POGROMS: ANTI-JEWISH VIOLENCE IN MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORY

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CHAPTER 6

The development of the Russian Jewish community, 1881–1903

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The last decades of the nineteenth century were critical ones in the history of Russian Jewry. From all external appearances, the community was not responding well to the devastating centrifugal forces associated with modernity that everywhere had shattered traditional societies. For Russia’s Jews, the case was even more complicated because in addition to having to cope with the new circumstances ushered in as a consequence of major economic restructuring, they found themselves in an unfriendly environment. Unlike what had happened earlier in Western and Central Europe, the disintegration of traditional Jewish life in the Russian Empire did not occur in a milieu in which Jews saw possibilities for a new life in the larger society around them. Rather, the hostility expressed in verbal and at times even physical forms from both officials and from the surrounding population made it clear to Jews that they were not welcome in Russia. Hence, flight from the Jewish world in the Russian Empire meant quite literally flight from Russia itself. Thus, the primary question facing Jewish thinkers in Russia at the dawn of the twentieth century was this very issue of community cohesion. On what basis did a Jewish community currently exist or on what terms could one be founded given the realities of the situation were the key questions confronting those who attempted to lead or even to speak for Russia’s 5 million Jews.

By the last years of the nineteenth century, a new group of leaders and spokesmen within both the secular and the religious spheres of Jewish life had emerged with tentative answers to these questions. Curiously, the year 1897 serves as a convenient point of departure for a review of these formulations as well as for an examination of Russia’s Jews on the eve of the new century. That year saw the appearance of a number of significant movements, studies or public expressions on the Jewish future, which, when examined, reveal a
common organizing theme for a coherent study of Russian Jewry at
the time. The year 1897 also marked the completion of a systematic
survey of the Empire's population, thereby establishing for the first
time a clear picture of the Jewish population of the realm. In the
past, all discussions of Jewish life had been based on fragmentary
or even impressionistic data. Now, concrete information was available
on the full spectrum of Jewish life, and such data would be the point
of departure for all subsequent discussions of the Jewish Question.
Thus, any serious discussion of Russia's Jews at the beginning of the
twentieth century must necessarily begin with a review of that
material generated by the census takers of 1897.

The census established that there were just over 5.2 million Jews, or
nearly one-half of the world Jewish population, living in the Russian
Empire. While this number constituted only 4 percent of the nearly
126 million people then living under tsarist control, a closer study of
the report reveals a more significant Jewish visibility than that
implied by the raw numbers alone.¹

The first critical fact of Russian-Jewish life was the existence of the
Pale of Settlement, an area of the country to which Jewish residence
had been restricted since the end of the eighteenth century. Included
within the Pale were the newer territories gained by Russia as a
consequence of the successful military campaigns against Poland and
the Ottoman Empire.² Initially, Russian rulers issued ad hoc
directives in order to restrict Jewish life to these new territories.
However, as part of the effort aimed at systematizing Russian
domestic legislation in the reign of Nicholas I, Jewish rights,
obligations, and limitations were clearly delineated in a series of
directives and rescripts in the middle of the 1830s.³ These regulations
identified the geographical area of that zone now to be known as the
Pale of Settlement as fifteen Russian provinces in the western part of
the Empire. Jewish settlement was also permitted in the ten Polish
provinces under Russian control. With 369,000 square miles of area
covering less than 20 percent of European Russia or 4 percent of the
total land mass of that which was the tsarist Empire, the Pale
became home to Russia's Jewish population in the nineteenth
century.

In the period of the Great Reforms of the 1860s certain categories
of the Jewish population were permitted to leave the Pale in order
to take up residence in the interior of the country, including also the
capital cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, by 1897 the
census takers found that 94 percent of the Jewish population was still
to be found within the confines of the Pale.⁴ Living alongside the
local people including the Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Russians,
Moldavians and White Russians, the Jews of the Pale made up 11.6
percent of the population in those areas. However, these 4.8 million
Jews were not distributed evenly throughout the region. In fact, the
level of Jewish concentration diminished as one traveled from north
toward south and especially from west to east. In the older, northwestern
region, six provinces in all, the Jewish population was 15 percent
of the whole, while in the four southeastern provinces, areas opened
to Jewish residence only at the close of the eighteenth century and then
included in the borders of the Pale, the Jewish people contributed 9
percent to the total. In the ten Polish provinces, Jews numbered 14
percent of the whole.⁵ Thus, the Jewish presence in the western
border area was certainly quantitatively significant. But beyond
these statistics, the concentration of Jewish residence in the urban
areas of the Pale and the Jewish role within the local economy of the
zone gave the Jewish population a qualitative importance far in
excess of the numbers themselves.

Using the criteria by which the census takers measured urbaniza-
tion, the Jewish presence in the urban zones of the western part of
the Empire was overwhelming. With close to 2.4 million urban
dwellers in the twenty-five provinces in which they were allowed to
live,⁶ Jews made up 55 percent of the urban population of White
Russia, 50 percent of those counted as urban in Lithuania, and close
to 38 percent of the urban mix in the Polish provinces.⁷ While the
Jewish population had always been an urban one, it became even
more so in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The census figures show that the rate of Jewish population growth
in the second half of the nineteenth century was significant. The
numbers indicate that the Jewish population grew by about 20
percent in the decade and a half after the pogroms of 1881. Thus,
with an expanding population base and shrinking area within which
to live as a consequence of the stricter residential requirements
imposed in 1882 as part of the so-called May Laws, the period
1881-97 saw the Jewish people being crowded even further into the
confines of the Pale. Of course, this same period also saw the
beginnings of a massive flight abroad. However, in spite of that
exodus, the high birth rate led to very severe overcrowding especially

