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BERLIN DEBATES: THE JEWS AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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The pogroms of the Civil War period that resulted in the deaths of at least tens of thousands of Jews were one of the most debated topics in the Ukrainian Jewish press in the early decades of the twentieth century; the Democratic and Socialist press also paid a considerable amount of attention to this subject. In the 1920's, journalists and historians who worked for the "pogrom commission"—the Central Aid Committee for pogrom victims in Kiev—issued a series of research publications based on documents that had been collected in an archive of Eastern European Jewry in Berlin, which was established in 1921, at the instigation of Ilya Cherkover. The foundational collections of this archive were formed from materials which had been gathered by the "Editorial Panel"—a subsidiary of the Central Aid Committee—that began operating in May 1919; the work of this "pogrom commission" was reinvigorated in Berlin. Thus, Nochum Shtif's book *Pogroms in Ukraine: The Period of the Volunteer Army* was written in Kiev in March 1920, published in Russian in 1922 and appeared in Yiddish in 1923. That year also saw the publication of Cherkover's first volume of *The History of the Pogrom Movement in Ukraine 1917–1921*, with a foreword written by Semyon Dubnov (Budnitskii, 2005, pp. 276–280; Roskies, 1984, pp. 138–140).

In his book, among other things, Shtif aimed to show the "organic, interworking connections between the pogroms, as part of military routine, the military and the socio-political *programme* of the Volunteer Army." The author considered the program of the White Army to have "contained features of restoration and return to the pre-revolutionary Russia." Pogroms were "a reaction against the emancipation of the Jews, itself a result of the hateful revolution; it was the anti-revolutionaries' first step in an attempt at re-enslaving the Jewish population" (Shtif, 1922, pp. VII–VIII). However, Shtif's opinions regarding the links between the pogroms and the Volunteer Army programme were somewhat mistaken. To be more precise, he was wrong about the connection between the pogroms and the official ideology of the White Movement leaders. The *Declaration of the Volunteer Army* was written by a leader of the Russian liberals, Pavel Miliukov, who, officially, always promoted equal rights for the Jews. In practice, however, Anton Denikin's troops became infamous for bloody pogroms and mass looting, to

which the commanding officers turned a blind eye (Budnitskii, 2005, pp. 158–344). It is not surprising then, that for Eastern European Jews, the White Movement became synonymous with pogroms.

Taking into consideration the degree to which pogroms were part of the White Army strategy, it is easy to understand how much of a shock it was for the Jewish community of Berlin, not to mention the Jewish émigré community as a whole, to see a group of Jewish public figures and journalists calling for a war on Bolshevism and suggesting that Jews should accept responsibility for taking part in the revolution. This group, who called themselves *The National Union of Russian Jews*, blamed their fellow Jews for not lending enough support to the efforts of the White Army in its struggle against the Bolsheviks. Among the Union members were Iosif Bikerma, Daniil Pasmanik, Veniamin Mandel', Grigorii Landau, as well as less well-known figures, such as Isaak Levin and Linskii (Naum Dolinskii).

In the beginning of 1923, Bikerma, Mandel', and Landau presented a series of lectures in Berlin concerning the revolution and the role of the Jews in it. This campaign was started by Bikerma; in his paper, *Russia and the Russian Jews*, presented on 17 January 1923, he attempted to defend his fellow Jews, who had been accused of destroying a “blossoming Tsarist Russia” (*Rul'*, 1923a, p. 5; *Rassvet*, 1923, p. 17). According to him, “Russia’s downfall began during the preparations for the February revolution, in which Jews played no part.” However, Russian Jews were not altogether forthright in

refusing to accept their responsibility and blaming anti-Semites for everything. Jews have an aloof attitude towards martial conflict; they had never operated weapons, nor were they ever competent fighters, although they did take an active part in the revolution. The Jewish masses are even proud of figures such as Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky. It is wrong to say that Jews do not hold responsibility for Trotsky, for it is evident that Jews are proud of Spinoza and Einstein (ibid.).

According to Bikerma, the biggest enemy to both Russia and her Jews were the Bolsheviks. However, he also attacked those Jews who “sought to impede Russia’s regeneration” (ibid.). This group consisted of Zionists, who not only distracted Jews from participating in modernizing Russia, but also encouraged them to collaborate with the Bolsheviks; “autonomists,” whose intentions were to orchestrate a secession of one large state into many smaller ones, so that Jewish autonomy could be easier to gain; and the entire Jewish community who were fearful that the downfall of the Bolsheviks would be followed by White Army pogroms. Bikerma entered into a direct dispute with Shtif: he put the pogroms in the context of the Civil War and argued that the anti-Jewish pogroms were part of the all-Russian demise. “A strong Russian statehood is essential for the Jews,” concluded Bikerma (ibid.).

