POGROMS: ANTI-JEWISH VIOLENCE IN MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORY

EDITED BY
JOHN D. KLIER
Elizabeth and Sidney Corob Lecturer in Modern Jewish History
at University College London

AND
SHLOMO LAMBOZA
Associate Professor of History at
St Mary's College, Maryland

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CHAPTER 8
The pogroms of 1903–1906
Shlomo Lambroza

Russia at the turn of the century was a country on a collision course with modernity. The historian Pavel Miliukov described it as “Two Russias”: “One is a Russia of the future, as dreamed of by members of the liberal professions; the other is an anachronism, deeply rooted in the past, and defended in the present by an omnipotent bureaucracy.” The Empire was experiencing modernization and the problems that accompany the industrialization of an economy and the urbanization of a people. Poor harvests in 1902–5 caused widespread violent unrest in rural areas. Urban areas also experienced their share of disorders. Unemployment was on the rise and workers found a vehicle for their frustrations in street demonstrations and political strikes. Political conditions were worsened by the disastrous Russo–Japanese War of 1904 and the massacre of innocents at the Winter Palace in January 1905.

The opening of the twentieth century found Russia with one foot in the twentieth century and the other mired in eighteenth-century absolutism: an unyielding autocracy face to face with inevitable change; an impoverished peasant and working class; a faltering economy; radical and violent political extremism. Manifestations of this conflict were chaos and anarchy in the countryside, demonstrations and rioting in the cities, and violent, anti-Jewish pogroms.

Violent antisemitism had not been in evidence since the 1881 pogroms but, the spring of 1903 reawakened fears Russian Jews had hoped lay buried with the victims of 1881.

In the late winter of 1903 a series of events began that led to the massacre of the Jewish community in Kishinev, a city in the south-western province of Bessarabia. The massacre sent shock waves through the Jewish community and rekindled fears of the 1881
pogroms. Five months later, in September 1903, an equally violent pogrom occurred in Gomel, in Mogilev province.

Kishinev shocked world Jewry. It elicited outcries of indignation within Russia, Western Europe, and the United States. The concern of the Jewish community was to expose and punish the guilty. The government of Nicholas II, for its part, attempted to downplay and minimize the pogrom. The inherent conflict resulted in a mass of confusing and contradictory evidence.

The pogrom at Kishinev was caused by three converging factors: instigation by a local antisemitic newspaper, Bessarabets; irresponsibility, dereliction, and mismanagement by local officials (especially the governor and the chief of police); deep-seated antisemitic feelings among the non-Jewish population of Kishinev.

The groundwork for the pogrom was laid by strongly worded antisemitic articles in Bessarabets, a sensationalist tabloid published in the provincial capital of Kishinev. P. A. Krushevan, the reactionary publisher of Bessarabets, believed liberals, radicals, and Jews were a threat to the autocracy. Articles in Bessarabets were particularly antagonistic toward Jews. Prior to the pogrom the paper ran articles and editorials that were nothing more than anti-Jewish diatribes. Articles stated Jews should be fired from municipal jobs to make room for non-Jews and warned Jews to renounce Judaism and convert. Although never directly calling for pogroms the paper ran vituperative and provocative articles with headlines such as, “Death to the Jews!” and “Crusade Against the Hated Race!” Krushevan developed a small following and organized a group of people who shared his reactionary and anti-Jewish sentiments. Other important facts about the paper were that it had a circulation of approximately 25,000; it was the only daily paper in the province of Bessarabia; requests to begin a newspaper that might counter the political bias of Bessarabets were denied by Vice-Governor A. I. Ustrogov; the paper received funding from the central government.

Compounding the anti-Jewish propaganda of Bessarabets, was the reappearance in Russia and Eastern Europe of the Jewish ritual murder legend. For the superstitious peasantry and unenlightened clergy, it was not outside the realm of reality that Jews would murder a Christian child and use his blood in the making of Passover matzoh. This was especially true if the charge was levied against obscure “Jewish sects,” rather than Jews as a whole. The Greek Bishop of Kishinev was convinced that among some Jews ritual murder was still practiced and refused, when asked by the chief rabbi of Kishinev, to discredit the legend.

Anti-Jewish sentiments simmered during the spring of 1903. The jingoism of the antisemitic Bessarabets, plus the coming of Passover and Easter, when the “Blood Accusation” was most commonly made, increased the possibility of conflict. The pre-conditions were in place, all that was needed was a spark to light the tinder.

In a small village, Dubossary, in the extreme western part of Kherson province (Kherson is bordered on the west by Bessarabia, and the town of Dubossary is about 40 km from Kishinev) on 11 February 1903 it was reported to the police that a young boy, Mikhail Rybachenko, had mysteriously disappeared. The proximity of Passover (which began on 11 April) led to accusations that the boy’s disappearance was related to the holiday. Two days later, on 13 February, the boy’s body was found. The police report stated that the body had twenty-four stab wounds and that the boy had been killed several days earlier. The report indicated no signs of ritual murder. An autopsy verified the initial police report. But rumors and accusations, especially by Bessarabets, blamed Jews for the murder. Rejected by the police, Bessarabets claimed that the boy’s wounds indicated a ritual murder. It also reported that an old Jewish woman testified that the child was abducted by Jews. The latter accusation was given no credence by the authorities. To allay further suspicions, counter the spread of rumor, and avoid possible confrontation, the authorities consulted three physicians from Odessa who examined the body. Again it was concluded that there was no evidence of ritual murder. Government attorney, A. Pollan, who was part of the investigation, gave a speech indicating the fallacy of the ritual murder rumor and stated that a more likely motive for the murder was material gain.

The evidence seemed unimportant to those intent on believing Jews were responsible; tirades from Bessarabets were more convincing than police reports. A Jewish delegation, fearing articles in Bessarabets would worsen an already sensitive situation, appealed to Vice-Governor Ustrogov to censor Bessarabets. It is unclear what the relationship was between Ustrogov and Krushevan, but Ustrogov had displayed favoritism toward Krushevan in the past and refused to take any action. A Jewish delegation also went to Governor R. S. von Raaben and pleaded that he do something to avert violence.
The governor did not act on their request. Requests were also made to the Chief of Police I. D. Chezmenkov.⁶

One further incident aggravated the already volatile situation. A few days before Easter a Christian girl in the employ of a Jewish family committed suicide. She died after being rushed to the hospital. Although the reports made it clear that the death was a suicide, the rumor mill presented her death as another ritual murder.⁷

As Jews celebrated the last day of the Passover holiday on Sunday, 19 April. Christians celebrated the first day of Easter. At dawn on that Easter Sunday, probably sometime between six and eight o’clock, after most Christians had left church following midnight services, the pogrom began. It started with young boys throwing rocks through windows of Jewish homes and shops. They were followed by groups of men, mostly identified as laborers (stone masons, carpenters, draymen, etc.) who roamed the Jewish business quarter of the town looting and vandalizing shops.⁸

Initially, the crowd concentrated on Jewish homes and shops, but as the pogrom gained momentum it became more violent. Violence started when a group of Jewish workers and merchants armed with crude weapons confronted the mob. Jewish self-defense protected property but also increased the level of violence. By the end of the first day, twelve Jews were dead and nearly one hundred severely injured. By the evening of the 19th, street rioting was over.

Governor von Raaben had 350 police and 8,000 troops at his disposal during the first day of the riot, but no order was given to stop the pogrom.⁹ At 6 a.m. on Monday, 20 April, von Raaben transferred the administration of the province to the commander of the military garrison, General V. A. Bekman. It now became Bekman’s responsibility to re-establish control. Sometime after noon, Bekman requested that von Raaben transfer authority to the military and asked for written permission to use arms against rioters. Between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. that afternoon Bekman received confirmation from von Raaben. According to Bekman, he dispatched the order instructing his troops to use necessary force to end the disturbances. The order reached the troops between 7 and 8 p.m. It had now been more than thirty-six hours since the outbreak of the pogrom.¹⁰

While von Raaben and Bekman were sending messages back and
forth, rioting began again at 9 a.m. on the morning of 20 April. The events of the 19th paled in relation to the nightmarish events of 20 April. In the hours before the renewed outbreak of violence peasants from the surrounding countryside and hooligans from nearby towns made their way to the city. What ensued was mass terrorization. The litany of horrors recalled by observers and victims reflects the brutality of the mob. The atrocities ranged from murder, to gang rape, torture, and mutilations. It would not be hyperbole to indicate that there was butchery at Kishinev. At the end of the two days, 47 Jews had been murdered, 424 wounded, 700 houses burned, 600 shops looted. Damage was estimated at 3 million roubles.11

Was Kishinev a planned pogrom? There is no direct evidence to indicate that the outbreak on 19 April was premeditated. There is strong circumstantial evidence that certain groups and individuals acted as agents provocateurs encouraging the pogrom and inciting the riot. There were those in Kishinev who sympathized with the inflammatory articles in Bessarabets and held similar beliefs to Krushevan’s. It is also known that Krushevan had organized a group of these like-minded individuals. Although there is no direct evidence, members of this group figure high on the list of suspects.

If any part of the Kishinev pogrom was planned, it was the events of the second day. Letters, reports, and eye witness accounts document a far more concerted and significantly more intense attack on the morning of the 20th. The rioting did not begin slowly and build to a violent confrontation as on the first day. Instead, at 9 a.m. on the 20th, bands of rioters descended on different sections of the Jewish quarter.12 This time rioters struck in greater numbers, many were armed and violence continued from the morning hours until the troops dispersed the crowd that evening. Two independent observers indicate that there were groups of red-shirted men directing the crowd.13 There are also reports that the crowd was led and directed by seminarians.14

What role did the police play? Why did local officials not act more responsibly in stopping the pogrom? The documentation shows that no orders were given to the police to end the riot. Some historians who have written about Kishinev believe that the police conspired with the rioters and that “they [police] were among the organizers of the pogrom.”15 Articles and eye witness accounts also accuse the police of connivance in the pogrom.16 Several accounts of the pogroms state that the police stood by and watched, some policemen participated in the looting and others exhorted the rioters. It is not surprising that misconduct by the police gave the appearance of culpability. On the other hand, evidence exists that the police acted to protect Jews. An account is given of a group of police officers and twelve of their men who saved the lives of many Jews by driving the mob away from a section of the Jewish quarter.17

As irresponsibly as the police acted, there were reasons why they did not attempt to stop the pogrom. First, they were clearly outnumbered by the mob. There were only 350 police in Kishinev and the rioters numbered from 1,500 to 2,000. Second, Governor von Raaben, out of fear that the destruction would spread to other parts of the city, ordered the police to defend the large factories and warehouses. Third, without clear orders from Chief of Police Chezmenkov, the police were unsure what to do. This is not to defend the inaction of the police, but rather to point out that there
were no orders given by their superiors. The local police were left to guess at the appropriate action. Responsible policemen acted to protect Jews, while irresponsible policemen either took no action or participated in the pogrom.