¹ The Russian Jewish community, 1881–1903
in the already congested urban areas.\textsuperscript{8} Obviously, one way of reducing that urban growth was for Jews to move to other areas of the Pale with a lower population density. Thus, we should not be surprised to learn that an internal migration, or resettlement, was also taking place within Russia in those years. In this respect, Jewish behavior conformed to a larger pattern as thousands of other Russian residents, experiencing dislocations as a consequence of the major economic transformations then taking place, were also moving to newer areas of settlement within the country. However, unlike some of those others, for whom mobility was less rigidly circumscribed, the Jews within the Empire were largely confined to the Pale.\textsuperscript{9}

The greatest growth in the Jewish population in the period occurred in the southern provinces. The evidence indicates that the numbers of Jews there nearly doubled in the last decades of the century. The promise of greater economic opportunity there attracted Jews to those underpopulated regions from the older, more established sections of the Pale.\textsuperscript{10} However this shift, undertaken primarily for economic reasons, had important communal consequences, too. The flight from the established, structured, Jewish world to virgin territories devoid of Jewish life was characterized not by the transplantation of older institutions and patterns of life, but by the effort to create new communities with new orientations that would fit more comfortably into the locale in which the Jews found themselves. Thus, the reconfiguration of Jewish residential patterns did not bring with it an expansion of the traditional community with its institutional frameworks, but marked instead the undermining of the static community and its replacement by a new and dynamic entity.\textsuperscript{11}

In their reporting of Jewish occupational patterns, the census takers caught the Jewish community in this transition from traditional to modern economic life.\textsuperscript{12} Nearly 70 percent of those indicating their sources of income noted that they earned their livelihood either through manufacture (38 percent) or commercial enterprise (32 percent). An additional 3 percent of the Jewish community stated that they were tied directly to the agricultural sector of the economy, while another 25 percent of Jewish wage earners reported that they earned their living through the sale of their services, either personal (19 percent) or professional (6 percent).\textsuperscript{13}

Breaking these numbers down even further, it is clear that in Lithuania and White Russia the industrial sector was gaining more and more Jewish workers as a rapid shift away from commercial activity tied to the traditional economy was in the process of transforming the Jewish way of earning a living.\textsuperscript{14} In the main, it was the Jewish industrialist who was hiring his newly emerging class of Jewish laborers. One scholar has gone so far as to claim that "this group of industrialists created jobs for over 93 percent of Jewish industrial workers. And while acting in their own self-interest, they helped satisfy one of the greatest economic needs of the Jewish community – the need for gainful employment."\textsuperscript{15}

While a small number of entrepreneurs with access to capital was in a favorable position to take advantage of the new outlets and incentives being made available to them, the overwhelming majority of Russia's Jews did not benefit materially as a consequence of Russian industrialization. This state of affairs becomes especially apparent when the data on Jewish poverty and increased Jewish hardship at the end of the century are examined. This evidence reveals that there was a dramatic increase in the number of Jewish loan associations and other social welfare societies operating within the Pale in the last decades of the century. For instance, data on Passover relief, money made available in order to purchase food for the holiday, indicate that as much as 20 percent of the Jewish community was getting this type of support.\textsuperscript{16} From a purely economic perspective then, the Jewish community of tsarist Russia was not thriving: it was, in fact, struggling, with all indications pointing to the possibility of serious internal problems of cohesion and direction as a consequence of recent developments taking place in the surrounding society.

These social, economic, and demographic developments were directly related to the massive economic transformation then occurring in tsarist Russia. Intimately tied to the existing economy, the Jews could not help but be affected by this major restructuring of Russian economic life at the close of the nineteenth century. Of course, compounding the difficulties facing the Jews was the increased hostility in the form of legal and social exclusions that they had to confront. After the experience of 1881, the Jews realized that not only was the government reluctant to come to their aid and to deal effectively with rioters, but that, in its investigations of the pogroms, it had concluded that the Jews themselves were responsible
community then merited a nationally minded leadership able to organize and articulate its hopes and aspirations. Thus, the various programs developed and offered to Russian Jewry at this time reflected not only ideological perspectives on the future of that community, but also political credos articulated by those striving to fill what they perceived to be the leadership vacuum created as a consequence of the fire storm of 1881.

II

The impact of the pogroms of 1881 on Russian Jewry was considerable. Physical damage, including casualties and property damage, was extensive. An estimated 20,000 Jews had their homes destroyed and an additional 100,000 suffered major property loss. In addition, the pogroms also undermined the prevailing integrationist political ideology being pursued by the Jewish establishment. It is true that the St. Petersburg Jewish leaders, the champions of this course, were able to maintain their ascendency over the community even after the riots and the ensuing governmental reaction. However their argument, that a positive Jewish life could be lived in the Russian Empire and that Jews should put their trust in the government, was now challenged by a variety of radical, political orientations which completely rejected the basic premises of the integrationists.

This new form of Jewish politics, characterized by stridency and assertiveness, emphasized Jewish activism in an appeal directed to the Jewish masses. Using the press, organizing small cells of like-minded supporters and attempting to build large grass-roots type movements, these new ideologues recognized the events of 1881 as a significant turning point not only for Russian Jewry but for all of world Jewry. The spontaneous flight abroad by Jews in the aftermath of the pogroms became the starting point for the building of new political programs.