On 3 March, the famous publisher and philosopher—not to mention Iosif Gessen’s right-hand man on the editorial board of the *Rul’* newspaper—Grigorii Landau presented a lecture with an almost identical title, *Russia and the Russian Jewry*. Like Bikerman, Landau both defended and blamed the Jews at the same time. He argued that Jews were not to be blamed for “inciting revolution”:

Therefore, the level of Jewish engagement in both the pre-Bolshevik and Bolshevik revolutions was all the more astonishing. [...] The picture is [truly] paradoxical: having not participated in any preparations for the revolution, the Jews took part in its delivery and execution, contrary to their own urgent, fundamental interests (*Rul’*, 1923c, p. 5; *Dni*, 1923a, p. 5).

According to Landau, “the present accusations [made against the Jews] are taken out of all proportion. Now, in the midst of ruin, suffering, and the destruction of the state and possibly even culture, it is essential that one holds himself to account and finds the truth” (ibid.). The truth was that “the Jewish semi-intelligentsia became receptive to ideas of unrest and thus committed a treachery against both Russia and their own people” (ibid.). The three movements—Socialism, nationalistic separatism, and revolutionary tendencies, widely spread among the Jewry—had a devastating effect on it. Landau concluded: “There are no contradictions between Russia’s interests and those of her Jewish population. The Jews are interested in revival of the Great Russia. [...] Most of them wish this and strive towards it. Russia’s revival is only possible through a triumph of morality and sobriety; through freedom from self-deception; through a conscious appreciation of collective interests” (ibid.).

The series of lectures delivered by the *Kayshchiesya* (repentant) concluded on 21 March 1923 with a paper by Veniamin Mandel’ who stated:

The widely circulated view that ‘Jews destroyed Russia’ has very little to do with the truth. Even if it was possible to equate Jews with the Bolsheviks, it would still have been inappropriate to hold them responsible for Russia’s demise, as the Bolsheviks themselves proved to be only a consequence of said demise. What truly obliterated Russia was the February revolution, which was orchestrated by the Russian elite and the state and public bodies, which Jews were not part of. The revolution was realized by sailors, the St. Petersburg proletariat and the St. Petersburg garrison. None of these groups claimed any Jewish members either. However, the Jews did engage in the development of the revolution, as well the Bolsheviks’ torturous devastation of Russia. The Jewry cannot deny its responsibility for its participation in blatant barbarism committed by the Bolsheviks. If a Jewish nationalist

collective exists, if this collective is truly proud of its heroic founders, then it must also accept liability for those Jews who sought to destroy the prevailing political order (Mandel', GARF, F. R-5769, op. 2, d. 5, l. 70).

Expanding on his point, Mandel' noted: "we are ironically labelled as 'repentant Jews' [*Kayshchiesya*]. We do not see any shame in repentance. On the contrary, if the act of repentance is earnest it results in rehabilitation. We wish for the Jewish community to critically reassess the direction it had followed up until the present time, to stop using old, clichéd vocabulary and to recognise the mistakes it had made" (Mandel', GARF, F. R-5769, op. 2, d. 5, l. 72).

These lectures prompted comments in the press as well as heated debates in the lecture hall itself, which occasionally continued until well after midnight. On 28 March, the Zionist Matfey Gindes presented a paper entitled *The Jewry and Contemporary Russia: A response to the Kayshchiesya*. This lecture was arranged by the Organisation of Russo-Ukrainian Zionists and was meant—as is made clear by its subtitle—as a response to the previous series of lectures by Bikerman, Landau, and Mandel' (GARF, F.P-5769, op. 1, d. 68, l. 73). According to Gindes, Jewish involvement in the revolution could be explained by their living conditions and the official government policies for "which Jews could not be held accountable." "Persecutions forced the Jews to eradicate damaging elements from their community." Gindes thought that the Jewish choice to support the Bolsheviks was inevitable. The only other alternative would have been the White Army, which "tied military strategy to anti-Jewish pogroms. The Jewish community should not align themselves with the latter, but there are no other political forces present on the scene." The author considered the new line of thinking to be the "first sign of the forthcoming Jewish admission of defeat, which one can notice in the mood of the Jewish people," and an attempt to "destabilise the foundations of equal rights for the Jews." "Raising [...] the question of penitence in those moments when one's neck is environed by a noose of political backlash [...] is unacceptable. The penitent catchphrase should be answered by a slogan that calls for a firm [collective] memory. This is the principal weapon in possession of all Jewish people in their battle against its enemies" (*Rul'*, 1923e, p. 9). Alas, it remained unclear how exactly this "firm memory" could help the Jewish people overcome their enemies, whoever they may have been.