The two men who bear direct responsibility for not stopping the pogrom were Chief of Police Chezmenkov and Governor von Raaben. Why did von Raaben not call out the troops and police on Sunday the 19th when the disorders started? Some historians speculate that von Raaben and Chezmenkov conspired with the pogrom organizers. They charge that from the start the governor and the chief of police colluded with anti-Jewish groups to let the pogrom run its course without police or troop interference. Police complicity is further suggested because the only concerted police action during the 20th was the disarming of Jews who had organized a defense force.

There is strong evidence to convict both von Raaben and Chezmenkov for negligence and collusion. Both were negligent in not taking immediate steps to prevent the pogrom. Unlike the more responsible officials at Dubossary, where police and officials moved to avoid confrontation by making it clear that the death of the young murder victim had nothing to do with ritual murder, von Raaben and Chezmenkov turned a blind eye to the imminence of the pogrom. They were equally derelict in not ordering police or troops to stop the pogrom once it had started. The governor would have been well within the law to order police and troops into the city on the morning of 19 April. Had he acted immediately the pogrom would have been significantly less severe. But he chose not to. Why? There are several possible motives. First, von Raaben might have acted out of his own prejudice toward Jews. Major General Shostak, who contributed to the War Ministry's investigation of Kishinev, indicated that von Raaben's antisemitism led him to take no action even though he had prior knowledge of the pogrom. In von Raaben's mind, an anti-Jewish demonstration might be perfectly acceptable. Von Raaben probably thought the demonstration would be small, a few Jewish homes and shops would be looted, maybe some Jews would be hurt, but he did not expect a massacre.

Another possibility is that von Raaben believed that the central government condoned his actions. Anti-Jewish attitudes were prevalent at all levels of the government. In allowing the pogrom to run its course, von Raaben responded to the spirit of the regime rather than the letter of the law. The mistake von Raaben made in carrying out what he believed to be unspoken policy, was allowing the pogrom to go too far.

Problems began for von Raaben toward the end of the first day. The pogrom was already no small affair, twelve Jews had died and many more were wounded. He must have known that hostilities would resume the next day. Early next morning, hoping to rid himself of responsibility, von Raaben turned the city over to the military garrison. In a feeble defense, von Raaben blamed the military commandant, Bekman, to whom he handed over authority, for not suppressing the pogrom. Bekman, before allowing his troops to use armed force, sought written verification of von Raaben's order. The transfer of authority created a power vacuum and it was at least ten to eleven hours before troops were given the direct order to stop all disorders. The delay between when von Raaben relinquished authority and when the troops took action appears more a matter of red tape and military inefficiency than a planned stalling tactic. On 20 April, Minister of the Interior V. K. Pleve, received a telegram from von Raaben describing the conditions at Kishinev. He ordered the city placed under martial law.

Shortly after the pogrom the allegation was made that Minister of the Interior Pleve participated in the conspiracy. "There is no doubt whatsoever that Minister of the Interior Pleve was the instigator of the pogrom [in Kishinev]," wrote Louis Greenberg. It was alleged that Pleve knew of the pogrom in advance and sent a dispatch to Governor von Raaben instructing him not to use arms against rioters. Copies of the dispatch were made public and printed in newspapers outside Russia. The dispatch was a forgery. There exists no evidence that Pleve had any prior knowledge of the pogrom or that he was part of a conspiracy.

Pleve's past activities showed that he was no friend of Jews. Sergei Witte characterized him as a Jew-hater and stated that "the guiding spirit behind the anti-Jewish laws under Ignatiev and Durnovo was Pleve." Simon Dubnow labeled him the leader of the "bureaucratic inquisition." Pleve had supported anti-Jewish legislation and was known for his anti-Jewish views. But, to condemn Pleve on his attitudes and past deeds is misguided. Pleve was a reactionary whose main objective as Minister of the Interior was to maintain order, not sponsor pogroms. If Pleve had prior knowledge of Kishinev, he might have taken steps to prevent the occurrence of violence. Pleve
bears responsibility for Kishinev in that his own views on Jews encouraged antisemitism in others and that he allowed the province of Bessarabia to be administered by anti-Semitic, incompetent, and irresponsible bureaucrats.26

Who were the participants in the Kishinev pogrom? The city had a population of roughly 147,000 people: 50,000 Jews, 50,000 Moldavians, 8,000 Russians, and the remainder of the population composed of Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks, Macedonians, Albanians, and Germans. From existing reports it is possible to put together a composite of the pogrom crowd. The crowd size at the height of the riot was estimated at 1,500 to 2,000.20 No women participated in the pogrom. Of the men who participated, many were from the working class. Reports indicate that artisans, municipal workers, and day laborers were part of the crowd. Local peasants or muzhiki came into town on the second day of the pogrom and accounts show them as active participants. Students, especially seminarists, participated. The under class or the lumpen was represented: common criminals, “half-drunk loafers,” hooligans, robbers. Soldiers and police were also known to have participated. Several reports mention Christian zealots, but these are not to be confused with the clergy. The crowd can also be divided by national origin. Most reports indicate that the largest segment of the pogrom crowd was made up of Moldavians (Krushevan, the publisher of Bessarabets, was a Moldavian). As a group they were a quarter of the city’s population. Russians and Albanians are also mentioned as part of the crowd.

It is easier to identify the elements of the crowd than to establish their motives. What drove the crowd to participate in pogrom violence? As indicated earlier, articles in Bessarabets encouraged violence against Jews. One slogan associated with the newspaper was “Death to the Jews.” An article in the paper indicated that Jewish corpses should be bound to cartwheels, for “the Jew is an abomination.”27 Bessarabets was also responsible for spreading the rumor of ritual murder and for asserting that revenge should be taken against Jews.

Two other rumors inspired rioters. First, a rumor that the Tsar had given permission to beat and rob Jews. This rumor became popular during the 1881 pogroms and reappeared in the months before Kishinev. A cable received by the Jewish Daily News on 25 April, 1903 reported, “Just as in the riots of 1880–1 [sic] there is a popular belief among the Russian peasants that the Czar decreed the slaughtering of Jews.”28 A letter received by the New York Relief Committee quoted a rioter saying “It is the Czar’s will that the Jews be everywhere robbed,” and “Poor brethren! We must kill you. It is so ordered.”29 Another letter stated; “In Kishinef on the first day of Easter the Vice-Governor [presumably Vice-Governor Ustrogov] read a paper to the people, in the name of the Czar, that the Jews of Kishinef and vicinity were to be killed and robbed.”29 The credibility of the latter two accounts is in some question. Whether the events described occurred or not is subordinate to the fact that the rumors circulated and acted as motivation for rioters.

The second rumor dealt with the Jewish role in the revolutionary movement. The rumor presented the Jewish community as disloyal subjects of the Tsar. Jews did participate in radical politics, but not all Jews were revolutionaries. Nevertheless, the association of Jews, as a group, with radical activities acted as further motivation for pogroms.

Religious issues were also a factor. It should be remembered that the pogrom began on the morning of Easter Sunday, directly after church services. What was said to the parishioners of Kishinev during the Easter service? Easter is the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ, but Holy Week in the Russian Empire was also notorious for drunkenness and related violence. Were parishioners reminded that Jews were the killers of Christ? Did the Easter service provide a rationale for vengeance against those who were believed responsible for the death of Christ? Interestingly, the documentation indicates there existed several cases in which spikes were driven through the hands, legs, and into the heads of Jews; was this retribution for the crucifixion?31

The reason the riot became violent is that the authorities took no action against the rioters. In some instances police and troops participated, giving the appearance that the pogrom was somehow approved by the authorities. A telegram sent from Kishinev to the Minister of Justice indicated that many of the atrocities occurred during the “power vacuum” at which time, “crowds of people indulged themselves in robbery and slaughter in the presence of authorities without being punished.”32 A report to the Minister of Justice indicated that: “Assault and destruction happened in front of the military and police, while both refused to act properly. Utilizing the opportunity, the mob robbed entire houses and stores of Jews. Lack of action from the government during the 30 hours led
the people to speak of permission from Petersburg to beat Jews. The lack of immediate and effective action by authorities reinforced rumors and encouraged crowd violence.

The central government, for its part, acted irresponsibly throughout the ordeal. The government should have indicated that Kishinev was a tragedy, that local officials showed poor judgment and acted inappropriately, ordered the closing or minimally censoring of Bessarabets, enacted swift judgments against rioters, sympathized with victims through some form of aid, and condemned the entire act as an antisemitic incident that would not be tolerated. Instead of recognizing the riot as an outrage, the government attempted to soft-pedal the issue. By not condemning the pogrom immediately, the government laid itself open to accusations that it was following a pogrom policy. Suspicions about the government’s role were heightened by the accusations made against Minister of the Interior Pleve.

At first, in an attempt to cover up the massacre, the government denied that the pogrom occurred. The official police version indicated that the pogrom started when a Jew attacked a Christian woman who “fell to the ground, letting go her infant. This incident was the immediate cause of the outbreak.” Why didn’t the police act? According to the Director of the Police A. A. Lopukhin, the riot was “hindering the policeman’s actions.” On the following day, the police report states, “a group of armed Jews attacked Christians thus restarting the pogrom.” Why didn’t police take action on the second day? The governor had handed over authority to the military garrison and therefore the police had no authority to suppress the riot.

The police report of the incident was riddled with half-truths and blatant fabrications. The report indicates that it was Jews who instigated the riot on the first and second day and insinuates that it was Jews who were responsible for the escalation of violence. Nowhere in the data was there corroborating evidence for this version of the events, nor was this report given credibility by the foreign press and the official government investigation that ensued.

To the government’s credit it did act against local officials and rioters, but foolishly appointed an investigator whose background created a conflict of interest. The investigating magistrate assigned to the case was M. Davidovich, a known antisemite and contributor to Bessarabets. Davidovich was accused of impeding the course of justice and meting out lenient sentences. The Ministry of Justice was careful to keep local officials free from involvement in court proceedings, and no criminal charges were brought against any Kishinev officials. Chief of Police Chezmenkov was dismissed for failing to take the appropriate measures to end the disorders. Governor von Raaben was also dismissed for the same reason and reassigned to the Ministry of the Interior. Vice-Governor Ustrogov was reassigned to the Caucasus. It was reported that between 700-800 rioters were arrested, 400 were convicted on various charges of rioting and 53 were charged with manslaughter, but only a handful were actually sentenced.