Writing in the Russian-Jewish weekly, Rassvet, Moshe Leib Lilienblum called for a major shift in the destination of Russian Jews leaving the Empire. Instead of going to North America, he urged them to go to Palestine. He contended that only in Palestine would Jews be able to re-establish themselves as an independent and normal people, since only there could they set their own future course. Lilienblum had come to the conclusion that antisemitism...
was fundamentally a problem of national confrontation between the Jewish people and those national communities on whose soil Jews were then living. In his view, the problem could only be truly resolved by addressing the question of Jewish homelessness. Passionately, he declared that only when the Jews were territorially rooted would their victimization cease. Breaking with his earlier reformist and acculturational beliefs, Lilienblum was now convinced that there were no Jewish concessions which would be sufficient to those who deemed the Jews an alien people and therefore ineligible for full civic rights. Generalizing from this position, Lilienblum concluded that the Jew should aspire to the same goal as all other national groups, i.e., a free and independent home. Thus, Lilienblum focused on Jewish settlement in Palestine, the historic home of the Jewish people, as the means by which Jews could initiate the process of self-regeneration in the modern period.21

Independent of Moshe Leib Lilienblum, Dr. Leo Pinsker, twenty years Lilienblum’s senior, came to similar views as he tried to make sense of recent events. A medical doctor and writer who in 1861 had coedited Sian, a Russian–Jewish weekly promoting Jewish acculturation, Pinsker found that the pogroms of 1881 shattered his worldview. He now admitted that he had never really understood the bases of antisemitism and had assumed that through education and general societal development this form of discrimination, along with all other residues of medieval intolerance, would disappear. Thus for Pinsker, Jewish emancipation had been part of that general process of reaching a higher level of human understanding and acceptance. After the events of 1881, Pinsker contended that antisemitism was not simply an anachronism that would vanish, but was an expression of national hostility, rooted in an incurable psychological illness. This conclusion emerged as a natural consequence of Pinsker’s new vision of the Jewish community as a national one. Pinsker now argued that rather than focusing on emancipation, Jews first had to go through a process of self-confrontation whereby they would come to acknowledge their primary identity as a nation and begin their search for freedom from that starting point. This process Pinsker termed “autoemancipation” and he identified it as the next stage in the Jewish effort to resolve the dilemmas of modern Jewish life. Of central importance to Pinsker was the fact that this would be a process initiated by Jews themselves and not one which saw them still dependent upon the efforts or the good will of others. Pinsker rejected all Jewish programs of action which did not grasp the depth of these national antipathies toward Jews.22

While Lilienblum and Pinsker looked to Jewish leaders in order to organize and fund these efforts, both men also stressed the importance of mass action. They emphasized that an improvement in the status of Russian Jewry would not be attained simply by lobbying or through other forms of private negotiation with governmental leaders, but rather through the mobilization of the Jewish people themselves. The necessity of building a new movement which would generate its own leadership and delineate a new course of action was clear in each man’s approach. An effort to organize the mass exodus and direct it to a Jewish territory rather than have it disperse around the world was, in their view, the first demand to be made of such new leaders. Thus, the role of the new leaders would not be confined to organizational or financial matters, but would of necessity be motivational and political too. Jews would now have to be organized communally along new lines. They had to be energized to the point of being convinced that not only immediate self-interest demanded their commitment to this objective, but that the fate of world Jewry would be served through the establishment of Jewish national life on that soil long identified with the Jewish people.

While Lilienblum and Pinsker agonized over the implications of the pogroms and tried to articulate a new course for Russian Jewry, others acted out their responses spontaneously. They fled the country. Hundreds of young Jews crossed the western border into the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the intention not only of avoiding violence, but also of quitting tsarist Russia forever. The overwhelming majority of these emigrants was headed to North America. However, a trickle of Jewish pioneers did not face west but turned south to Palestine. With utopian and altruistic intentions, these young people were convinced that by moving to Palestine in order to build a Jewish collective life there, they were taking the first steps in the ultimate redemption of their people.

In general, those who chose Palestine over other destinations shared a number of common characteristics. Products of Russian schooling, they had come to identify with Russian culture and especially its progressive literary tendencies of the 1860s and 1870s. This does not mean that they were completely estranged from the Jewish community and its way of life, rather, it is fair to say that the traditional world of the prayer house and the study hall no longer
attracted them. Even though a good number of such young people joined the rest of the Jewish community in observing a national day of mourning in the synagogues of Russia in mid-January 1882, it should not be presumed that this marked for them a return to the religion of their forefathers. Instead, they came to the synagogue in order to express their solidarity with their fellow Jews with whose fate they now fully identified. Yet, the violence directed against the Jews, the indifference of Russian society to the victims, and the hostility of governmental officials to the Jewish masses estranged these Russophiles from their surroundings. Hence, they searched for a modern identity to which they could graft the progressive ideals garnered from that Russian culture they admired so much. That they could not construct such an identity in the Empire is understandable. That they denied the possibility of finding it in North America reflects the degree to which they had come to place their national concerns and ideology over all personal or individual matters. And, that they sought that identity among the sand dunes and swamps of Palestine confirms their dogged determination to solve the problems of modern Jewry in a manner never attempted before. Their own personal trek to Palestine or their organization of groups and associations intended to promote that effort stands as the first Jewish political response to the pogroms of 1881 and the first, groundbreaking, step in the movement that would reach its full development sixteen years later.23

Organizational needs brought together the various elements promoting a national emigration. The activists enthusiastically welcomed Pinsker’s pamphlet and as a consequence prevailed upon him to assume a leadership role within their fledgling movement.24

At least a dozen local societies had emerged within the Pale in the years 1880–3 committed to the goal of setting Jewish colonists in Palestine in order to build the base of a new society there. It soon became quite clear that a central organization was needed in order to coordinate the work of these disparate groups. In November 1884, some thirty delegates met across the Russian border in Germany in the town of Kattowitz, beyond the reach of tsarist officials, in order to create just such a group. To head their new society, called Hibbat Zion, the Lovers of Zion, the delegates chose Dr. Leo Pinsker, the most famous and most widely respected supporter of this approach. In order to communicate with the masses, they chose Moshe Leib Lilienblum as the secretary of the association. Lilienblum’s ability to

write in Hebrew and Yiddish in addition to Russian gave him access to a community broader than that of the disaffected Russian-Jewish youth.25

Hibbat Zion was created in order to raise money, facilitate the emigration process for those going to the Middle East, and promote that destination over America among Russian-Jewish emigrants. It was also to act as a central clearing house for all of the groups that had already sprung up as well as for subsequent organizations committed to the same goal. The movement was intended to be a grass-roots one as it appealed to the Jewish masses on behalf of a Palestinian solution to the dilemmas of modern Jewry.