Various Berlin-based Jewish and Russian public figures took part in these debates, with discussions taking place not only immediately after the lectures, but also during specially arranged debating sessions where many participants spoke several times. The results of these discussions were summarized at a meeting held on 19 April 1923. It is interesting to note that Zionists, Monarchists, and (very few) supporters of Bolshevism all shared the

same floor. It seems that this was only possible in the Berlin of the early 1920s.

Let us explore the most characteristic statements of those present at the debates, including the main speakers. This discussion is reconstructed on the basis of anonymous reports from Russian émigré newspapers published in Berlin. One of the principal questions discussed was that of “accountability” with regards to pogroms. Also discussed were the views on Zionism and Bolshevism, potential avenues for Russia’s reconstruction, her new structure, and the role of the Jews in this new, hypothetical country.

The well-known economist Boris Bratskus, who had been forced to flee Russia on the infamous “philosophers’ ship” in 1922, explained that the Russian Revolution “was rooted deeply in the depths of the Russian psyche. An elemental force in the form of Russian folk-Bolshevism burst through to the fore. The Russian people have made their own history” (*Rul’*, 1923b, p. 5). One cannot separate the Jews from ordinary Russians when the question of accountability arises. The close relationship many Jews had with Bolshevism was determined by the condition in which they lived in pre-revolutionary Russia. Bratskus both argued against and agreed with the *Kayshchiesya*: “It is difficult at this moment in time to come up with a recipe for deliverance, but one can only salute those Jews who express desire to support Russian statehood” (*Dni*, 1923b, p. 7).

The Zionist activist and historian of pogroms Iosef Schechtman proclaimed: “Zionism is the only solution for a nation inhabiting foreign states. The Jewry does not have any other allies. The White Movement is only an attempt to restore the Tsarist regime, which is inevitably linked with pogroms” (*Rul’*, 1923g, p. 5). Schechtman noted that Tsarist rule and oppression of the White Guardsmen had become so tiresome for so many, that it was impossible not to become a revolutionary: “The February Revolution should be highly praised because it resulted in dispensing the Pale of Settlement, Numerus Clausus, and other restrictions” (*Dni*, 1923d, p. 5). Yet another Zionist, Israel Trivus, said that “the *Kayshchiesya* harm not only the Jewish people, but Russia too; their activities do not shed light on the Jewish question but instead complicate it. They uphold the popular belief that Jews are responsible for Russia’s collapse. The image of the revolutionary Jew is a myth, because Jews are traditionally very conservative. It is not the Jews who should repent, but those who carried out anti-Semitic policies” (*Rul’*, 1923f, p. 5). Trivus and Mandel’ did not disagree about the conservatism of the Jewish people. However, Mandel’ thought that, even though the revolution displayed typically Russian characteristics, the Russian Jewry contributed to it in particular, and therefore ought to take responsibility for their participation. “Zionism does not offer the Jews anything substantial,” Mandel’ said, “it acted as a catalyst for Jewish emancipation from the Russian state for some Jews, while the Russian Jewry [at large] had merged with Russia and her

culture” (*Rul'*, 1923g, p. 5). Mandel' believed that Jews should aim to reinstate the “Great Russia” in which the Jewry would flourish.

Landau echoed Mandel's statement: “It would be untrue to say that Jews do not have allies. It is necessary to be more active in Russian political life.” The Zionist tendency to avoid Russian politics puts Jews on a “road to nowhere” (*ibid.*). Landau particularly directed his accusations at the Jews for not doing enough to support the Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon, who was imprisoned by the Bolsheviks in 1922: “These protests are even more necessary, because the Jews themselves would often turn to the public opinion all over the world when persecuted for their faith” (*ibid.*).

Bikerman attacked not only the Jews associated with Communism, but also the Zionists. They “got carried away with the prospect of creating their own nation state, dragging the Jewish masses along with them, distracting the community from tackling the question of how to face Russia's new fate” (*Dni*, 1923c, p. 5). Speaking at the debates, Bikerman reiterated that although “pogroms were unfortunate events, they were unavoidable and even natural under the circumstances.” In another presentation, Bikerman talked about the idealism of the Whites, and stated that applying the word “pogroms” to their actions would be a “misuse of the word” (*Dni*, 1923b, 11 March, p. 7). It was these comments by Bikerman, as well as those made by Landau (although formulated less harshly), which initiated a vehement reaction. The editor and publisher of the *Russian Economist* magazine, Anatoly Gutman, stated that pogroms cannot be justified by the Civil War: “The commanding officers never attempted to curtail the carnage as the White Army enacted genocide.” However, he conceded that at the “present moment” one should concentrate on overthrowing Bolshevism, rather than on the critique of the White Movement: “Russian Jews must be Russian patriots and therefore enemies of Bolshevism” (*Rul'*, 1923b, p. 5).

