

Chapter 19. In the 1930s

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Jews' Role in Russia - Chapter 19

The 1930s were years of an intense industrialized spurt, which crushed the peasantry and altered the life of the entire country. Mere existence demanded adaptation and development of new skills. But through crippling sacrifices, and despite the many absurdities of the Soviet organizational system, the horrible epic somehow led to the creation of an industrialized power.

Yet the first and second five-year plans came into existence and were carried out not through the miracle of spontaneous generation, nor as a result of the simple violent round-up of large masses of laborers. It demanded many technical provisions, advanced equipment, and the collaboration of specialists experienced in this technology. All this flowed plentifully from the capitalist West, and most of all from the United States; not in the form of a gift, of course, and not in the form of generous help. The Soviet communists paid for all of this abundantly with Russia's mineral wealth and timber, with concessions for raw materials markets, with trade areas promised to the West, and with plundered goods from the Empire of the tsars. Such deals flowed with the help and approval of international financial magnates, most of all those on Wall Street, in a persistent continuation of the first commercial ties that the Soviet communists developed on the American stock exchanges as early as during the Civil War. The new partnership was strengthened by shiploads of tsarist gold and treasures from the Hermitage.

But wait a second, were we not thoroughly taught by Marx that capitalists are the fierce enemies of proletarian socialism and that we should not expect help from them, but rather a destructive, bloody war? Well, it's not that simple: despite the official diplomatic non-recognition, trade links were completely out in the open, and even written about in *Izvestiya*: "American merchants are interested in broadening of economic ties with the Soviet Union."^[1] American unions came out against such an expansion (defending their markets from the products of cheap and even slave Soviet labor). The "Russian-American Chamber of Commerce," created at that time, simply did

not want to hear about any political opposition to communism, or “to mix politics with business relations.”[\[2\]](#)

Anthony Sutton, a modern American scholar, researched the recently-opened diplomatic and financial archives and followed the connections of Wall Street with the Bolsheviks; he pointed to the amoral logic of this long and consistent relationship. From as early as the “Marburg” plan at the beginning of the 20th century, which was based on the vast capital of Carnegie, the idea was to strengthen the authority of international finance, through global “socialization,” “for control ... and for the forced appeasement.” Sutton concluded that: “International financiers prefer to do business with central governments. The banking community least of all wants a free economy and decentralized authority.” “Revolution and international finance do not quite contradict each other, if the result of revolution should be to establish a more centralized authority,” and, therefore, to make the markets of these countries manageable. And there was a second line of agreement: “Bolsheviks and bankers shared an essential common platform — internationalism.”[\[3\]](#)

In that light, the subsequent support of “collective enterprises and the mass destruction of individual rights by Morgan-Rockefeller” was not surprising. In justification of this support, they claimed in Senate hearings: “Why should a great industrial country, like America, desire the creation and subsequent competition of another great industrial rival?”[\[4\]](#) Well, they rightly believed that with such an obviously uncompetitive, centralized and totalitarian regime, Soviet Russia could not rival America. Another thing is that Wall Street could not predict further development of the Bolshevik system, nor its extraordinary ability to control people, working them to the very bone, which eventually led to the creation of a powerful, if misshapen, industry.

But how does this tie in with our basic theme? Because as we have seen, American financiers completely refused loans to pre-revolutionary Russia due to the infringement of the rights of Jews there, even though Russia was always a profitable financial prospect. And clearly, if they were prepared to sacrifice profits at that time, then now, despite all their counting on the Soviet markets, the “Morgan-Rockefeller Empire” would not assist the Bolsheviks if the persecution of the Jews was looming on horizon in the USSR at the start of the 1930s.

That’s just the point: for the West, the previously described Soviet oppression of the traditional Jewish culture and of Zionists easily disappeared under the contemporary

general impression that the Soviet power would not oppress the Jews, but on the contrary, that many of them would remain at the levers of power.