The number of local chapters of Hibbat Zion grew steadily during the decade of the 1880s. By 1885, it is estimated that there were about 14,000 members in local chapters with the number of chapters exceeding 150 by the end of the decade.26 While Hibbat Zion was the largest and best known organization promoting Jewish settlement in Palestine, it was not the only one doing so. The growth of Hibbat Zion was paralleled by the emergence of other contemporary movements, which while having somewhat different ideological orientations, nevertheless shared the common goal of returning the Jews to the ancient Holy Land.

Hibbat Zion grew and attained official and legal status in 1890 as the Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Palestine, or as it was popularly called, the Odessa Committee. Yet the organization was not a success if measured in strictly material terms. It was never able to raise the necessary funds to purchase adequate lands and settle masses of Jews. Even those Jews whose transport and resettlement the Society did support found the level of aid inadequate for their needs. The leaders of Hibbat Zion had failed to penetrate the world of Jewish affluence in Russia and Europe or to rally Jewish philanthropists to their cause. Eventually, they did gain the support of Baron Edmund de Rothschild of the French branch of the family, and his contributions to the Palestinian colonies of Hibbat Zion saved them from collapse. However, in spite of this aid, the organization’s effort to establish independent Jewish life in Palestine was not successful since the Baron’s support was not motivated by ideological concerns but was an act of charity. Jews in Palestine under the care of the House of Rothschild were continuously made aware of their dependency upon their benefactor.

Also, the leaders of Hibbat Zion did not make the movement into
a real political force within the Jewish world. Part of this is of course to be attributed to the fact that the movement toiled under the burden of illegality through the first seven years of its existence. Thus, during that period, the leaders could not organize, coordinate, or act politically in any open manner. Even after the Russian government extended legal recognition to Hibbat Zion, restraints on the organization continued to be considerable. Consequently, the leadership’s primary objectives continued to be educational and cultural within Russia while all the while they were still committed to an activist settlement program.

On the other hand, the movement should not be dismissed as a failure. At a time when the idea of a secular Jewish national community was just emerging, Hibbat Zion gave organizational support to such an end. Through its various programs and efforts, Hibbat Zion promoted and even legitimated this new approach to Jewish identity and community structure. Thus, for a new generation of Russian Jews this idea was not only taken seriously, but was a welcome and even positive response to the traumatic impact that the pogroms had had on Jewish life in the Empire. In this, Hibbat Zion effectively prepared the ground, ideologically as well as organizationally, for Theodor Herzl’s enthusiastic reception in Russia after his founding of the World Zionist Organization in 1897.27 And, from the very start, the gravitation of Russian Jews to Herzl’s Zionist organization and their impact on its ideologies and policies as well as its overall activities was profound.

III

Because economic change had the most significant effect in disrupting Jewish society, the group that initially had the most success in gaining popular support within the community was that group which offered direct answers to the immediate problems caused by industrialization and modernization—the socialists. In fact, beginning with the 1870s and continuing for the next twenty years, Jewish socialists of various tendencies became active propagandists within Jewish workers’ circles in the Pale. At the time, these socialists were not at all committed to organizing a mass Jewish labor movement. Rather, their intent was to disseminate information, to raise consciousness among would-be laborers, and to begin building support for a true politically minded labor movement in Russia.28

As economic changes began to affect the Jewish community in the 1880s, the number of Jewish workers in the expanding industrial sector increased significantly. In addition, incidents of Jewish labor unrest also began to develop with strikes against working conditions in the textile and tobacco industries, industries dominated by Jewish workers and Jewish employers. While not seeing themselves as proletarians, either in class or political terms, these Jewish workers, nevertheless, began to attend the lectures and the classes sponsored by the Jewish socialists with greater frequency and in increased numbers.29 These socialists, mainly Marxists with little in the way of a personal Jewish identity or positive feeling for the Jewish community or its history, nevertheless found themselves leading an all-Jewish movement.

A critical juncture in the history of this relationship between the propagandists and the workers can be noted with the publication of Arkadi Kremer’s *Ob agitatsii* in 1894. In that pamphlet, Kremer called on his fellow socialists to shift their priorities and to begin emphasizing legal and economic issues to their “students” rather than to continue concentrating on educational and cultural activities.30 Through this shift, Kremer wanted to link the activists and their disciples in a much stronger way than ever before. He thought that this new course would provide a new direction to the movement and would transform it into an energetic political force in its own right.