A Jewish sympathiser of General Kornilov, one Shifrin, “painted a picture of Jewish persecution by the Whites” (*ibid.*). Shifrin must have belonged to a handful of Jews serving in Volunteers' Army when it had indeed been voluntary (i.e. before the secret decision to reject Jewish applicants).

Naum Gergel', a member of the “pogrom commission,” who was later to publish an article analyzing pogroms' statistics after many years of research (see Gergel', 1928, pp. 106–113), and whose data on the victims' numbers, sex, and age remain the most authoritative to this day, gave the most boisterous presentation. Taking part in the debates following Landau's lecture, Gergel' stated that one should discuss Landau's position, rather than the question of Jewish culpability: “Let [Landau] explain where he stands with regards to the White Movement and the pogroms committed by Denikin's troops. Bolshevism is a negative phenomenon. However, one does not wish to return to the times of the Beilis Case either” (*Dni*, 1923b, 11 March, p. 7). The severity of Gergel's speech was probably toned down for newspaper

publication. The reporter noted that Gergel' had spoken abrasively and a portion of the audience left the auditorium in protest.

A biographer of Emperor Nicholas II, Sergei Oldenburg, spoke in defense of the White Army, calling it "the nucleus of future Russia" (*Rul'*, 1923b, 10 February, p. 5). Another monarchist, Maslennikov, a member of the 3rd and 4th State Dumas and later a member of the Supreme Monarchist Council abroad, came out in support of the *Kayshchiesya*: "Bolshevism is the product of an illness festering in the Russian soul, and the Jews—Trotsky, Radek, Litvinov et al.—are responsible for upholding its stability. Without their actions, the Russian revolution would have limited itself to a cruel but impotent and short-lived riot." Concluding his statement, Maslennikov said that it was "necessary for everybody to work towards rebuilding the Great Russia" (*Dni*, 1923e, p. 5). "Everybody," by implication, suggests that Maslennikov believed that the Jews should also contribute to this endeavor. This view was not widely shared by other right-wing politicians.

A certain Kuznetsov, a Moscow industrialist, considered the Jewish role in reinvigorating Russia, making a call to write off "all old accounts": "Jewish merchants and industrialists are essential for Russia of the future. The only way that this Russia could be created is through application of collective will and energy." (*Rul'*, 1923h, p. 5)

It is curious to note that some of the *Kayshchiesya* shared monarchists' opinions. They obviously saw in the monarchy (naturally, an "enlightened" one) a guarantor of order and stability. Thus, Mandel' sung a veritable "paean to the future monarchy, free from the Black Hundreds" (*Rul'*, 1923d, p. 5). Meanwhile, one Minskaia confidently reflected that in the recent years, 9 out of 10 Jews leaned to the right and began to feel a "melancholy longing for the Tsar" (*Rul'*, 1923g, p. 5). Daniil Pasmanik, yet another "Jewish monarchist", took part in the Berlin debates by correspondence, as it were—from Paris, where he was living at the time. In the beginning of January 1923, Pasmanik published a book in Paris titled *Russian Revolution and Jewry (Bolshevism and Judaism)*. He argued that Judaism and Bolshevism had nothing in common, and that blaming the Jews for playing a decisive role in the Russian Revolution is nonsensical, at least if you consider the statistics. However, he also wrote:

It is not enough to say that the Jewish people are not responsible for certain actions which were carried out by members of its community. We are responsible for Trotsky until we distance ourselves from him, just as the Russian people are responsible for Lenin, Chicherin, and all the traitor generals, until they distance themselves from them. [...] We, the Jews, do not have a right to keep our heads in the sand (Pacmanik, 1923b, pp. 11–12).

In 1923 Pasmanik published a compilation in two volumes, under the title *Diary of a Counter-Revolutionary* (he was the only contributor). Among other issues, he expressed his attitude towards the monarchy:

It is hard to be a monarchist, when you are told that the anti-Jewish pogroms, unprecedented in scale, will form the new monarchy's foundations. It is not possible for a nation to wish to be sacrificed. That is clear and simple. The loud and ignorant monarchists scare away Russian Jews. If I prefer monarchy, it is because I believe in its cultural and creative potential, as only this potential can help monarchy revive and resurrect the Great Russia. [...] When the Russian Jewry is freed from the nightmare of pogroms, it will become far more pro-monarchist than many Jewish intellectuals expect (Pasmanik, 1923a, pp. 24–25).

Pasmanik suggested that the Russian émigré community and even the anti-Soviet opposition in the USSR, when in a state of emergency, should follow Italy's example by consolidating around a single political figure, as the Italians had done with Mussolini. "As an evolutionist, I am not ecstatic about the emergence of Fascism, but I see it as a historical necessity," wrote Pasmanik (1923a, p. 30). Of course, one has to bear in mind, that in the beginning of 1923, Fascism had not yet acquired the same notorious reputation as it would in later years. Still, using Fascist Italy as a model for solving the "Russian Question" shows that the author lacked not only political intuition but also taste.