In the months after the pogrom the Jews of Kishinev rebuilt their shattered lives. Funds were sent from Europe and the United States to aid Jewish victims. Count S. D. Urusov, a respected and thoughtful member of the bureaucracy, replaced von Raaben as Governor of Bessarabia. Count Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky wrote damning letters in the foreign press about government culpability. To avert further incidents a Jewish delegation from Kishinev traveled to St. Petersburg to meet with Ministers Pleve and Witte. Despite the moral indignation of the public and the appearance of legal retribution, little was accomplished, especially towards forestalling future pogroms. The government held its analysis that Jews bore responsibility for the violence committed against them: in an interview with the New York Times, Count Arthur Cassini, the Russian Ambassador to the United States stated: “the Jews ruin the peasants with the results that conflicts occur... But notwithstanding these conflicts the Jews continue to do the very things which have been responsible for the troubles which involve them.”

The myopic government of Nicholas II did not understand that Kishinev was not an isolated incident of local anti-Jewish violence, but rather a symptom of the social and economic tensions that festered in European Russia. Blaming the victims would not alleviate the need for wide-ranging reforms. By not sternly condemning pogroms, intentionally or not, the government encouraged future pogroms. They were not long in coming. Five months after Kishinev, a violent pogrom broke out in the town of Gomel, in Mogilev province.

The pogrom at Gomel marked the second, and only other major incident of antisemitic violence during 1906. Gomel was a city of
40,000, more than half of whom were Jews. (The 1897 census indicates 26,000 Jews. This is in contrast to Kishinev where Jews comprised one-third of the population). The town had strong and organized Bund and Zionist groups which, moved by the massacre at Kishinev, organized, armed, and trained self-defense squads numbering 200 men (boevie otriady or battle squads).49

On Friday, 11 September, a market day and a holiday in commemoration of the feast day of St. John the Baptist, an argument between a Jewish fishmonger and a peasant led to a brawl in the market place. Jewish merchants and members of the self-defense squads fought with local peasants and workers. By the end of the riot, several Jewish homes and businesses were destroyed. The Jewish defenders had beaten back the crowd and prevented the riot from reaching larger proportions. During the fighting many on both sides were injured and a peasant was killed. During the following Saturday and Sunday, 12 and 13 September, the town prepared for an inevitable confrontation. The Jews of Gomel organized and armed their self-defense units and appealed to the authorities for protection. In response, local authorities patrolled streets, placed drinking establishments off-limits, and the police chief summoned an infantry regiment of 1,600 men.41

The pogrom began on noon Monday the 14th when a group of 400–500 railroad workers began a rampage through the Jewish neighborhood.42 They were met with sturdy resistance by armed Jews: "Even women fought. Their physical ability and the correctness of their aim was not that at all of a race of cringing peddlars."43 Peasants from the surrounding countryside arrived in town on the morning of the 15th, as did the 1,600 troops summoned by the chief of police. The riot worsened on the 15th, but Jewish self-defense held firm. By the following morning the rioting was over. Ten Jews and eight Christians were killed and dozens on both sides seriously wounded.44

A New York Times headline of 24 September read: "Russian Troops Aided the Slayers of Jews." The article quotes at length a letter from an eyewitness at Gomel asserting that police and troops openly sided with pogromists and participated in the looting and pillaging. A second report, however, indicates that police and troops were conscientious in suppressing the riot.45 It is likely that both occurred. On Monday, 14 September, when the violence began, police were vastly outnumbered by both Jews and Christians. At the most liberal estimate, the Gomel police force did not constitute 100 men,46 while the rioters numbered at least six times that and likely more, preventing any serious attempt to quell the riot. That certain members of the police acted capriciously or irresponsibly is possible and not surprising. That others acted conscientiously is also consistent with how the police acted at Kishinev.

The scene became more muddled the following day. On the morning of Tuesday the 16th, hundreds of peasants from the surrounding countryside came into town, as did the 1,600 troops called in by the chief of police. The military easily drove out the peasants and turned its attention to subduing the riot. Troops moved against armed Jews who had barricaded themselves in the streets of the Jewish section; to some this appeared as if the military attacked and disarmed Jews while allowing others to continue the pogrom. The reality is that police moved not only against Jews but also against pogromists. By the end of the day the military had killed five Jews and three pogromists in their attempt to end the disturbances.

The Gomel pogrom differed from Kishinev. At Gomel local administrators were more responsive to Jews, possibly because Jews made up 50 percent of the population. The chief of police of Gomel and the governor of Mogilev acted responsibly as conditions in the town deteriorated. Authorities patrolled the streets, closed down ale houses and called in troops; a sharp contrast to the indifference and irresponsibility of the local authorities at Kishinev.

Another striking difference between Gomel and Kishinev was the resistance of the Jewish community and the establishment of viable self-defense. Gomel might have been significantly worse were it not for aggressive Jewish defense measures. The traditional air of passivity that had marked the Jewish community was replaced by a militant spirit of self-defense leading one newspaper to indicate that Gomel was "more a fight than a pogrom."47 One of those who participated in the defense at Gomel indicated that "despite the suffering it was good for the soul. There are no longer the former downtrodden, timid Jews. A new-born, unprecedented type appeared on the scene—a man who defends his dignity."48 The spirit of self-defense displayed in Gomel contrasted sharply with the quiescence of the Kishinev Jews. The success of the Gomel defenders moved Jewish communities throughout the Pale to organize and train self-defense groups.

What was the relative impact of Kishinev on Gomel? Certainly,
from the Jewish point of view, Kishinev represented the return of violent antisemitism. Organizers of defense were convinced that Jews could not count on local authorities, police, or the military to protect them. Kishinev sounded an alarm for Jews of the Pale.

The other side of the equation, the impact of Kishinev on pogromists, is more difficult to measure. Kishinev was shocking and dramatic and consequently received a great deal of attention in the local and national press. The inhabitants of Gomel knew of the massacre at Kishinev. Whether this encouraged them is impossible to know. What can be said is that Kishinev established a model of behavior. The pogrom became an acceptable means of registering social protest and animating latent antisemitism. The similarities between Gomel and Kishinev are also telling. Both pogroms were predicated or rationalized on the basis of revenge, in Kishinev the alleged murder of the boy at Dubossary and in Gomel the actual death of the peasant. Both occurred during religious holidays and there were analogous reports charging police and military culpability.

Most important, and the essential element for understanding the basis of future pogroms, is the position taken by the central government. Given the unfolding of events of Kishinev and Gomel the central government could not have stopped these pogroms. They happened too quickly (although this does not absolve local authorities from their lack of effort). The central government should have curtailed publication of inflammatory articles in the antisemitic press. The government’s refusal to muzzle or censor these periodicals becomes a contributing factor in future pogroms. The ultimate in bad judgment was that after the pogrom, Nicholas II sent a letter to Krushevan complimenting him on his fine publication. In addition, in the months following Kishinev, the government issued a new series of regulations that further restricted Jewish rights. This gave the appearance that Jews were being punished for their role in Kishinev.

The government’s lack of stern condemnation and its half-hearted approach to prosecuting pogromists was also damaging. At the closed-door trial for the Kishinev pogrom, requests that the ex-governor of Bessarabia (von Raaben) and ex-chief of police (Chezmenkov) testify were refused. Virtually no one who might have had a hand in the planning of the pogrom took the stand. Instead the government white-washed the issue by prosecuting ignorant peasants and workers. The harshest penalty handed down by the court was to two men sentenced to five years of penal servitude. Twenty-three others were sentenced from six months to two years. Forty-seven people died, 700 houses burned, 3 million roubles worth of damage was done at Kishinev and the combined prison time served by all those convicted amounted to less than forty years.

The trial of the Gomel pogromists reflected the government’s egregious attitude toward anti-Jewish violence. The evidence presented by the procurator (state’s attorney) stated that the riot was an anti-Russian pogrom started by Jews. The government also charged that Jews destroyed Jewish houses to obtain wood as weapons to be used against the military and Christian population. The reason that the Jews began the attack against the Christians, stated the government’s attorney, was in revenge for the Kishinev massacre. The government’s case lacked both merit and substantive evidence. Jewish lawyers easily discredited the argument during the cross examinations. The court hearing the trial of the Gomel pogrom handed down lenient sentences; twelve non-Jews and eighteen Jews were sentenced to up to one year in penal servitude and the court also petitioned the Tsar to mitigate the sentences. The leniency of the sentences levied against the rioters prompted the following from the law journal Prawo: “Who then is the real author of all the horrors that were perpetrated at Gomel?...[there] can only be one answer: besides the Christians and the Jews, there is still a third culprit, the politically rotten officialdom.”

Prawo was accurate in questioning the role of the central government, for the one issue that truly exacerbated relations between Jews and non-Jews was the attitude that Jews were at the root cause of pogroms. This is evident in the trial of the Gomel pogromists. By presenting the case as an anti-Russian pogrom, the government chose to prosecute the victims rather than the criminals. This was the traditional view espoused by the government on pogroms. It was articulated shortly after the 1881 pogroms when Minister of the Interior N. P. Ignatiev wrote a report that concluded that pogroms were caused by Jewish clamor, religious fanaticism, prominence in the ranks of the opposition, and a Jewish propensity for exploiting the narod. Ignatiev concluded: “Their [the Jews] conduct has called forth protests on the part of the people, as manifested in acts of violence and robbery.”
Similar arguments were made by various Russian officials regarding the pogroms at Kishinev and Gomel. The viewpoint of many in the central government, including Nicholas II, was that the Jews bore responsibility for the violence that occurred against them. Often repeated, the official view was that Jews were a parasitic element in the Russian Empire who lived off the hard earned wages of the narod and secretly conspired in revolutionary cadres to overthrow the Romanov dynasty. Neither assessment was accurate. Jews throughout the Pale were as poor if not poorer than their Russian counterparts and only a small percentage of Jews participated in radical activity. Yet the reality was subordinate to the public perceptions shaped by the antisemitic press and reinforced by the attitudes of the central government.

II

The attack at Kishinev was barbarous, even by the standards of past Russian disorders, and its impact resounded deafeningly and violently at Gomel. The objective conditions that led to both pogroms remained substantively unchanged; the antisemitic press continued to publish unsubstantiated and libelous accounts against Jews; the action or lack thereof by the central government encouraged anti-Jewish attitudes; local bureaucrats, police, and the military could not be depended upon to protect Jews; and social tensions caused by economic hardships worsened. The only objective factor that changed was the catalyst or rationale for pogroms. (At Kishinev the rationale was an alleged ritual murder and at Gomel the death of a peasant.) Consequently, all that was necessary was the introduction of a new catalyst. This occurred on the evening of 27 January 1904 when a surprise naval attack by the Japanese destroyed two Russian battleships at Port Arthur, a Russian naval base on the Yellow Sea.

Russia stumbled into the Russo-Japanese War ill-prepared and ill-equipped. The war was a disaster. The Viceroy of the Far East, Admiral E. I. Alexeev, had allowed the Russian fleet in Port Arthur to deteriorate to the point of uselessness. In addition, the Trans-Siberian Railroad, the only artery for the transport of men and munitions, was still incomplete. If Nicholas and his ministers had been more thoughtful and less disdainful of the Japanese, they might have averted disaster. Instead they entered the war blinded by hubris, believing that the innate superiority of the Russian peasant/soldier led by an exemplary officer corps would triumph.