Kremer believed that the new focus on economic and legal matters would lead quite naturally to an examination of political realities and spark a call for real political change. With this new approach, a clear shift in the orientation of the organizers to their students also emerged. The new relationship was no longer to be that of teacher to student but rather that of organizer to party member in this new political web. Since these efforts were not focused exclusively on the Jewish workers of the Pale, it is clear that a new perception of that group had surfaced. Formerly, the effort had been to develop a proletarian consciousness among Jewish artisans and journeymen and to get them to identify themselves with the larger group that then constituted the Russian labor force. A universalist and cosmopolitan view had governed the earlier phase of the effort to organize Jewish labor. Now, specific objectives, economic, legal and strangely enough, national, were outlined with the expectation that confrontational activity would build a consciousness that would lead directly to the political organization of the Jewish workers of the Pale. As one writer has described these events, “The organized
Jewish labor movement... came about as a result of the intellectuals' decision to promote a mass movement.\textsuperscript{31}

Iulii Martov [Tsederbaum], a political exile living in Vilna at the time, delivered the May Day speech in 1895 and used the occasion to call for a movement with a specifically Jewish character. Martov began his address with a standard Marxist analysis of the situation of workers in tsarist Russia. However, he then proceeded to introduce a Jewish component into that structure. "In the Russian Empire the Jew is able to improve his position only through his own activity... In the first years of our movement, we awaited the development of a Russian working-class movement... and because of this, we did not see the rudiments of a real Jewish movement."\textsuperscript{32}

Not only was Martov using the occasion to justify the switch in tactics advocated by Kremer, he was also claiming that the embryo of an independent Jewish movement was in existence and that its birth should be encouraged. Martov went on to assert that such a movement would work side by side with future Russian and Polish labor movements in order to create a true pan-Russian proletarian organization. In that larger body, the Jewish movement would champion specific goals for the Jewish people, particularly equal rights and freedom of cultural life. Through his formulation, Martov was recognizing the contemporary Jewish community as a national one, and was placing it on a par with the other nationalities of the Empire. Furthermore, he was indicating that, in his view, a future Russian labor party would be multi-national with specific tasks being assigned to each of the constituent groups. Martov concluded his presentation by declaring that the biggest obstacle facing the Jewish socialists was the national passivity of the Jewish masses. He noted that "the awakening of national and class consciousness proceed hand in hand.\textsuperscript{33} The implication here is clear – the stimulation of the first form of consciousness would lead directly to a heightening of the second one. Thus, by 1895, Jewish socialists in Vilna had come not only to recognize the existence of Jewish workers as a potentially valuable political entity in their own right, they had also come to associate them with specific tasks within the framework of that larger grouping which some day would represent all workers in Russia.

In 1896, socialist activists in Vilna produced an illegal Yiddish paper called \textit{Di arbeiter stimme}, and in October 1897, representatives of the editorial board together with delegates coming from Jewish

workers' groups located in the major urban centers of the Pale met in Vilna in order to found the General Jewish Workers' Party of Russia and Poland, the Bund. Jewish laborers now had their own political party in order to represent both specific and general interests within the context of the Russian revolutionary movement. Delivering a key address at the founding meeting of the Bund, Arkadi Kremer outlined the priorities of the new organization:

A general union of all Jewish socialists will have as its goal not only the struggle for general Russian political demands; it will also have the special task of defending the specific interests of the Jewish workers, carry on the struggle for their civic rights and above all combat the discriminatory anti-Jewish laws.\textsuperscript{44}

With this development, a Jewish national identity made its official appearance in left-wing and worker circles, and a Jewish agenda came to be part of the program being advanced by a section of a revolutionary movement in Russia.

The history of the Bund is well known.\textsuperscript{54} Its role in the formation of the RSDLP in 1898 and its confrontations with Lenin in 1903 have been studied, analyzed, and fully described. All of these topics go far beyond our survey here and will not be addressed as they divert our attention from the critical theme, i.e., the efforts undertaken by a new generation of Jewish activists to deal with the crises of contemporary Jewish life.

While the leaders of the Bund were not the only Jewish socialist revolutionaries who recognized Jewish identity and a Jewish agenda as part of their broader political formulations, they were the most cosmopolitan and least national in their ideological framework. It is for this reason that so much attention has been focused on them. For if such individuals, coming from a Marxist ideological perspective which denied the legitimacy of Jewish national identity, could be brought to recognize such an identity as a valid one, then it is apparent that such a contention had come to penetrate the broadest sectors within contemporary Russian Jewry.

Our examination of the nationalist and socialist movements that appeared in the aftermath of the 1881 riots has revealed their divergent approaches to solving the Jewish Question in tsarist Russia. For the nationalists, the solution was to be found outside of the Empire and was to be achieved through the territorialization of the Jewish people in a land of its own. For the socialists, on the other
hand, the difficulties facing Jews would be resolved as part of the larger process of liberating all of Russia and bringing true freedom to all of her inhabitants. In spite of these differences though, the nationalists and the socialists shared a common point of departure, that being the recognition of Russian Jewry as a discernible national group with interests and demands unique unto itself. In articulating their respective positions and in developing their identities, both the Jewish nationalists and the Jewish socialists reflected that mood of separateness and distinctiveness which characterized the contemporary Jewish community of the Empire. However, not only did these movements reflect the current mood within the Russian Jewish community, they also contributed substantially to developing this orientation in a politically sophisticated manner for the next generation of Jewish youth and in promoting this new identity widely. While the major political activities of both the Jewish nationalists and the Jewish socialists lay in the future, it is clear that by 1897 both groups had reached a level of organizational maturity and had built up sufficient support within the Jewish community to be taken seriously by both Jews and non-Jews alike. If these leaders were not yet among the primary decision-makers for Russian Jewry, it was only because the old-line traditional leadership still held the masses firmly in its grip. However, both the socialists and the nationalists continued their organizational efforts so as to be in a position to assert their claims to national leadership should the occasion be forthcoming. Their prominence in Jewish life after 1903 reflected these years of growth and development.