Holding an entirely contrary opinion was a certain Kaplan, who claimed that the Soviet state was the only power which is capable of bringing about order while boosting Russia's prestige: "soon, Parisian hegemony will be transferred to Moscow" (*Rul'*, 1923f, p. 9). One Epfel'baum, who called himself a sympathiser of the Third International but was not a member of any political party, said that both Zionists and the *Kayshchiesya* were united in "bowing to the Whites, so that they can show how distant they are from Bolshevism [...] The monarchists Landau and Bikerman must decide whose side they are on: Nicholas's or Cyril's." Epfel'baum stated ironically that the future [Russian] monarchist newspaper to be published in Berlin will be funded by the Jews (*Rul'*, 1923g, p. 5).

In the words of the journalist Ilya Trotsky (no relation to Leon Trotsky), the *Kayshchiesya* disassociated themselves from the Jewish public. "It is unclear whether the balance of power in a future Russia will shift to Miliukov or Kerensky," said the journalist, "but it is certain that neither Markov nor Maslennikov will succeed in gaining any authority and, in fact, it is even more humiliating to be led by them. Only in 1917 were the Jews freed from their legally inferior position. By not accepting this, the *Kayshchiesya* are condemning themselves to absolute isolation" (*Dni*, 1923d, p. 5). Trotsky was entirely correct. The group of "repentant" or "responsible" Jews (as they were

mockingly called in émigré circles [Gul', 2001, p. 150]) was rejected by the largely indignant wider Jewish public. This was reflected in the Jewish press, irrespective of political affiliations. Shloyme (Solomon) Gepshtein, the editor of the Zionist *Rassvet*, responded to Bikerma's lecture by comparing him to an incompetent solicitor:

one should listen to what he has to say, and then hire another solicitor. He cannot be trusted with the 'Jewish case.' The man in the street would formulate the reason in layman's tongue: 'my lawyer must be first and foremost *my* lawyer.' In my opinion, we, Zionists, have worked out a formula which has won us international support from the Jewish masses in all countries. This formula is based on the *paramount importance* of Jewish national interests, honour and dignity in any delusionary or challenging circumstances (Gepshtein, 1923, p. 5).

Like most of Bikerma's critics, Gepshtein especially condemned the author's explanation of the reasons for the pogroms, which seemed to border on justification. Gepshtein recollected a scandalous remark made by a Bund ideologue, Vladimir Medem, concerning the pogroms at the time of the first Russian revolution: "Jewish blood spilled during the pogroms greased the gears of the Russian revolution!" Gepshtein wrote that "Bikerma consoles himself with the same philosophy, only he reverses it: "Jewish blood spilled during the pogroms greased the gears of the Russian statehood and counter-revolution" (ibid., p. 6).

Iosef Schechtman expressed his opinion of Bikerma's text (published in the volume *Russia and the Jews*, more on which below) in almost exactly the same words:

Around the time of the first Russian revolution of 1905 and the pogroms that followed, the late Medem, one of the leaders of Bund, said: "Jewish blood spilled during the pogroms greased the gears of the Russian revolution." Now comes Bikerma, the Jewish apostle of the Russian counter-revolution, demanding that the Jewish people should not blame the 'Whites' for spilling Jewish blood, but instead consider it as a consequence of the Civil War. He encourages the Jews to satisfy themselves with this explanation, extend their hands out to those who have spilled Jewish blood and be happy that this blood greased the gears of the Russian political backlash (Schechtman, 1923, pp. 3–4).

The Parisian anti-Zionist newspaper *The Jewish Tribune* also published a response to the Berlin debates. In relation to the *Kayshiesiya*, the views of the Zionists and their critics differed little. In the article *On Responsibility and Irresponsibility*, Alexander Kulisher ironically stated:

We are undoubtedly progressing. Up until now, the question about ‘Jewish responsibility for the Russian revolution’ was posed only by anti-Semites. Now, certain Jews are beginning to raise this question, too. A whole series of confessional guilt-trips under the banner of ‘responsibility’ has commenced among the Russian-Jewish émigrés living in Berlin (Kulisher, 1923, pp. 3–4).

Kulisher cited Edmund Burke’s words about not being able to fathom a single accusatory speech against an entire people. Closing his statement, Kulisher said that

discussions about ‘responsibility’ in relation to undefined and disorganised groups, who have no ‘common will’ and cannot commit crimes or repent their sins, cannot have any purpose or goal apart from evoking fear and paranoia. Anti-Semites, who talk about ‘Jewish responsibility,’ know exactly why they do it. Mr. Landau and Mr. Bikerman do not, therefore their statements are irresponsible (Kulisher, 1923, p. 4).