Certain pictures of the past have the ability to conveniently rearrange in our mind in order to soothe our consciousness. And **today** a perception has formed that in the 1930s the Jews were already forced out of the Soviet ruling elite and had nothing to do with the administration of the country. In the 1980s we see assertions like this: in the Soviet times, the Jews in the USSR were “practically destroyed as a people; they had been turned into a social group, which was settled in the large cities “as a social stratum to serve the ruling class.”[\[5\]](#)

No. Not only far from “serving”, the Jews were to the large extent members of the “ruling class.” And the “large cities,” the capitals of the constituent Soviet republics, were the very thing the authorities bought off through improved provisioning, furnishing and maintenance, while the rest of the country languished from oppression and poverty. And now, after the shock of the Civil War, after the War Communism, after the NEP and the first five-year plan, it was the **peace-time life** of the country that was increasingly managed by the government apparatus, in which the role of the Jews was quite conspicuous, at least until 1937-38.

In 1936, at the 8th Congress of Soviets of the Soviet Union, Molotov, on orders from Stalin (perhaps to differ from Hitler in the eyes of the West) delivered this tirade: “Our brotherly feelings toward the Jewish people are determined by the fact that they begat the genius and the creator of the ideas of the communist liberation of Mankind,” Karl Marx; “that the Jewish people, alongside the most developed nations, brought forth countless prominent scientists, engineers, and artists [that undoubtedly had already manifested itself in the Soviet 1930s, and will be even more manifest in the post-war years], and gave many glorious heroes to the revolutionary struggle ... and in our country they gave and ***are still giving new, remarkable, and talented leaders and managers in all areas of development and defense of the Cause of Socialism.***”[\[6\]](#)

The italics are mine. No doubt, it was said for propaganda purposes. But Molotov’s declaration was appropriate. And the “defense of the Cause of Socialism” during all those years was in the hands of the GPU, the army, diplomacy, and the ideological front. The willing participation of so many Jews in these organs continued in the early and mid-1930s, until 1937-38.

Here we will briefly review – according to contemporary newspapers, later publications, and modern Jewish encyclopedias – the most important posts and names that had emerged mainly in the 1930s. Of course, such a review, complicated by the fact that we know nothing about how our characters identified themselves in regard to nationality, may contain mistakes in individual cases and can in no way be considered comprehensive.

After the destruction of the “Trotskyite opposition,” the Jewish representation in the party apparatus became noticeably reduced. But that **purge** of the supreme party apparatus was absolutely not anti-Jewish. Lazar Kaganovich retained his extremely prominent position in the **Politburo**; he was an ominously merciless individual and, at the same time, a man of notoriously low professional level. (Nevertheless, from the mid-1930s he was the Secretary of the Central Committee, and **simultaneously** a member of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee – only Stalin himself held both these positions at the same time). And he placed three of his brothers in quite important posts. Mikhail Kaganovich was deputy chair of the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy beginning in 1931; from 1937 he was narkom (**narodny komissar**, that is, “people’s commissar”) of the defense industry; later he simultaneously headed the aviation industry. Yuli Kaganovich, passing through the leading party posts in Nizhniy Novgorod (as all the brothers did), became deputy narkom of the foreign trade.^[7] (Another, absolutely untalented brother, was a “big gun” in Rostov-on-Don. It reminds me of a story by Saltykov-Shchedrin, where one Vooz Oshmyanskiy tried to place his brother Lazar in a profitable post). However, both the ethnic Russian opposition factions, that of Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky, and that of Syrtsov, Ryutin, and Uglanov, were destroyed by Stalin in the beginning of the 1930s with support of the Jewish Bolsheviks – he drew necessary replacements from their ranks. Kaganovich was the principal and the most reliable of Stalin’s supporters in the Politburo: he demanded the execution of Ryutin (October 1932-January 1933) but even Stalin wasn’t able to manage it then.^[8] The purge of 1930-1933 dealt with the Russian elements in the party.