IV

Other developments in the last decades of the nineteenth century also contributed to the formulation of a distinctive Russian-Jewish identity. Principally, the creation of literatures in both modern Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as the fostering of a Russian-language Jewish press, furthered this growing sense of Jewish self. While not politically minded, these literary efforts did reach a wide audience and implicitly supported the nationalization of Jewish life along a number of distinctive cultural streams. Yiddishists and Hebraists engaged in polemical exchanges with one another as each claimed to be the authentic and legitimate voice of the people, and both castigated the Russianists for their assimilationist tendencies.

Nevertheless, all three recognized their shared heritage which clearly separated them from the ethnic groups living alongside them.

While the Yiddishists and the Hebraists gravitated more naturally to the nationalist and socialist orientations when they offered political comments, the Russian-oriented writers faced a more problematic situation. Clearly, they could not champion the cause of emigration, and their moderate and generally middle-class world views precluded a revolutionary approach to the questions of the future of Jewish life. Hence, they needed to develop an integrationist view that would generate mass support and at the same time be both dignified and honorable. This new generation of integrationists had come to maturity since 1880. These men recognized that new relationships and attitudes had emerged within the Jewish community as well as within the general society. They realized that the personal lobbying and intercessionist efforts utilized by their predecessors would be neither effective with the Russian regime nor warmly received by the Jewish community. Hence, their first task was to develop a stance that would secure for them the respect of both the Jewish community they aspired to represent and the Russian government from whom they sought to gain status and rights for Jews.

These urbane, Russified, Jewish middle-class professionals generally lived outside the Pale. They were trained in law, medicine, or engineering and had the skills to express themselves publicly in both verbal and written forms on a variety of topics. Proud of their abilities and achievements and considering themselves an “aristocracy” of merit, individuals from this group began to play a more public and active role in Jewish affairs in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Their growing involvement with the Jewish community included representing the community in the pages of the Russian-language press, primarily Voskhod, or organizing a legal defense bureau to assist Jewish victims of Russian violence or Russian injustice, and participating in Jewish cultural or charitable organizations. These young men found themselves experiencing a real return to their people. They found themselves drawn to the community, interested in its past, and committed to its future existence. For them, the community was not an artifact that had to be preserved, but a living organism that functioned and would continue to thrive under proper conditions. Furthermore, recent developments had shown them that
the community was neither an endangered species that required especially tender care, nor a plant so delicate that it could exist only under the most ideal conditions. Rather, the community was tough and had the ability to withstand assault, persecution, and discrimination without losing either its character or its hopes for the future. As with the case of the Jewish nationalists who “returned” in the eighties, this return to the Jewish people did not bring with it any form of religious revival or greater religious commitment. While these individuals were now more sensitive to religious perspectives and perhaps did not flaunt so openly their secular habits, they identified with a community that contained within it a broad spectrum of Jewish identities, and so had room in it for them, too.38

Public discussion of the theme of the Jewish community of Russia as a national or ethnic group in its own right and therefore deserving of more than civil liberties for its individual members was soon forthcoming. In a series of letters entitled Pis’ma o starom i novom Eretzite begun in 1897 and published in the Russian-Jewish weekly Voskhod over the next decade, the journalist-historian Simon Dubnow worked out the historical bases of the thesis of diaspora nationalism. In these essays, Dubnow addressed the question of Jewish national identity and its character as well as its particular needs in the present and for the future.39

Dubnow began by tracing the national idea through the various stages of its development. He concluded that the sense of national identity ultimately came to be a spiritual one, and once having attained this lofty status, the community would be free from all material needs in order to support and maintain its identity. Dubnow wrote: “We see that the decisive factor for the destiny of a nation is not its external power, but its spiritual force, the quality of its culture and the inner cohesion of its members.”40

Assuring the reader that the Jewish people had already attained this plateau, Dubnow went on to assert that the Jewish nation did not require a territorial base in order to maintain itself. In his view, it only needed the strength furnished by unity and popular will. “[A people] which creates an independent existence, reveals a stubborn determination to carry on its autonomous development. Such a people has reached the highest stage of cultural-historical individuality and may be said to be indestructible, if only it clings purposefully to its national will.”41

Dubnow argued that Jewish existence was not to be attributed to religion or territory but rather to the people’s ability to establish an autonomous cultural existence in all the territorial settings in which they had found themselves. In emphasizing the continuous character of history, Dubnow concluded that that which had worked in the past continued to operate effectively today. Thus, for him, the future of Jewish life was still dependent upon the retention of Jewish cultural autonomy in the diaspora. Hence, all of the contemporary needs of the Russian-Jewish community could and would be satisfied through the guaranteeing of such cultural freedom to the community.42

The political ramifications of this analysis meant that in addition to pressing for civil rights for Jews, Jewish activists in Russia had also to call for national rights for the community. In affirming the viability of continued Jewish life in Eastern Europe, Dubnow was saying that a Jewish national identity with its own cultural integrity could be reconciled with individual civil liberties if, in addition to emancipation, Jews would also be granted the right of cultural autonomy in the lands where they were presently living. Since, in his view, the Jews had no need for territory in order to sustain themselves as a people and since they had no claim upon the lands they were living on, they would not be seen as a threat to the indigenous population. Dubnow feared forced acculturation and ultimate assimilation much more than any other possible physical dangers. In his writings, Dubnow tried to negate those aspects of Jewish existence which seemed to be most threatening to local nationalists in exchange for that level of autonomy which he believed was critical for continued Jewish national life.