The discussion almost dried out when this polemic resurfaced on the pages of Berlin periodicals after the publication of *Russia and the Jews* in early 1924, which featured not only essays by Bikerman, Landau and Mandel’, but also texts by Daniil Pasmanik, Isaak Levin and Linskii (Dolinskii). Most of the authors of this compilation expanded the ideas which had previously been touched upon in their lectures, or, like in the case of Pasmanik, in his previous publications. The principal concepts of this volume can be summarized as follows: first of all, for the Jews, Bolshevism is an absolute evil which should be fought against. Second, many Jews are conservative by their nature and are generally found to be interested in stability—a point which can be proved by historical evidence. To claim that they strive for ruin and revolution is at best a mistake and at worst, a slander. Finally, due to certain historical circumstances—for example, the anti-Semitic policies of the Tsarist government—quite a few Jews actively took part in the Russian revolution. The Jewish people need to take responsibility for this, distance themselves from these Bolshevik Jews, and take on an active role in attempting to restore the Russian state.

The introduction to the volume, titled “To the Jews of All Countries!” reads:

In this time of trouble, all Russian Jews have had to part either with their lives or private possessions. Jewish culture and dignity have been degraded, forced into a helpless and miserable void and pressured by grief into a slow and quiet death. Our shrines are desecrated; our culture has been trampled upon and turned inside out. Just like the Russian

people, hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews have been exiled and are now forced to traverse the globe. For us it is our second Diaspora, a Diaspora within a Diaspora. [...] *The National Union of Russian Jews* is strongly convinced: for the Jews, as well as all peoples of Russia, Bolshevism is the prime evil and our sacred duty is to fight it with all our strength for the sake of humanity, culture, the motherland and the Jewish people. Our goals are to spread this conviction among Jews all over the world—but first and foremost, among the Russian Jews, to mobilise the Jewish public opinion in all countries for the war against Bolshevism and to rebuild Russia (Bikerman et al., 1978, pp. 5, 7).

The volume's authors spoke out against Bolshevism, as well as Socialism as a whole. To quote Landau: "Socialism has undermined and led to the degradation of Russian economy, with the Jewish economy being completely dismantled as a result. In one blow, it has destroyed Jewish trade, property and urban life" (Landau, 1978, p. 111). The contributors condemned not only the Bolshevik October Revolution, but also the February Revolution—the "sacred cow" of the Russian liberal-democratic community. They condemned it even more harshly than the October Revolution. Bikerman wrote:

Every Jew, who does not fantasise that Jews can walk on water, or that in the middle of collapsing kingdoms and dying nations we can stay calm, because we are protected by a magic spell that turns centuries of accusations into perpetual innocence, must remember that the February, and not the October Revolution, was responsible for Russia's demise (Bikerman, 1978, p. 21).

And Isaak Levin stated:

Ascertaining Jewish responsibility for Jewish involvement in the Bolshevik movement often brings about confusion and irritation within Jewish circles. [...] The denial of Jewish responsibility is in many ways based on misunderstanding. It goes without saying that when talking about responsibility, we mean moral, rather than criminal, responsibility. If one is to uphold the point of view that the Bolshevik revolution achieved only destruction, without accomplishing anything positive, then Jews, insofar as they form a national collective of sorts, cannot be in denial of, or ignore the responsibility for, the Jewish involvement in the revolutionary movement (Levin, 1978, p. 123).

But who were these Bolshevik Jews? Mandel' pointed out that "the immature and pretentious half-wits whose only intention is the proliferation of their careers, as well as degenerate fanatics and even sadists, whom the Bolsheviks met 'with arms wide open', come from both Russian and Jewish

communities” (Mandel’, 1978, p. 201). In order to explain active Jewish participation in radical movements, not only in Russia but also in Europe, Levin brought forward a slightly more complex argument. According to him, the Jewry found itself suspended “between the old Jewish culture, from which it has distanced itself, and the Judeo-Christian culture in a variety of its national forms, with which it had not yet fully assimilated... Great numbers of Jewish Bolsheviks, on the one side, and Jewish NEPmen, on the other, show how severe the divide within the Jewish culture is.” Levin suggested that the goal of the Jewish people should be to “find the cultural compost underneath their feet” (Levin, 1978, p. 138).

The volume received even stronger criticism than the lectures. “The holy conclave presiding in the German capital has aimed high to save Russia. It sees no better alternative, other than attacking their own brothers, the Russian Jews,” wrote Solomon Pozner in the *Jewish Tribune* (Pozner, 1924, p. 1). The Jewish community was especially outraged by attempts to “whitewash the Whites.” The White Movement had been soiled with so much dirt and blood, especially Jewish blood, that doing this would prove extremely difficult, if not impossible. Vasilii Shul’gin, one of the ideologues of the White Movement, proclaimed that the movement was started by “near-saints” but was later hijacked by “near-bandits” (Shul’gin, 1989, p. 292). The leader of the White Movement in southern Russia, General Denikin, did not veer far from Shul’gin in characterizing his former subordinates: “Where military trophies and requisitions end,” he wrote bitterly in *Essays on Russian Troubles*, “lies a dark moral void of violence and plunder [...]. It is pathetic to console oneself with the fact that the Reds were far worse than us. Weren’t we the ones who were meant to be fighting precisely *against* violence and violators?” (Denikin, 2003, pp. 134–135).