The Russians lacked good leadership, well-trained conscripts, and sufficient supplies to win the war. They were especially hampered by the inefficiency of the Trans-Siberian railroad, ignorance of the enemy, and a geriatric General Staff unfamiliar with new armaments and tactics. Russia had not yet learned to fight a twentieth-century war and her troops were led by officers who preferred the bayonet to the machine gun.55

The war served two purposes. If victorious, as the Russians believed they would be, it would establish Russia's imperial hold in the Far East. Second, a war might be a way to defuse anti-government sentiments and stabilize the Empire. The spirit of patriotism prevailed and the government was granted a respite from domestic troubles, but as the war proved less and less successful, public enthusiasm and patriotic zeal waned. Russian defeats and humiliations in the early months of the war highlighted the corruption and incompetence of the central government.

As the war deepened, conscripts became reluctant to leave their homes to fight in Manchuria. Discontented peasants and workers who had temporarily put aside anti-government protests renewed them with greater vigor. Even genuine patriots lost faith in the government's ability to win the war. The war worsened conditions at home, further alienated the narod, exposed government inefficiency, and supplied new justifications for pogroms.56

In 1904 forty-three pogroms occurred. At least twenty-four were in some way related to the war. (The remaining nineteen will be discussed later, pp. 216-18.) The first occurred in Bender (Bendery), a town 30 miles south of Kishinev, in the province of Bessarabia. Disturbances began on Saturday, 1 May, while most Jews were at synagogue. Reportedly, a mob attacked the Jewish quarter, killing five Jews (three men and two women), robbed Jewish homes and shops, and smashed windows. The mob was too large for the police to control and Cossacks were called to disperse the crowd. The military, using arms against the rioters, ended the pogrom.57

Bender is an interesting pogrom because it is the first to take place during the Russo-Japanese War. The war began in January and by May the Russians had suffered disastrous setbacks. During the same week as the Bender pogrom, the Russians lost between 3,000 and 4,000 men at the Battle of Yalu. The population of Bender had been
moved to anti-Jewish violence by the writings of the antisemitic newspaper *Bessarabets*. This time it was not accusations of ritual murder that inspired the pogrom, but rather claims that Jews collaborated with the Japanese. Newspaper articles were supplemented by pamphlets that claimed Jews supplied the Japanese with funds and munitions, that Jewish soldiers were deserting the front, and that Japanese intelligence was receiving information from Jews. Articles and pamphlets encouraged Russians to fight the Jewish enemy at home.

One of these pamphlets, circulated around Easter, which fell on 3 April in 1904, was particularly vituperative. It reminded the reader that last year "our brethren settled accounts with the Jews [a reference to Kishinev], the murderers of our God. Brothers, it was a glorious time." It continued, building on the concept of "the enemy in our midst," by referring to Jews as "our foes at home." It restated the myths of Jewish ritual murder, "The peril is with the Jews, who drink our children's blood..." and that Jews were planning the destruction of the Empire, "[Jews] poison our youth with foul and pernicious ideas, and overthrow the pillars of our holy State and faith." Finally, it restated the rumor popular in 1881 that the Tsar favored violence against Jews and that citizens must rise against Jews in support of the government. This particular pamphlet also hinted at genocide, "the people must arise and help in this war of annihilation... Let us show the Jews our Russian might, and destroy them wherever they live. Kill them. No quarter. Every single one is a foe and a traitor... Death to the Jews. God is with us and the Czar is for us." As extreme and maniacal as this document is, it nonetheless captures the essential elements of the antisemitic/pogromist mentality. It takes the standard antisemitic diatribes and puts them in the context of the Russo-Japanese War: "With their blood we will pay for the Japanese War," stated the closing lines of the pamphlet.38

Pamphlets and newspaper accounts contained a kernel of truth, as Jewish bankers did supply loans to the Japanese. Jacob Schiff, a prominent New York banker, underwrote and helped float a £5 million sterling bond issue to support the Japanese war effort. Schiff did not try to hide his attitude or his actions; he believed Russian Jews had suffered terribly under the tsarist regime. Schiff reasoned that a Russian defeat at the hands of the Japanese might force badly needed constitutional reforms, reforms that would benefit Jews.50 But to extrapolate from this information that there existed an international Jewish banking scheme to destroy Russia or that the average Jew in the Pale was part of this scheme or that Jews were deserting to fight on the side of the Japanese was absurd. Although Schiff, a Jew, did help the Japanese raise money, Russia's war efforts were heavily subsidized by the Jewish Rothschild family. More important, the crucial link for continued French financial support for the Russian war effort was the confidential representative of the Russian government in Paris, Arthur Raffalovich, an Odessa Jew.60 Finally, 30,000 Jews, a disproportionately large number, served in Manchuria, fighting and dying in the name of Tsar and country, while in the towns and cities of the Pale their homes were burned and their wives and daughters violated by reservists in transport to the front.

Since the government was not winning the war through strategy and tactics, it decided to do so by overwhelming the enemy with numbers. Aggressive conscription for an unpopular war increased dissatisfaction among reservists, many of whom failed to report for duty, while those who reported did so unwillingly. As the men milled around in the small towns and cities waiting to leave for Manchuria, resentment towards the war led to riots and these riots led to pogroms. Jews, who according to the antisemitic press bore some responsibility for the war, became the target for the frustrated, alienated, hostile reservists.

Of the twenty-four mobilization pogroms, three occurred in Bessarabia, two in Kiev province, one each in Ekaterinoslav, Grodno, Lomza (Lomza), Kherson, and Vitebsk. Fourteen took place in the province of Mogilev. Responses by local authorities varied. In Bessarabia, where *Bessarabets* continued to print anti-Jewish articles, Governor S. D. Urusov, who had replaced von Raaben after the Kishinev pogrom, moved to counteract the newspaper's influence by issuing an appeal through the clergy: "The Jews have shown their patriotism by those who have been killed and wounded in battle. So, the charges of the masses have no truth, it has only been said to provoke new agitation against Jews."61

Mobilization pogroms ended by December 1904, largely due to new conscription policies initially proposed by General A.N. Kuropatkin, the commander-in-chief of the armies of the Far East. Reservists had previously been drafted regardless of age, marital status, or number of dependants. Kuropatkin admitted in his
memoirs that these men did not understand the reasons for the war and that they were fed "seditious proclamations." The men being sent to the front were "physically and morally less reliable," and prone to rioting and desertion. Instead of calling up untrained reservists, the army should have deployed soldiers serving in the reserves, but these men had been held back to respond to disturbances at home. Conscription policies were finally changed. Men with large families were given deferments when possible, and a greater effort was made to draft young, single men. The new policies coincided with the end of mobilization pogroms. No longer was the government pulling men away from their families to fight a war in which they had no interest. Those now being mobilized for the front were better trained and better disciplined troops, less likely to participate in riots or pogroms. It was also decided to transfer trained soldiers now in the reserve units at the rear to Manchuria. True to tsarist bureaucratic incompetence, action was taken too late: "These men were available for despatch [sic] to the front as drafts in the summer and autumn of 1904, but they only arrived a year later, after the Mukden battles, when they were too late. These splendid men saw no fighting at all." 

The Russo-Japanese War and the mobilization pogroms accounted for more than half of the pogroms occurring in 1904. There were an additional nineteen pogroms whose causes are not so easily determined. In looking at these pogroms some interesting patterns emerge. Five of the nineteen occurred in the towns of Poland, three in Kherson province, two each in Kovno, Volynia, and Kiev, and one each in Grodno, Bessarabia, and Vitebsk. Two occurred outside the Pale, in the cities of Smolensk and Samara. It is not surprising that a pogrom occurred in Smolensk, for it bordered the Pale, on Mogilev province, and 10 percent (4,650) of its population was Jewish. But that a pogrom occurred in Samara is remarkable. Samara is a good 800 miles east of the Pale and the entire province had only 2,500 Jews. Prior to 1904, no pogroms had occurred in this province. However, Samara was a stop on the Trans-Siberian Railroad that transported reservists to the front, and it is a plausible supposition that the pogrom here was caused by troops en route to Manchuria.

The start of pogroms in September can perhaps be linked to the Jewish holidays Rosh Ha Shannah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) which fell on 10 and 19 September, respectively, during 1904. (Only three of the pogroms started before September.) There exists good evidence on only five of the nineteen pogroms. The details of these five provide interesting models for the outbreak of pogroms.

The so-called pogrom at Parchev (Parcew), a small town in Poland, started sometime at the end of July. The information on this pogrom is so conflicting that the truth is nearly impossible to discern. A local priest convinced a young Jewish girl to convert to Christianity. Her parents claimed that she was under age and could not act independently on such matters. At a subsequent trial, fighting started between Jews, who tried to abduct the girl, and Christians who tried to prevent them. This was not a typical pogrom by any means. There was no property destroyed, no attempt to attack Jews not directly involved in the initial incident and no aftershocks.

In Ostrochts, also in Poland not far from Parchev (Parcew), at about the same time a more serious pogrom occurred. Again, the origins of the pogrom are unclear. One report indicates that Jewish boys threw stones at a Polish beggar, and in revenge factory workers attacked the Jewish quarter. Another report states that during a quarrel between a Jew and a Christian, the latter had an epileptic fit and fell to the ground. Rumor spread that the man was killed by a Jew. Two sources indicate that twenty Jews died during the pogrom and there was extensive property damage. The police acted responsibly in putting down the pogrom.

The pogrom in Sosnovitsy began on the Jewish New Year. An unsubstantiated rumor that Jews had killed a Christian girl started the pogrom. At first the Jewish synagogue was stoned and wrecked and then the mob destroyed homes and shops in the Jewish quarter. One Jewish woman died from stab wounds and eight Jews were seriously injured. The police in Sosnovitsy did not take any immediate action to stop the pogrom. Eventually troops from the nearby garrison were called. They stopped the disorders and arrested several pogromists.

In Smela (Kiev province), a pogrom began over accusations by a Christian woman that a Jewish merchant had abused her. Troops were called in by the governor-general, but not before 100 Jewish homes were burned, 150 shops looted, and two schools and two synagogues were destroyed. The well-organized Bund offered stiff
resistance. Many of those who participated in the pogrom were arrested.  

Finally, in Rovno, another incident between a Jewish shopkeeper and Christian customers led to a dispute that turned into a pogrom. Jewish homes and shops were looted. The fire brigade put a stop to the pogrom by spraying the pogromists with water.  