By 1905, Dubnow’s ideas on cultural rights became part of the platform of the newly formed League for the Attainment of Full Rights for the Jews of Russia. Bringing together Zionists, middle-class liberals, and autonomists, the League played an active role in securing the franchise for Jews in the vote for the state Duma, and in conducting the ensuing electoral campaign in February–April 1906.43 Thus, here too, we are able to see the importance attached to community and the focus on the Jews as a national entity within the context of tsarist Russia, the epitome of the modern multinational state.

For these liberals, the solution to the variety of problems besetting the community was to be found in Russia through the extension of civil liberties to the individual and the guaranteeing of cultural
fund this form of higher Jewish education. Finally, the reduced influence of religious leaders in decision-making positions and the shifts to secular educational systems or even technical schools by Jewish youth, as they sought those skills which they believed would be necessary in the new society, reduced the pool of potential students for the yeshivot and diminished their overall importance for that generation of Jews coming to maturity after 1880. In sum, these new realities moved the leaders of the yeshiva system to initiate a series of wide-ranging reforms in the system in the second half of the nineteenth century. These reforms included a restructuring of the relationship between the yeshiva and the community so as to give the school greater financial support, changes in the actual curriculum taught at the schools, and even pedagogical changes in the mode of instruction employed in the schools.

The first set of changes was addressed to the financial structure of the schools as administrators sought to assure the continuity of the system in an age of uncertainty. Working out arrangements with communal leaders, patrons, and benefactors throughout the Pale, the leaders of the yeshivot were able to stabilize their finances so that they could attract good students at minimal cost and pursue their mission with the confidence that bills would be settled and scholars and students would be sustained.44 Since yeshiva leaders were committed to developing a cadre of students who would come to identify themselves as part of the communal elite and as spokesmen for what they believed was the authentic Jewish perspective, they concentrated on creating a close-knit society among the student body. This meant that the students who entered the yeshiva were being called on to move into a whole new world. Students received new names, lived in an all-male social setting, and were expected to study as much as twenty hours a day. Students were continuously reminded that they were engaged in a course of study that was part of a tradition that traced its origins back to biblical days. The yeshivot not only provided training and skills in forms of traditional hermeneutics, but also created individuals closely and passionately bound to an alternative system and world view.45

While the curriculum at the yeshiva continued to stress the Talmud with its continued relevance for contemporary issues, a new course of study introduced into the classroom at this time was the series of musar talks by the headmaster or a special instructor. These discourses, focusing on personal ethics, became the most important pedagogic innovation introduced into the Russian, mainly Lithu-
The Russian Jewish community, 1881–1903

successful integration into the curriculum of the yeshivot at this time was a major accomplishment.\textsuperscript{47} By the 1890s, the yeshivot had not only regained their former exalted status within the traditional community, they had also come to be widely respected and looked to as centers of learning by the general community. By being able to attract serious and talented students, the yeshivot were able to train a new corps of traditional rabbis and teachers, and thus have a profound influence on the next generation of Jewish students. In this way, both traditional religious identity and the halakhic foundations of communal life received transusions in the very same time period which saw the emergence of secular formulations of those same conceptions.

Within a few years, these rabbinic leaders and their lay supporters also came to recognize the critical importance of modern politics as the means by which they could promote their own vision as well as compete with others for communal leadership. Therefore, they, too, began the process of organizing politically and taking their case to the people. In doing so, they used all of the devices and tactics of modern political movements as they sought to disseminate their message and organize their supporters not only to protect their vision of the community, but to gain for themselves the recognition of the general society as the true representatives of the Jewish people. In this way, moral activism and religious energy initially aimed at the Jewish street made their way into the political arena as part of the same process of responding to the immediate crises confronting the community and seeking to organize its future course.

\textit{VI}

We began this summary with a statistical analysis of Russian Jewry based on the census data collected in 1897. A closer study of that material indicates that the community was in the process of being dramatically transformed in the decades between the pogroms of 1881 and 1903. Given the hostile attitude of the government to the Jews and its negative response to Jewish requests for alleviations of discriminatory policies, it would have been reasonable to describe the community as being not only beleaguered, but also on the verge of disintegration. However, such a harsh assessment would be an incorrect one. While confronting change, social and economic dislocation, as well as enmity from the surrounding society, Jewish

anian, yeshivot. However, the style of the musar talk and its impact did not remain restricted to Eastern Europe. Taken personally by the rabbi most widely identified with musar, Israel B. Z. Lipkin [Salanter] to both Germany and France, the movement also had a profound impact on modern Jewish education in the West.\textsuperscript{36} Musar talks, delivered in an emotional fashion, stressed personal ethics and piety and sought to base those exclusively on halakhic grounds. The focus on individual ethics and individual action was intended to personalize the educational process and force the student to undertake an introspective self-analysis, ultimately coming to the conclusion that all of his actions should be in conformity with Jewish law and not be influenced by local practice or secular custom. This Judaization of thought and action on the level of individual behavior was fundamental to the musar movement. In this, the founders of the movement intended to inculcate a positive attitude to halakha and to its continued relevance as a means of dealing even with the confused and ethically chaotic character of the contemporary world. It is clear that musar intended to establish once again the primacy of halakha and thereby re-establish the authority of the halakhist as the chief problem-solver or decision-maker for Jews under all circumstances. Rather than retreating to abstractions or philosophical and theological formulations, or even withdrawing into a spiritual asceticism that rejected the world in order to preserve the pristine character of a religious outlook, Lipkin and the musar preachers confronted head-on the challenges of modernity and affirmed that the age-old Judaic tradition of dealing with the world through halakha continued to be relevant. They believed that not only rabbis and scholars should be engrossed in the study of halakha, but also businessmen, as well as laborers, and students should turn their attention to the traditional sources and be bound by its insights.