For his part, Linskii presented rather vivid accounts of the treatment that Jews received from the White Movement, which proved that any collaboration between the Whites and the Jews was out of the question, and even the presence of Jews on the territory occupied by “volunteers” was extremely dangerous. Solomon Pozner sought to highlight this point: “Why have Mr. Landau and Mr. Bikerman chosen not to read the article written by their colleague, before sitting down to pen their own terrifying philippics?” Pozner quite rightly pointed out that “the patriots who presented their moralising lectures [...] had not lived through the hurricane sweeping across southern Russia. They do not wish to know how severe it had been or what it had done” (Pozner, 1924, p. 2). This comment was a transparent hint at the fact that Bikerman and Landau spent the Civil War years either on the Bolshevik-controlled territories, or abroad. They had neither witnessed the anti-Jewish pogroms, nor were they able to experience their immediate consequences. All their arguments about the White Movement, therefore, were speculative.

Pozner correctly assumed that Bikerman believed that Russian Jews were afflicted by their devotion to the February Revolution. Pozner concluded his review, or, to be more precise, his rebuke, with the following passage:

If only the Berlin grouping of the supporters of the old regime were not blinded by the desire to turn back the wheel of history, they would not have written indecent articles about ‘wide spread irresponsibility, boundless verbal immorality and triumphant superficiality.’ It would cease to play the absurd role of the healer of national wounds and would stop distributing superlative advice regarding the war on Bolshevism. After all, Russian Jews fight Bolshevism to the best of their ability, without having to be reminded of it (Pozner, 1924, p. 2).

The volume spurred on a different reaction from Nikolai Berdiaev:

When I was reading *Russia and the Jews*, I strongly felt the deep, tragic self-realisation of the Russian Jews, who love their native country, do not like the revolution and wish to be Russian patriots. I do not agree with many of the ideas expressed in this volume; however, I respect the effort of the group united by the volume, which aims to establish the dignity of Russian Jews without using the revolution in the Jewish interests. This brings to mind how deep and maybe hopeless the tragedy of the ‘Jewish question’ is (Berdiaev, 1924, p. 2).

Berdiaev approached the problem from a theological and philosophical, rather than political, perspective. He attempted to engage with the “Jewish question” as if it was a question of “inner Christian conscience.”

However, Berdiaev’s outlook was that of an outsider. Unlike Berdiaev, Russian Jews were not able to engage with the ideas expressed in the volume from a philosophical perspective, because they could not free themselves from its political context. It was Semyon Dubnov who most clearly formulated the attitude of the Jewish community in Berlin towards the *Kayschiesya*:

The arrival of Jewish reactionaries, led by the former radical-democrat Bikerman, is perhaps the most pitiful episode in the life of the Berlin émigré community. Along with other repentant democrats, he founded the *National Union of Russian Jews* and published a collection of articles attempting to prove that by neglecting to join forces with the Whites against the Bolsheviks, Russian-Jewish leaders had not performed their patriotic duty. During the Civil War, however, those same Whites turned out to be rabid supporters of the Black Hundreds and became responsible for pogroms (Dubnov, 2004, p. 533).

However, the Whites never accepted the *Kayshchiesya* in their camp. The famous philosopher Ivan Il'in, who, in the words of one of his contemporaries, "spent the Civil War lecturing in a Red university," engaged in a relatively frequent correspondence with General Piotr Vrangel' while living abroad (Il'in was expelled from Russia in 1922). The philosopher was sincerely devoted to the General and even signed his letters "White." In October 1923, Il'in sent to the General a Memorandum about the current political situation. Il'in believed that Jews could prove useful in a potential anti-Bolshevik *coup d'etat*, but

only if they were able to secure a guarantee against any further reprisal. [...] They tested the ground for this by presenting a group of repentant patriots (Pasmanik, Bikerman, Landau and Mandel'), who cunningly provoked the right-wing into public debates. This group 'defends' the White Army and enjoys unfounded trust from respectful public figures (Struve). Bikerman even entered negotiations with the Supreme Monarchist Council on behalf of the group (having the intelligence services in mind) (Il'in, 1996, p. 227).