The rise in the number of pogroms during 1904 was largely due to the increase in economic and political tensions, exacerbated by the Russo-Japanese War. Objectively, the external conditions that caused the pogroms remained unaltered while the precipitating variables, accusations of Jewish treachery in the war effort, accusations that Jews were at the forefront of radical activities, accusations that Jews were murdering Christians, became handy rationales for anti-Jewish violence. The response of local officials and the central government was, at best, inconsistent. While some officials denounced pogroms others looked away and still others covertly encouraged them. Because of the inconsistency of officialdom the masses were given mixed messages about participating in anti-Jewish violence. Since few were arrested for pogrom activity and even fewer convicted and since those convicted were given extremely lenient sentences, there existed minimal threat of reprisal from the authorities. Inconsistency of leadership extended to the police and troops. The action of troops and police usually depended upon the conviction of their superior officers. At times troops and police halted pogroms, at other times they joined in the looting and murdering.  

Including the pogroms at Kishinev and Gomel, there were forty-five pogroms through 1903 and 1904. During these pogroms ninety-three Jews and thirteen non-Jews were killed; 4,200 people, mostly Jews, were severely injured. Total destruction of goods and property due to looting, burning, and vandalism was estimated in excess of 5,211 million rubles. Jews actively defended themselves in 34 percent of the pogroms, especially in areas where the Bund was most active. In only five cases (Kishinev, Gomel, Sohosvity, Vitebsk and Smela) were charges brought against pogromists. The maximum penalty was five years hard labor given to participants in the Kishinev pogrom. Others faced sentences of two months to one year, but in several cases the sentence was commuted or the accused were given clemency. In not one of these cases was a member of the police, or a reservist or member of the military, or government official charged with criminal activity.  

Whatever the de jure prohibitions against the pogroms, de facto the government indicated that the Jews themselves, by their actions, helped instigate them. As a consequence stern repression of pogroms was not accepted policy, and they became a normal phenomenon of these troubled times. In April 1903, the brutality of Kishinev was a shocking display of violent antisemitism, but by 1904, little more than one year later, pogroms no longer elicited such surprise.  

In December 1904, the Russian garrison at Port Arthur surrendered to the Japanese. The defeat discredited the already embattled central government. The following month, urban disorders reached unprecedented levels. In St. Petersburg, 12,500 Putilov workers walked off their jobs, followed by workers from the Neva Machinery and Ship Building factories. By mid-January, strikes closed 300 factories. At the height of strike activity in St. Petersburg, on 22 January, several thousand demonstrators led by a young prison chaplain, Father Georgii Gapon, were fired on by the military, and nearly 150 killed. The massacre on Bloody Sunday presented Nicholas and his ministers with a crisis that threatened the existence of the Romanov dynasty. The patriotism so evident only one year earlier, at the start of the Russo-Japanese War, turned to disillusionment and contempt.  

The early months of the 1905 Revolution brought together Russia's disparate political, ethnic, and national groups. Students, workers, liberals, peasants, Jews, Armenians, and others formed a loose coalition supporting immediate and meaningful reforms. The liberal intelligentsia and political radicals went beyond the call for reform, demanding significant change in the existing political structure. In the face of imminent chaos, the central government failed to find the tactics necessary to end the wave of social upheaval and political unrest.  

By February 1905, strikes became commonplace in major industrial areas. The workers' movement, initially economic, became politicized with the organization of soviets (councils of workers) in mid-April. Peasants, who at first responded hesitantly to urban disorders, also became disillusioned with government incompetence and economic instability. By the spring of 1905 rural disorders dotted the countryside. Attempts by Socialist Revolutionaries to organize and politicize the peasantry were marginally successful.
Peasants were too dispersed and their outlook too focused on land acquisition to develop sustained political awareness. Nonetheless, peasants understood the inherent commonality of the struggle faced by themselves and the urban workers. Whether or not they could articulate a political program was second to their ability to recognize that they were involved in a mass movement.

Along with workers and peasants, national minorities raised their voices in opposition to the central government. Even before the revolution there existed an uneasiness among national minorities who resented their inferior status, government policies of Russification, and discrimination. Believing that the first step to national autonomy was political freedom, Poles, Armenians, Transcaucasian Muslims, Georgians, Finns, Jews, and other religious and ethnic minorities joined the liberation movement.

While Jews were not at the core of radical activity, as was the claim of many Judeophobes, they nonetheless played an active and conspicuous role in the revolutionary movement. Moved by the desire to improve their political and material conditions and to achieve a minimal measure of civil liberties, Jews joined the Bund, the Social Democrats, Poale-Zion (Workers of Zion) and other left-wing organizations. While some Jews participated in radical activity, the majority were more concerned with eking out a living, surviving pogroms, and educating their children. At the very most, 100,000 Jews were members of left-wing groups. Given a community of 4 million and a working class of 1.53 million, the number of Jews participating in radical activity was a small percentage of the total Jewish population; but this small group was visible and active.⁷¹

At the center of Jewish radical activity was the Bund, a Marxist workers’ group established in the 1890s. After the Kishinev pogrom, the Bund organized defense networks among Jewish workers and community members. It urged Jews to abandon their passive and accommodating policies and extolled the virtues of resistance. As successful as the Bund was, it did not constitute the nucleus of Russian radical activity in 1905. The Bund’s effectiveness was inconsistent and varied geographically and chronologically. While extremely active in the northern provinces, the Bund was less organized and had fewer members in the southern and eastern provinces of the Pale. During the early months of the revolution, the Bund received strong support from members of the Jewish community and like-minded radical groups. But by the end of 1905 and the early months of 1906, the Bund had lost supporters in the Jewish community and among other Russian revolutionary parties. The Bund was merely one player in the general upsurge of political activity. Even at its height, the Bund’s membership was less than 3 percent of the total Jewish working class.⁷²

The statistical evidence was irrelevant to the central government which believed Jews constituted the core of radical activity. This long-standing attitude was articulated by Minister of the Interior Pleve as early as 1902 when he stated: “There is no revolutionary movement in Russia, there are only Jews who are the true enemies of the government.”⁷³ Of course, the government refused to take the most obvious step to defuse Jewish participation in radical activity: repeal the May Laws and extend equal rights. Repression drove many Jews, especially the young, to anti-government activity. The government, whether meaning to or not, created a fatal cycle. The inability to actualize substantive reforms encouraged young Jews to join left-wing groups. Further persecution of Jews who joined these groups only strengthened their temerity and increased their numbers. As early as 1903, Theodor Herzl and Lucien Wolf, leading Jewish dignitaries, urged Minister of the Interior Pleve to rethink the government’s Jewish policy. If Pleve wanted to end Jewish participation in revolution, Wolf stated, the government would have
to begin eliminating the sources of political discontent. Wolf wrote
the following after his meeting with Pleve: “I have always thought
that it would have been in the interest of the Government to
cultivate the innate conservatism of the Jews... I was certain that the
only working remedy of revolution was to deprive it of its excuses.”

Some members of the government were keenly aware that
discrimination encouraged Jewish participation in radical activities.
In a conversation with Herzl, Count Witte indicated that while the
Jews constituted only 7 million out of a population of 136 million,
nearly half of the membership in radical parties was Jewish. When
pressed by Herzl as to why he believed this to be the case Witte
admitted: “I think that it is the fault of our government. The Jews
are too oppressed.” But Witte was the exception, the government
attitude was better articulated by Count Lambsdorf in a January
1906 report he sent to Nicholas II:

There is thus no room for doubt as to the close connection of the Russian
revolution with the Jewish question in general... Nor can it be denied that
the practical direction of the Russian revolutionary movement is in Jewish
hands... it is precisely the Jews who are standing at the head of the
revolutionary movement.

Nicholas embraced this analysis, for at the top of the report in his
own hand he wrote: “I share entirely the opinion herein
expressed.”

The attitude of the government was not necessarily shared by
other segments of the Russian population. In the early months of
the revolution, there was a solidarity among Jews, workers, peasants,
and national minorities. Pogroms were inconsistent with the general
mood of the masses who supported the revolution and opposed the
autocracy. Poskhoz, the liberal Jewish newspaper, wrote: “Never
before, perhaps, has the Christian population in the Pale felt so
much solidarity with the Jews...” and a correspondent for Iskra
wrote: “The heroic behavior of Jews in clashes with police and army
units arouses admiration everywhere...” The Bund newspaper
Poslednie izvestiia indicated that a change had taken place in the
consciousness of the Russian masses, and attempts by either the
government or right-wing supporters to stage pogroms would meet
with failure: “Since Kishinev everything has changed.”

Regardless of the optimism of the liberal press and the apparent
solidarity of the masses with the Jewish struggle, the American Jewish

Yearbook for 1906 reported that fifty-four pogroms occurred between
January and the beginning of October 1905. In some measure, each
of these incidents was affected, either directly or indirectly, by the
development of the revolution.

Not all of the fifty-four incidents described in the Yearbook were
typical pogroms. In some instances, what appears as a pogrom was
actually police and troops intervening to disperse political demonstra-
tions. This was especially true in April, May, and June when
demonstrators clashed with authorities. Jews were among those who
had taken to the streets to show their support for the revolution. In
Warsaw on 2 April, a funeral march of 30,000 people was fired upon,
4 Jews were killed and 40 wounded. In Lodz, during the turbulent
"June Days", the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the Polish Social
Democrats, and the Bund challenged government troops after troops
attacked a peaceful demonstration. The rioting in the streets of Lodz
lasted for three days killing 561 people, 341 of whom were Jews.
The incidents of Warsaw and Lodz were clashes between demonstra-
tors and the authorities, aimed more at dispersing radicals than
pillaging Jewish homes or assaulting defenseless Jews.

More typical pogroms also occurred, the most serious in Zhitomir
(11 May) and Kiev (23 July). At Zhitomir, rumors circulated that
Jews had used the portrait of the Tsar for target practice and that
Jews were planning a massacre of the Christian population. Rumors
of an impending anti-Jewish pogrom mobilized the Bund’s defense
forces. Revolvers, knouts, homemade bombs, and daggers were
passed out to the kanif-grupe, the core of the defense. Zhitomir
became a legend among members of the Bund. One inhabitant of
Zhitomir claimed: “If not for self-defense, Zhitomir would have
been another Kishinev,” while another Jewish contemporary
stated: “in Zhitomir there was no pogrom but a war.”

Even with a valiant self-defense, twenty-nine Jews were killed and 150
wounded. The government claimed that the disturbances at
Zhitomir were caused by Jews and Socialist Revolutionary agitators.
The Minister of the Interior, Alexander Bulygin, directed the
provincial governors to make it clear to the Jews, that in their own
interest they should “warn their co-religionists against assuming a
provocative attitude toward Christians.”

More interesting than the “blaming the victim” attitude of the
government, was that the Zhitomir pogrom was planned and carried
out by an amalgam of vigilante, pro-monarchist hooligans. It was
during Zhitomir that the Black Hundreds, the terrorist arm of the Russian right, first began to gain prominence as the instigators of pogroms.