Here we can identify an aggressive, even combative effort to sustain traditional Judaism, its values, world-view and structures by claiming that the tradition still had the power to shape the individual Jew and the modern Jewish community. The musar movement was not mass oriented, but rather was directed at the elite being trained in the yeshivot. It was intended as personal moral fortification for graduates of the yeshivot who were then dispatched directly into the maestrom of the community as spokesmen for the authentic voice of the tradition. It was not contemplative – it was active and ultimately communal. The teaching of musar and its
leaders did not despair; the community did not become paralyzed. Even though thousands of young people were fleeing their homes for either freedom in the West, or utopian dreams in the Middle East, or in pursuit of a better life elsewhere in the Pale, the Jewish community of tsarist Russia did not crumble. New spokesmen came to the fore and delineated scenarios or advanced programs that they believed would establish the community on firm foundations in the future. While some of these positions marked radical departures from approaches undertaken in the past, they nevertheless were not ephemeral in their conceptualization. Nor, for that matter, was the commitment on the part of the activists quixotic. The supporters of these movements applied themselves assiduously and built modern political movements addressed to the proposition that the Jews were a community whose present difficulties would be overcome and resolved through the tireless efforts of the people themselves.

This shift from a passive to an activist approach in order to solve the problems of Russian Jewry stands out as a common feature for all groups emerging in this period. The sense of Russian Jewry as a community, divided in the same ways that all national or ethnic groups were divided but all the same still an identifiable entity with characteristics unique unto itself, was accepted, recognized, and understood by all groups vying for its leadership. Finally, all looked forward optimistically to the new century as the time when significant and positive changes would take place.

The sequence of events triggered by the new wave of pogroms begun at Kishinev in April 1903 only accentuated and telescoped those views and programs already under discussion in the Jewish world. The violence in Kishinev initially released feelings of shame and revulsion that more was not done by the existing Jewish leadership in the defense of the community. For those who had been advocating a new course, the failure of the Jewish “establishment” to protect the Jews of Russia at this critical time documented their cry that a new approach to the problems of Russian Jewry was called for. The critics and the radicals moved dramatically to the center of Jewish life as they asserted their right to lead the community through this latest trial. Hence, the immediate responses to Kishinev, active self-defense, and the politicization of Russian Jewry, were not new responses which marked a new epoch in the history of the community, but were rather the fruits of more than twenty years of effort.

NOTES

1 The data collected by the census takers is available in I. M. Rubinow’s Economic Conditions of the Jews in Russia, US Bureau of Labor Bulletin, no. 15 (1907) (reprinted New York, 1976). In addition to the government’s census, the Jewish Colonization Association undertook a major study of the Jewish community at the close of the nineteenth century and published its findings in Russian, Shornik materialov o ob ekonomichkom polozhenii Evreev vRossii (St. Petersburg, 1904) and in French, Recueil de materiaux sur la situation economique des Israélites de Russie (Paris, 1906).


3 On Jewish policies and their impact during the reign of Nicholas I, see Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855 (Philadelphia, 1983).

4 Just over 300,000 Jews lived outside the Pale of Settlement at the beginning of the twentieth century. Approximately 200,000 of these Jews lived in European Russia with about 15,000 Jews in the city of St. Petersburg. Just under 100,000 lived in Asiatic Russia, most of these in Georgia and the surrounding mountain regions.

5 Rubinow, Economic Conditions, 490–1.

6 Kahan, Essays, 52–6.

7 Rubinow, Economic Conditions, 493.


9 A study of internal resettlement at the close of the nineteenth century has been prepared by J. William Leasure and Robert A. Lewis, “Internal migration in Russia in the late nineteenth century,” Slavic Review, xxvii (1968), 375–95.

10 Rubinow’s data, Economic Conditions, 495–6, indicate that a significant number of Jews moved from the northwestern to the southeastern zone

11 For instance, see Steven Zipperstein’s discussion of the new forms of Jewish communal life in his study, *The Jews of Odessa. A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford, CA, 1983), 70-114. Jewish Odessa in the second half of the century should be contrasted to the character of the traditional community as depicted by Isaac Levitas in his *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772–1844* (New York, 1943).


19 Jonathan Frankel’s pioneering study, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge, 1981), especially 51–90, has profoundly influenced the argument in this section of my presentation.


21 This theme dominated the essays in Lilienblum’s pamphlet *O vozrozhdenii evreiskogo naroda na sv. zemle ego drevnikh otsev* (Odessa, 1903). An English-language edition of these essays appeared under the title *The Regeneration of Israel on the Land of Its Forefathers*.

22 An English-language version of *Autonomapatioc* can be found in B. Netanyahu’s *Road to Freedom* (New York, 1944), 7–93.

23 In addition to the discussion in Frankel’s *Prophecy and Politics*, 90–7, see David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford, 1975), 65–74.


26 Ibid., 155–8.


29 Mendelssohn, *Class Struggle*, 37.

31 Mendelssohn, *Class Struggle*, 55.

32 Martov’s speech was published as *Povorotnyi punkt v istorii evreiskogo rabochego dvizhenia* (Geneva, 1900), 17–18.

33 Ibid., 20.


37 The recollections of one such individual, Henry B. Shlezberg, are especially revealing in indicating this growing attachment to the Jewish people. See G. B. Shlezberg, *Dela minuweshkh dnei*, 1 (Paris, 1933).


39 S. M. Dubnow, *Pis’ma o strom u novom Evrejstve* (St. Petersburg, 1907). An English-language edition of these letters was published by K. S. Pinson under the title *Nationalism and History* (Philadelphia, 1958).

40 Dubnow, *Nationalism and History*, 79.

41 Ibid., 80.

42 “Autonomism, the basis of the national program,” ibid., 131–42.