Out of 25 members in the Presidium of the Central Control Commission after the 16th Party Congress (1930), 10 were Jews: A. Solts, “the conscience of the Party” (in the bloodiest years from 1934 to 1938 was assistant to Vyshinsky, the General Prosecutor of the USSR ^[9]); Z. Belenky (one of the three above-mentioned Belenky brothers); A. Goltsman (who supported Trotsky in the debate on trade unions); ferocious Rozaliya Zemlyachka (Zalkind); M. Kaganovich, another of the brothers; the **Chekist** Trilisser; the “militant atheist” Yaroslavsky; B. Roizenman; and A.P. Rozengolts, the surviving

assistant of Trotsky. If one compares the composition of the party's Central Committee in the 1920s with that in the early 1930s, he would find that it was almost unchanged — both in 1925 as well as after the 16th Party Congress, Jews comprised around 1/6 of the membership.[\[10\]](#)

In the upper echelons of the communist party after the 17th Congress (“the congress of the victors”) in 1934, Jews remained at 1/6 of the membership of the Central Committee; in the Party Control Commission — around 1/3, and a similar proportion in the Revision Commission of the Central Committee. (It was headed for quite a while by M. Vladimirsky. From 1934 Lazar Kaganovich took the reins of the Central Control Commission). Jews made up the same proportion (1/3) of the members of the Commission of the Soviet Control.[\[11\]](#) For five years filled with upheaval (1934-1939) the deputy General Prosecutor of the USSR was Grigory Leplevsky.[\[12\]](#)

Occupants of many crucial party posts were not even announced in *Pravda*. For instance, in autumn 1936 the Secretary of the Central Committee of Komsomol (the Union of Communist Youth) was E. Fainberg.[\[13\]](#) The Department of the Press and Publishing of the Central Committee — the key ideological establishment — was managed by B. Tal. Previously, the department was headed by Lev Mekhlis, who had by then shifted to managing *Pravda* full-time; from 1937 Mekhlis became deputy narkom of defense and the head of Political Administration of the Red Army.

We see many Jews in the command posts in provinces: in the Central Asia Bureau, the Eastern Siberia Krai Party Committee (kraikom), in the posts of first secretaries of the *obkoms* [party committee of oblasts] of the Volga German Republic, the Tatar, Bashkir, Tomsk, Kalinin, and Voronezh oblasts and in many others. For example, Mendel Khatayevich (a member of the Central Committee from 1930) was consequently secretary of Gomel, Odessa, Tatar, and Dnepropetrovsk obkoms, secretary of the Middle Volga kraikom, and second secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine. Yakov Chubin was secretary of the Chernigov and Akmolinsk obkoms and of the Shakhtinsk district party committee; later he served in several commissions of the Party Control in Moscow, Crimea, Kursk, and Turkmenia, and from 1937 he was the first secretary of the Central Committee of Turkmenia.[\[14\]](#) There is no need to list all such names, but let's not overlook the real contribution of these *secretaries* into the Bolshevik cause; also note their striking geographical mobility, as in the 1920s. Reliable cadres were still in much demand and indispensable. And there was no concern that they lacked knowledge of each new locality of which they took charge.

Yet much more power was in the hands of the narkoms. In 1936 we see nine Jewish narkoms in the Government. Take the worldwide-famous narkom of foreign affairs Litvinov (in the friendly cartoons in *Izvestiya*, he was portrayed as a knight of peace with a spear and shield taking a stand against foreign filth); no less remarkable, but only within the limits of the USSR, was the narkom of internal affairs Yagoda; the ascending and all-glorious “Iron Narkom” of railroads, Lazar Kaganovich; foreign trade was headed by A. Rozenholts (before that we saw him in the Central Control Commission); I.Ya. Weitser was in charge of domestic trade; M. Kalmanovich was in charge of sovkhozes [state owned farms that paid wages] (he was the foods-commissar from the end of 1917); I.E. Lyubimov was narkom of light industry; G. Kaminskiy was narkom of healthcare, his instructive articles were often published in *Izvestiya*; and the above-mentioned Z. Belenky was the head of the Commission of the Soviet Control.[\[15\]](#) In the same Government we can find many Jewish names among the deputy narkoms in various people’s commissariats: finance, communications, railroad transport, water, agriculture, the timber industry, the foodstuffs industry, education, justice. Among the most important deputy narkoms were: Ya. Gamarnik (defense), A. Gurevich (“he made a significant contribution to the creation of the metallurgical industry in the country”[\[16\]](#)); Semyon Ginzburg, he was deputy narkom of heavy industry, and later he became narkom of construction, and even later minister of construction of military enterprises.[\[17\]](#)