The *Kayshchiesya* was small in number and not particularly influential. So why did their ruminations provoke such a fervent reaction and so many rebuttals, which could even be collected in a book, not dissimilar in size to *Russia and the Jews*? The situation can be explained thus: the *Kayshchiesya* touched upon many sensitive questions, including a particularly sensitive one regarding the role of Jews in the revolution. The community of Jewish public figures, who were all thrown out of Russia as a result of the revolution, could not come up with a satisfactory answer to this question. Most of them echoed Dubnov's sentiment, first expressed in Petrograd on 8 June 1917, at a Jewish rally:

Several demagogues have emerged from our milieu. They align themselves with heroes of the streets and prophets of usurpation. They speak publicly, hiding under Russian pseudonyms, as if ashamed of their Jewish origins (Trotsky, Zinoviev et al). But perhaps they should use their Jewish names as pseudonyms instead, because as far as we are concerned, these people have no roots among us (Dubnov, 2004, pp. 533–534).

It may seem a little problematic to dismiss Jewish "heroes from the street" as mere renegades and immature adolescents. Far too many of them were involved in the revolution to make such generalizations.

The Menshevik St. Ivanovich (Semen Portugeis's pseudonym) expressed a more earnest view fifteen years after the Berlin debates had first taken place. He contemplated the persecution of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and argued that

the percentage of those who lost their social status was much higher among the Jewish population than among Russia's other peoples. He wrote:

Punishments of biblical proportions rained down upon the Jews, not *because* they were Jews, but because they were bourgeois. These punishments were executed by Jewish Bolsheviks and renegade Jews from other political parties. Quite frequently members of the 'bourgeoisie' were chased, abused and tortured by 'children' of the same Jewish community, seduced by Bolshevism. [...] This prosecutor and torturer was not an outcast [*dover-aher*] but 'our very own Iankel', the son of Rabbi Moshe from the Kasrilovka village; a mostly harmless boy, who had failed his Pharmacology exams last year but passed Political Literacy this year, with flying colours (Ivanovich, 1939, p. 46).

Of course, Bolshevik Jews were not all ne'er-do-well pharmaceutical students, pretentious half-wits and immature degenerates. Just like all the other inhabitants of the former Russian empire, the Jews experienced the revolution and the Civil War which followed it. However, something else was also true: the revolution opened up many new opportunities for Jews, one of which was to obtain political power. Revolution was not only something to be endured; it was also something to be induced. Thousands of "young men from Kasrilovka" chose not to miss out on this opportunity. "Leather jackets" suited them well enough, and so they became the faithful soldiers of the Revolution.

The experience of the Civil War demonstrated to the majority of the Jewish population in Russia that they were more likely to feel safe and content under the Soviet rule. Furthermore, the Soviet regime opened up new avenues previously inaccessible to Jews: education, professional career advancement, and the possibility of political influence. However, these indulgences had a price: religion, language, and culture all had to be forfeited. In short, for Jews, the price of admission to this new society was the surrender of their national identity, which they had previously managed to keep intact for thousands of years, including the two-hundred-and-fifty years of living in the Russian empire.

In the mid-1920s, members of an ethnographic expedition to the former Pale of Settlement unearthed "in every corner, evidence of apostasy—each one more unusual than the last." In Rogachev "the elders were experts in the Talmud; the youth were communists and their children were non-Kosher, having not been blessed by infant circumcision." In Gomel, the local children were singing outside the synagogue, in Russian and Yiddish: "Down with monks, rabbis and the priests!" When an uncircumcised young boy was seated by his grandfather in front of the Torah, and asked "What do you want to do when you grow up, Berka?" he responded with a pompous air: "First of all, I

am not Berka. I am Lentrozin [a combination of Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev], and I am going to work for the Cheka” (Tan-Bogoraz, 1926, p. 25).

Shtetl boys moved to the cities so that they would have a better chance of becoming engineers, poets, chess players, musicians or secret service agents. The provincial world, with its religious dogmas and strange traditions, became foreign to them and they lost interest in their heritage. The Russian Revolution revolutionized “Jewish streets,” too. Russian Jewry was broken apart, much like the rest of the country. Talking about its common self-interests was no longer possible. However, Jewish public figures—both the *Kayshchiesya* and their opponents—did not wish to admit this to themselves. Even Kulisher, in his critiques of Bikerman and Landau, called the Jewry disparate, disorganized, and lacking a united “will”—yet at the same time contradicted his own thesis by claiming that the ideological position of the *Kayshchiesya* played into the hands of the enemy by not adhering to the virtues of the Jewish people.

It is obvious that Kulisher, as well as other authors writing for the liberal-democratic *Jewish Tribune*, the members of the *National Union of Russian Jews*, the journalists of the Zionist newspaper *Rassvet*, or even the “harmless boys from Kasrilovka” (who grew to become Bolshevik Party apparatchiks), all had different concepts of who the enemy was and what exactly Jewish virtues consisted of.