While the development of left-wing political movements began in the 1870s, there were virtually no right-wing political parties in Russia until 1900. The Russian right opposed liberalization, firmly supported the Romanov troika of nationalism, autocracy, and Orthodoxy and many among their ranks were antisemitic. The deepening crisis of the autocracy through the early years of the 1900s mobilized the right to political action.

The first of these organizations, the Russian Assembly (Russkoe Sobranie), was formed as a cultural society and counted among its members government officials, military men, and publicists. Its membership also included Krushevan, the antisemitic publisher of Bessarabets, A. A. Suvorin, publisher of the conservative and anti-Jewish newspaper Novoe Vremia, and A. I. Dubrovkin, V. M. Purishkevich, and P. F. Bulatsel, the founding members of the more political and notoriously antisemitic Union of the Russian People (URP).

The close association of government officials with the right has led to allegations that these organizations were merely an extension of the imperial government. Louis Greenberg wrote that: “This organization... was called into being by the government to save the tottering throne of Nicholas II,” and Simon Dubnov characterized them as, “agents of the secret political police.” The fact that Nicholas II accepted a badge from a delegation of the URP in December 1905 and that in 1906 the government financially subsidized publications and activities of the URP, lends merit to the accusations.

The reality, though, is that while some in the government, especially Nicholas II, sympathized with the goals of the Russian right there existed no direct relationship between the two. The relationship was more subtle. There was a fine line between official and unofficial participation by the government in right-wing movements. For instance, Pleve was a member of the original Russian Assembly as were seven generals and twelve high-level government officials. Individuals in the Interior Ministry were members of the URP as were some members of the police. In the provinces, local and provincial officials were known to have sympathized and at times conspired with members of the URP. In

Odessa, the commander of the Odessa Military Garrison, General A. V. Kaulbars, was the founder and organizer of the URP.

Central to the organizational spirit of the right was a deep and hostile antisemitism. This antisemitism was vulgar and violent. A speech delivered by M. Dubrovkin to 300 members of URP in Odessa stated: “The Holy Russian cause is the extermination of the rebels. You know who they are and where to find them... Death to the rebels and the Jews.” His speech was greeted by wild enthusiasm with the crowd yelling “Death to the rebels. Death to the Jews.”

In the stormy spring and summer months of 1905 right-wing political organizations appeared throughout the provinces. They assumed a variety of names, but all represented the basic conservative policies articulated in the publications of the right. They identified as their enemy radicals and Jews and staged demonstrations and pogroms in opposition to the revolution and in support of the autocracy. These groups came to be known as the Black Hundreds.

The Black Hundreds were not themselves a political party, although the name later became associated with more defined right-wing political groups. Rather, the Black Hundreds were an amorphous entity that acted as a semi-autonomous arm of the Russian right. The term Black Hundreds became a generic name for the many small right-wing groups (“Tsar and Order,” “The White Flag,” “People’s Union,” etc.) that instigated attacks against Jews. In reality, no one group can be identified as the Black Hundreds. These right-wing vigilantes were the terrorists of the right, the enforcement agents of reactionary politics. Under the guise of patriotism—carrying portraits of Nicholas and singing God Save the Tsar—the Black Hundreds organized pogroms. Their rallying cry was “Bei Zhidov” (Beat the Jews). The actions of these groups were encouraged by the antisemitic press, through pamphlets, by more established right-wing organizations (especially after the issuing of the October Manifesto), and at times by local and provincial officials. To their sympathizers, the actions of the Black Hundreds were interpreted as justified expressions of public indignation. Bertram Wolfe characterized them as the “extralegal armed forces, shock troops for the impending struggle.”

The “impending struggle” to which Wolfe referred developed in the autumn months of 1905. The revolutionary movement had gained momentum through the spring and summer and climaxed
with the general strike of October 1905. What started as a strike of the Moscow rail workers evolved into a general strike that spread to almost every part of the country and involved millions of workers and peasants. The strike movement was given organization and direction by the Bund, the Social Democrats (SDs), and the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). The general strike closed down the economy of imperial Russia and led to violent clashes between strikers, police, and the Black Hundreds.

Until the general strike the government believed that it could withstand the crisis. The Empire was under martial law, the troops, with some exceptions, were still obedient, right-wing political groups remained loyal to the autocracy, and order had been restored in some areas. When the strike became total, the optimism of the government faltered. The government had to act decisively to preserve the autocracy. Instead the policy adopted by the government reflected an inconsistency that distinguished the reign of Nicholas II. V. I. Gurko in his memoirs stated: “The government was at a loss to know what to do. It was not ready to use strong measures, although there was still a possibility of doing so.”

Nicholas II called upon Count Witte, who had recently returned from negotiating the Portsmouth Treaty, for advice. Witte’s analysis of the country’s situation was contained in a report to the Tsar dated 22 October.97 The report urged Nicholas II to take the initiative in creating a constitutional monarchy, extend the limits of civil liberties, eliminate exceptional legislation (such as the May Laws), and establish a body of ministers that would act to direct the government. The core of the report became the October Manifesto issued on 30 October 1905, which the Tsar reluctantly signed. With his signature affixed to the Manifesto, the entire essence of Russian autocracy was transformed. An extremely modest document, the October Manifesto was nonetheless a first step toward the dismantling of autocracy, even if, in the long run, it was a memorial to a failed revolution.

The days directly after issuing of the Manifesto were times of great uncertainty. The belief that the Manifesto would set Russia back on the road to tranquility and peaceful reform was erroneous. Unrest continued in urban and rural areas and the number of pogroms reached unparalleled proportions. Conservative estimates indicate that at least 650 pogroms occurred between the signing of the October Manifesto and September 1906.98 The overwhelming majority occurred in the three months directly after the issuing of the Manifesto and only a small number in the months between February and September 1906.

It is difficult to know accurately how many pogroms occurred during the period following the October Manifesto. The most exhaustive survey, Leo Motzkin’s *Die Judenpogrome in Russland*, estimated that 690 pogroms occurred in the two-week period following the issuing of the Manifesto.99 Motzkin’s count has become the accepted figure, and much of the scholarship since is based on his original estimate. Motzkin’s 1910 study indicated that of the 690 pogroms, 666 occurred within the Pale of Settlement. He admits that his was not an exhaustive study, and indicated that there existed “essential gaps in the data collected.”100 Motzkin believed there were more pogroms than even his estimate reflects; this was especially true for pogroms occurring outside the Pale or what Motzkin identified as smaller, unreported pogroms.

Supporting Motzkin’s estimate was a study carried out by the St. Petersburgh Aid Committee (an organization created to aid pogrom victims) that identified 638 pogroms.101 Using the Motzkin and the St. Petersburgh studies and available resources from archives, contemporary accounts, correspondence, contemporary newspapers and journals, my own study identified 657 pogroms inside the Pale and an additional 17 outside the Pale.102 One reason that Motzkin’s estimate is higher than either the St. Petersburgh study or my own is that Motzkin included areas in which pogroms were attempted
but never actually occurred. It is also unclear as to what Motzin meant when he reported that “insignificant pogroms” occurred. The numerical disparity among the three studies is not as significant as the proximity of their findings. Clearly, they all corroborate that there was extensive antisemitic violence from October 1905 to January 1906. More than 80 percent of the pogroms of 1905–6 occurred in the sixty days following the release of the Manifesto. The frequency of pogroms declined dramatically by the end of January 1906 (only six reported pogroms) and came to a virtual halt by February (four were reported in February). From the end of February to June 1906 there were no reported pogroms until the outbreak of the extremely violent Belostok (Bialystok) pogrom (Grodno province) of 14 June. There were several smaller pogroms in June, all in Grodno province, all likely an extension of Belostock. The last pogrom occurred in September 1906, in the town of Siedlce (Sedlets) in Poland.

Figure no. 1 shows the development of continuous pogrom activity from January 1903 through December 1906. The data for this graph represent all the known information on pogroms that included month and year. It is clear that while there was a low level of pogrom
activity throughout most of the four years, there is a dramatic rise and equally dramatic decline of pogroms from October 1905 through January 1906. Even when years are compared on a month by month basis the contrast is dramatic. (Figure no. 2).

The sheer number and ferocity of the pogroms overwhelmed the Jews of the Pale. The modest self-defense forces established by the Bund were insufficient to deal with the magnitude of the violence. The northern provinces where the Bund was most active experienced the fewest pogroms. The southern provinces of the Pale, where there was only limited community organization and where the Bund had not yet established significant self-defense units experienced the greatest number and most violent of pogroms. Nearly 87 percent (575) of all pogroms occurred in the southern provinces of Chernigov, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Podolia, Kiev, and Bessarabia. The pogroms in these provinces accounted for 62 percent (1,929) of Jewish fatalities in 1905. Surprisingly, 43 percent of all pogroms in the southern provinces occurred in Chernigov. The Chernigov pogroms are particularly interesting because while numerous, they were not, comparatively speaking, violent. In the

251 pogroms that occurred in Chernigov only 76 Jews were killed. (See Table i) The one anomaly among the southern provinces was Taurida (Taureda) which only experienced eight pogroms.

By the end of the pogroms the Jewish community was in shambles; over 3,100 Jews lost their lives, at least one-fourth of whom were women; the number of children left totally orphaned is estimated at 1,500; about 800 children lost one parent. In all it was reported that 2,000 Jews were seriously injured, and more than 15,000 wounded. The number of wounded reflects only those who sought medical attention; it is likely that the number of injured was higher. Total destruction of Jewish property is estimated at 57,84 million roubles within the Pale and an additional 8.2 million outside the Pale.104

The greatest destroyer of property was fire. Many reports and letters described entire towns being destroyed by fire. Although synagogues were usually the first to be burned, when this was not the case they were usually ransacked and pillaged. No one has estimated the value of the glass that was broken during pogroms, but virtually no pogroms occurred without all the windows of Jewish homes and shops destroyed.

The magnitude of violence during the 1905-6 pogroms far exceeded that of earlier years (see Table i). For both 1903 and 1904 it is estimated that 93 Jews lost their lives in pogroms. The statistics for 1905 are sobering: in Odessa 800 Jews killed and 5,000 wounded;105 in Kiev 100 Jews were killed and 406 wounded; in Minsk 100 Jews killed and 485 wounded; Simferopol 50 Jews killed; Kalarash (Bessarabia) 100 Jews killed and 80 wounded, the entire town was burned to the ground; Vitebsk 80 Jews killed; Belostok 200 Jews killed and 700 injured.106

How can the radical increase in number of pogroms be explained? As in earlier pogroms, a confluence of forces caused antisemitic disorders. The contributing factors to pogroms that have already been discussed (the antisemitic press, unresponsiveness by the central government, lack of coordination among local and provincial officials, and confusion among police and troops) were compounded by organized antisemitic right-wing political groups and their offshoot, the Black Hundreds. In addition, the events and conditions surrounding the release of the October Manifesto contributed to the dramatic rise in pogroms.

Shortly after the issuing of the Manifesto, supporters of the revolution celebrated their victory over autocracy. Parades and
demonstrations occurred in major cities. Crowds carrying red flags and singing the Marseillaise celebrated their triumph. The Jewish response was equally celebratory. Jews held parades in Odessa, Kiev, Minsk, took over government buildings and generally participated in what they believed was their long-due emancipation. Popular celebrations, Jewish or otherwise, reflected an overt hostility toward the government.

The government took no immediate measures to repress disorders. Local and provincial officials used their discretion in handling demonstrations. Some pursued their work responsibly, others did not. Out of concern that the central government was unable to defend itself and that the revolution had made a shambles of autocracy, counter-demonstrations were sponsored by pro-monarchist, right-wing political organizations. These groups saw themselves as the last line in the defense of Tsar and fatherland. Right-wing demonstrations were encouraged and at times organized by members of the clergy who interpreted the revolution as an attack on religion as well as autocracy. Support for pro-monarchist demonstrations also came from local and provincial officials who wanted to show their loyalty and support for the central government. It was inevitable that the forces of revolution and reaction were headed for violent confrontation.

Those of the right did not distinguish between Jews, liberals and radicals. The propaganda of the antisemitic press, the attitude of the government that Jews were to blame for the revolution and that Jews were active in radical politics made them a natural target for persecution. Throughout the Pale of Settlement, anti-revolutionary demonstrations turned into bloody anti-Jewish pogroms. The worst occurred in Odessa in the three days following the release of the Manifesto.

Odessa's history made it a prime target for a pogrom. The city had a large Jewish population (123,000 which was 92 percent of the total population), had a history of pogroms dating back to 1821 and was a center of radical activity in Novorossiya. The reactionary forces in Odessa (an unofficial branch of the URP) were well organized and courted local police and military officials. They enlisted into their ranks hooligans, miscreants and common criminals, the social dross of the right. The left was equally organized, staging strikes and demonstrations throughout the spring and summer of 1905. Revolutionaries and reactionaries gathered their forces for an imminent confrontation.

In the days directly after the issuing of the Manifesto, a confrontation between pro- and anti-government factions degenerated into a violent anti-Jewish pogrom. Jewish homes and apartments were ransacked, pillaged and set on fire. Jews in the streets were brutally murdered, raped, tortured. By the end of the pogrom 800 Jews were dead, 5,000 wounded, 463 children orphaned and 10,000 families ruined, property destruction was estimated at more than 100 million roubles. An emergency telegram sent by the Odessa Aid Committee to the Alliance Israelite, a Paris relief organization read: “The massacres at Odessa surpassed the cruelties of the rest of the world... 10,000 families without bread or roof—Indescribable miseries—Immediate aid needed on a large scale—Urgent!” An official report on the pogrom labeled it as incredible savagery against Jews.

The official investigation of the Odessa pogrom found that “in many cases police forces directed crowds of hooligans... and together with them took part in these acts of violence, robbing and beating and leading the crowd.” It goes on to indicate that the City Governor, Dmitrii Neidhart was guilty of negligence, “by virtue of inaction.” The role of the Commander of the Odessa Military Garrison, Baron A. V. Kaulbars was also called into question. In an address to police and troops Kaulbars stated, “It is necessary that we call these things by their correct name. All of us intimately sympathize with the pogrom.” Kaulbars was later responsible for organizing the official Odessa branch of the URP, authorized the publication of two antisemitic journals that were distributed by his men and also claimed that anti-Jewish atrocities were actually the work of revolutionaries disguised as members of the Black Hundreds. In the following year when Kaulbars was promoted to Commander of the Kiev District, it is known that he supplied arms to the combat unit of the URP.

In another chapter, Robert Weinberg presents a significantly more detailed examination of the Odessa pogrom. His analysis explains how antisemitic propaganda, militant right-wing organizations like the Black Hundreds, and the collusion of local officials were the primary cause for such extreme violence in Odessa. Most importantly, Weinberg examines in detail the role of Neidhart and Kaulbars and concludes that although they did not plan the pogrom, they sympathized with the pogromshchiki and allowed the pogrom to run its course without taking appropriate measures.

As the revolutionary movement lost support the pogrom move-
ment gained momentum. As a backlash to the victory of October, hundreds of pogroms broke out throughout the Pale. Some spontaneous, others planned, some encouraged by officials and still others led by police and troops. Overwhelmingly, the outbreak of pogroms was rooted in the belief that the way to short circuit the revolution was by attacking Jews. Nicholas II in a letter to his mother the Dowager Empress expressed this belief most succinctly:

In the first days of the Manifesto the subversive elements raised their heads but a strong reaction set in quickly and a whole mass of loyal people suddenly made their power felt...the revolutionaries had angered people once more; and because nine-tenths of the troublemakers are Jews, the People's whole anger turned against them. That's how the pogroms happened. It is amazing how they took place simultaneously in the towns of Russia.114

The Manifesto made the Tsar a very unhappy man. It was possibly the despair that he felt at the issuing of the Manifesto that mobilized his efforts to regain control and re-establish authority. The height of pogrom activity coincided with the government's counter-offensive. Troops were deployed to rural areas to end agrarian disorders and General D. F. Trepov was given wide-ranging powers to bring an end to radical activity within cities. Trepov's appointment was specifically made to counter the more liberal ministers in the government. In January 1905, he was made Governor-General of St. Petersburg, by May his powers significantly increased when he was given the additional post of Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs and shortly after the issuing of the October Manifesto was promoted to Commandant of the Court. Trepov's appointments placed the police force of the Empire under his direct control and allowed him to exert enormous influence on government policy. Nicholas sustained a close relationship with Trepov, valuing his opinions and advice above that of Count Witte. In a letter to his mother he stated: "Trepov is absolutely indispensable to me...I give him Witte's bulky memoranda to read and he reports on them quickly and concisely...."115 It was clear that in the closing months of 1905 Trepov held as much power, if not more power than Witte. In his memoirs Witte stated: "...I was the responsible premier without much influence...he [Trepov] was more or less the official dictator."116

The evidence against General Trepov presents the most compelling case that high level government officials encouraged pogroms. A. A. Lopukhin, Director of the Department of Police, in February 1906, reported to Witte that during October and November 1905, a secret printing press located at Police headquarters in St. Petersburg printed thousands of antisemitic pamphlets. The pamphlets proclaimed:

Do you know brethren, workmen and peasants, who is the chief author of all of our misfortunes? Do you know that the Jews of the whole world...have entered into an alliance and decided to completely ruin Russia. Whenever those traitors of Christ come near you, tear them to pieces, kill them.117

A. A. Lopukhin's investigation indicated that Trepov had known about these pamphlets and that he had made editorial changes and marginal notations on the preliminary drafts. Lopukhin stated unequivocally that their existed "complicity of representatives of the Government in the organization of pogroms." The investigation indicated that the Chief of the Political Section of the Police Department, P. I. Rachkovskii, an advisor and confidant of Trepov, in collusion with other officials and members of the right (most notably, A. Dubrovin, organizer and leader of the URP and G. Gringmut, founder of the Monarchist Party) printed within the Ministry of the Interior, "thousands of proclamations" that urged individuals to "wage a war on Jews." Copies were distributed to the army, police and local and provincial officials. The chief of police at Vilna "telegraphed to the Police Department a request for additional copies in view of the great success which the appeal had had."118

In June 1906. Prince Urusov, delivered a speech to the Duma reaffirming the existence of the secret printing press and alleging government culpability in pogroms.119 Urusov's speech followed a 17 May 1906 Duma report that stated: "Official documents...show that the Department of State Police was directly concerned in the mission of inflaming one section of people against the other, a mission that has concentrated hordes of assassins in the midst of peaceful citizens...proclamations drawn up by the same Department, incit[ed] the populace to massacre persons of other religions...."120

Whether officials in the Police Department acted on their own or with government approval is impossible to assess. The government was in disarray in the months following October. While part of the
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government who opposed pogroms, "they will assuredly recur as long as the local police continues to believe in the powerlessness of the Ministry and in the potency of other forces." Lopukhin's reference to "other forces" is an allusion to the right, officials of the Political Section of the Police and others in the government who supported what he termed a "pogrom policy."

Government officials who were complicit in instigating pogroms did so with impunity. As late as September 1906 no charges were brought against members of the Political Section of the Police. M. S. Kommissarov, the officer responsible for running the secret printing press was never brought up on charges. Nicholas II had personally intervened to assure that Kommissarov would not be punished. On the contrary, he retained his position within the Ministry of Interior and was given a grant of 25,000 roubles from the Tsar. D. M. Neidhart, City Governor of Odessa, was dismissed from his position and brought to trial for his role in the Odessa pogrom, but was cleared of all charges by the Senate in March 1906.124

As the central government continued to assert its control in late December 1905 and early January 1906 the frequency of pogroms diminished. The government moved to crush the last vestiges of the revolution, re-establish order and bring to an end civil disturbances. In February there was only the most minor of pogrom activity and in March of 1906 there were no reported pogroms. In June, the violent Belostok pogrom broke out killing 200 Jews and injuring 700. The official report of the Duma on the Belostok pogrom indicated that local officials, troops, and police colluded with members of the Black Hundreds in organizing and staging the pogrom. The report stated that troops and police were particularly brutal and bore responsibility for some of the worst atrocities. It was also revealed that proclamations printed at the Ministry of the Interior incited "the extermination of the Jews" and that these proclamations were distributed to stimulate the patriotism of the troops." The report concluded "that the pogrom against the peaceful Jewish population arose...through the measures adopted by the authorities; that for these acts not only the officials are responsible, but also the central government which authorized an extensive propaganda for the organization of an attack."125

The central government's response to the Belostok pogrom was the release of a news item that gave "thanks" to the troops for their "splendid service, and their glorious, self-sacrificing, untiring, just
and honest devotion to duty during the Belostok pogrom.” Police Superintendent S. D. Sheremetev, who was identified in the Duma report as one of the main organizers of the pogrom was transferred and promoted.126 The final curtain on pogroms fell in September 1906. Reports from Sedlits, in Poland, indicate that a pogrom was organized by local officials and members of the Monarchist League. During the pogrom 100 Jews were killed and 300 wounded.127 A telegram from Warsaw on the pogrom stated:

Evidence of the prearrangement of the pogrom at Sedlits by local authorities and the monarchist league is accumulating... when the massacre was being planned, the officers of the Ostrolesky Regiment declared that they would maintain order and fire upon the rioters. The regiment was removed from the town and its place was taken by the Libau Regiment, which distinguished itself so unenviably at Belostok.128

Sedlits brought to an end the drama of pogroms which began in 1903 at Kishinev. As the government continued to reassert its authority in the months following the revolution, pogrom activity abated. The central government was more interested in re-establishing the status quo ante than in tolerating mass demonstrations. The government had learned the painful lesson that mob rule, even in the form of pogroms, potentially threatened the stability of the autocracy. Had the government allowed pogroms to continue it would reflect its own inability to maintain order. The government refused to subsidize, tolerate, or encourage pogroms in the years after the Revolution of 1905.

The right had also brought to an end its physical attacks against Jews. Convinced that it was their efforts that aided in restoring the power of the autocracy, the right went about establishing itself as a legitimate political force. Subsidized by the central government and encouraged by Nicholas II, the right’s political influence had grown in the months after 1905. From 1906 to 1917, the right became more involved with pushing through its own political agenda rather than instigating pogroms.

While there is very little hard evidence to show that the government consciously pursued what Lopukhin referred to as a “pogrom policy,” the circumstantial evidence is damning. Within the central government there were clearly officials who believed and acted upon the concept that pogroms could be used to attack the revolutionary movement. In league with members of the right, these officials acted to agitate, promote, and instigate pogroms in the misdirected belief that by attacking the Jews they would in some manner be attacking the core of the revolutionary movement. Some responsible officials within the government attempted to expose this antisemitic cabal, while others were clearly in sympathy. The sympathy of high-level officials, including Nicholas II, the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, Assistant Minister of the Interior D. F. Trepov and other members of the Tsar’s camarilla, must assume a certain responsibility for pogroms. They are as much to blame for their inaction and tacit approval as for their blatant antisemitic attitudes. While not pursuing a stated “pogrom policy,” it was nonetheless “policy” among certain officials that pogroms would be tolerated and those who acted on this unstated policy did so without fear of reprisal. Quite the opposite, those officials associated with pogroms were frequently rewarded with promotions.

Sharing blame with the Tsar and his ministers were local and provincial officials. Possibly out of a misdirected sense of loyalty to the Tsar, or out of their own malevolence for Jews, local bureaucrats actively conspired to stage pogroms. It is also clear that officials within the Department of Police encouraged, participated and led pogroms. The same charge can be made against local police and military garrisons who were called in to control pogroms. The perception among local officials that excesses against Jews were tolerable and condoned, albeit unofficially, led them to carry out what they believed to be the Tsar’s wishes.

IV

Antisemitism is a product of common mistrust, competition, jealousy, psychological habits, and religious antipathies. Motives for antisemitism, especially violent antisemitism, are not readily found by studying one time period or one phenomenon. The pogroms in Russia represented a complex manifestation of antisemitism. Their development must be understood within the social and political context of late Imperial Russia.

The arguments raised by the traditional historians regarding pogroms (Dubnow, Greenberg, Motzkin) focus on the tribulations of Russian Jews as caused by pogroms. By framing the argument in this way, these historians sought to establish the central government as
the culprit while neglecting to consider the sociopolitical conditions in Russia during 1903–6. While correctly identifying the central government's complicity, traditional historians nonetheless did not provide an expose of the subtleties regarding government involvement. The fundamental point of the traditional analysis is that the government used pogroms to channel the discontent of the populace away from the autocracy and toward Jews and for this injustice the government bears moral responsibility.

In substance I agree with this assessment. Nicholas II, his ministers, provincial and local officials had the ability, even at the height of revolutionary disturbances, to limit the excesses of pogroms. For a variety of reasons they chose not to take appropriate actions. Their reluctance to act makes the government, on a moral if not a legal level, culpable. Where I disagree with the traditional view is its emphasis on the action or more correctly the inaction of the government, without adequate consideration of forces that contributed to pogroms.

Among these forces I would include the development of extremist right-wing political organizations. It was through the publications, propaganda and lobbying efforts of the right that violent antisemitism became an acceptable method for displaying loyalty to the regime. The writings of the right-wing antisemitic press, the establishment of right-wing political organizations in 1904 and 1905, the recruitment of government officials to their cause and establishment of vigilante groups (Black Hundreds) were seminal in encouraging violent antisemitism. Clearly, members of right-wing groups had an agenda that went beyond encouraging pogroms, but equally as clear is that a central component of their ideology was a deep and abiding hatred of Jews. Because of this, the right consciously attempted to foster antisemitic attitudes within the narod and among government officials. Their persistent efforts normalized and legitimized violence against Jews.

The right had a sympathetic ear among many in the government. So much so, that there exists ample evidence that high level members of the Political Section of the Police (the Okhrana), members of the Ministry of the Interior, commanders of provincial garrisons and local police officials colluded in the organization of pogroms. The propaganda of the right fed upon the growing discontents of the narod. Tutored at an early age that Jews were pariahs, the narod were fertile ground for the cultivation of a pogrom mentality. It was not difficult to convince the impoverished worker or peasant that the cause of their discontent rested on the shoulders of Jews. Embittered by economic conditions, and the unwillingness of the government to institute reforms, peasants and workers participated in popular and oftentimes violent demonstrations. The product of the frustrations of the narod included agrarian disorders, strikes and demonstrations in urban areas and anti-Jewish pogroms. Why attack Jews? It is difficult to account for the motivation of the narod. Certainly some participated merely for acquisitive purposes, that is, for loot and booty. Others might have participated in pogroms out of a misguided belief that their action was supportive of the Tsar and in opposition to radicalism.

The narod might have also acted out of a belief that the extension of civil rights to Jews would somehow worsen their own socio-economic condition. Rising expectations among the narod and the inability of the government to meet those expectations led to the Revolution of 1905. When change did begin the narod might have been simply unwilling to share their gains with Jews. Possibly, they believed the extension of equal rights to Jews would in some way diminish their claims to economic reforms. This was especially true regarding the right of Jews to own land.

Finally, we arrive at the role of the government in pogroms. I feel it is beyond question that the attitude and actions of the government became the overwhelming contributive cause of pogroms. I do not believe that the central government (Nicholas, his ministers, and advisors) consciously set about implementing a policy that at its core encouraged violent attacks against Jews. There exists no documentary evidence to support this type of conclusion. What I believe occurred was a much more subtle manipulation of events whose end product, whether deliberate or not, was pogroms. The policy of the government was not to promote pogroms, but to promote antisemitism. It seems quite clear from the May Laws through to 1906 the government consciously, deliberately, knowingly, and overtly supported antisemitic activity. The most obvious was the discriminatory May Laws of 1882. But the May Laws only begin the list: the participation of government officials in right-wing political movements; the subsidizing of these movements and their publications by the government; the willingness of the government not to prosecute officials who were clearly responsible for pogroms; the willingness of the government to promote individuals responsible for
pogroms; the pernicious attitude that Jews bore responsibility for pogroms; the unwillingness of the government to compensate pogrom victims; all these factors point to a clear antisemitic policy by the central government.

It was the attitude of the government that created the conditions that allowed pogroms to occur. The government had an unspoken policy, a policy that rested on the erroneous belief that by persecuting Jews this would in some way neutralize the revolutionary movement. To this end the government turned its back, saw what it wanted to see, heard what it wanted to hear and disregarded the reality of its own situation. It was this disregard for the reality that caused many innocent lives and eventually the collapse of the Romanov dynasty.

NOTES


2 The Blood Accusation, the accusation that Jews use the blood of a young Christian boy in making Passover matzoh can be dated back to the First Crusade. Young William of Norwich who died in 1145 was the first supposed victim. Maurice Samuels who wrote about the celebrated Belis trial points out that the legend reappeared across the centuries and was particularly prevalent during the nineteenth century. The most famous accusations were those in Damascus (1860), Saratov, Russia (1857), Kutsai Assay, Russia (1879) and Tisz-feslari, Hungary (1882); for more information see Maurice Samuels, *Blood Accusations* (New York, 1966); Davitt, *Within the Pale*, 129.

3 *Materialy*, 1:1 n. 1; *New York Times*, 14 May 1903, 5:1; Cyrus Adler in his introduction to *The Voice of America on Kishinev* (Philadelphia, 1904), states that the boy died on 16 February and that his body was found six days later on 22 February.


5 *Materialy*, 1:4–7, n. 4.


9 Davitt, *Within the Pale*, 142.


14 Davitt, *Within the Pale*, 125.


21 *Materialy*, 1:130–2, no. 4 and 5.

22 Greenberg, 11:51.


26 Davitt, *Within the Pale*, 170.


28 Ibid., 28 April 1903, 6:2.

29 Ibid., 22 May 1903, 1:7.

30 Ibid., 19 May 1903, 2:3.

31 Ibid., 19 May 1903, 2:4 and 17 May 1903, 2:3.


33 Ibid., 137, no. 12.

34 The US Ambassador to Russia in 1903 cabled the State Department that the Russian government had denied that a massacre occurred in Kishinev. See *Papers Relating to the Foreign Affairs of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1903), 712.


36 Ibid., 3:3.

37 *Bulletin* (Paris, 1903), entire issue dedicated to Kishinev.


40 Shlomo Lambroza, “Jewish self-defence during the Russian pogroms of


42 Ibid., 2 October 1903, 5:2.

43 Ibid.


46 Neil Weissman, “Regular police in Tsarist Russia, 1900–1914,” *The Russian Review*, XLIV (1985), 45–68. Weissman indicates that the ratio of police to population before 1905 was 1:700 (p. 48). Given Gomel’s population of 40,000 this would mean a police force of roughly sixty men.

47 *Der Freynd*, 20 September 1903, 1:4, no. 201.

48 Poslednie izvestiia, 6 October 1903.


63 Ibid., 275–81.

64 Ibid., 285.
development of right-wing movements in Russia see Hans Rogger, "The formation of the Russian Right," *Jewish Policy*, 188–211.
89 Greenberg, 54.
93 *The Times*, 10 October 1906, 3:3.
96 Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past*, 394.
100 Ibid., 1: 189–91.
103 Linden, *Die Judenpogrome*, 1, 189–92.
105 The police report indicated that 400 Jews were killed, and 300 people, mostly Jews were injured. But it is widely accepted that the police report underestimated the extent of the damage. Several sources, including the Kuzminskii Report, clxvi-clxvii and 201; the Vinaver Report; *Die Judenpogrome*, 11: 130, *Voskhod*, no. 44-45, 11 November 1905, 16, and *AJY*, 50-1, cite a higher figure for the number of dead and wounded.
107 AAU USSR Dossier Odessa, no. 5269.
108 Kuzminskii Report, cxxiv.
109 Ibid., cii-cliiii.
110 *Ost und West*, viii, no. 1, January 1908.
111 Vinaver Report, 12.
112 Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict*, 211.
113 Vinaver Report, 45.
115 Bing, *Secret Letters*, 211.
116 Witte, *Vospominania*, 1, 64-5, 71-2.