The famous “Great Turning Point” took place from the end of 1929 to the beginning of 1931. Murderous collectivization lay ahead, and at this decisive moment Stalin assigned Yakovlev-Epshtein as its sinister principal executive. His portraits and photos, and drawings by I. Brodsky, were prominently reproduced in newspapers then and later, from year to year.[\[18\]](#) Together with the already mentioned M. Kalmanovich, he was a member of the very top Soviet of Labor and Defense (there was hardly anyone apart from Stalin, Molotov, Mikoyan, Ordzhonikidze, Voroshilov in that organ).[\[19\]](#) In March of 1931, at the 6th Session of Soviets, Yakovlev reported on the progress of collectivization – about the development of **sovkhozes and kolkhozes** (that is, the destruction of the way of life of the people).[\[20\]](#) On this ‘glorious’ path to the ruination of Russia, among Yakovlev’s collaborators, we can see deputy narkom V.G. Feigin, members of the Board of **the** people’s commissariat of agriculture M.M. Volf, G.G. Roshal, and other ‘experts’. The important organization, the Grain Trust, was attached to the people’s commissariat of agriculture to pump out grain from peasants for the state; the chairman of the board of directors was M.G. Gerchikov, his portraits appeared in *Izvestiya*, and Stalin himself sent him a telegram of encouragement.[\[21\]](#) From 1932

the People's Commissariat of Sovkhozes and Kolkhozes with M. Kalmanovich at the helm was separated from the people's commissariat of agriculture.[\[22\]](#) From 1934 the chairman of the national Soviet of Kolkhozes was the same Yakovlev-Epshtein.[\[23\]](#) The chairman of the Commission of Purveyance was I. Kleiner (who was awarded the Order of Lenin). During the most terrible months of collectivization, M. Kalmanovich was deputy narkom of agriculture. But at the end of 1930 he was transferred into the People's Commissariat of Finance as deputy narkom; he also became chairman of the board of the Gosbank [The State Bank], for in monetary matters a strong will was also much needed. In 1936, Lev Maryasin became chairman of the board of the Gosbank; he was replaced in that post by Solomon Krutikov in 1936.[\[24\]](#)

In November 1930 the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade was created, and A.P. Rozengolts served for seven years as its head. Jews comprised one-third of its board members. Among them was Sh. Dvoylatsky, who simultaneously served in the Central Commissions on Concessions; in 1934-1936 he became the Soviet trade representative in France.[\[25\]](#) At the end of 1930 the People's Commissariat of Supply was created with A. Mikoyan at the helm; on its board we see M. Belenky — that is another, actually the fifth, man with the surname "Belenky" encountered here; soon he himself became the narkom, replacing Mikoyan. In general, in the People's Commissariats of Trade and Supply, the Jewish component was higher than in the upper party echelons — from a quarter to a half. Still let's not overlook the Tsentrosoyuz (the bureaucratic center of Soviet pseudo-cooperation). After Lev Khichuk in the 1920s, it was managed from 1931 to 1937 by I.A. Zelensky, whom we met earlier as a member of the board of the people's commissariat of foodstuffs.[\[26\]](#)

Let me point it out once more: all these examples are for illustrative purposes only. They should not be taken to create the impression that there were no members of other nationalities on all those boards and in the presidiums; of course there were. Moreover, all the above-mentioned people occupied their posts only for a while; they were routinely transferred between various important positions.

Let's look at transport and communications. First, railroads were managed by M. Rukhimovich (his portraits could be found in the major newspapers of the time[\[27\]](#)); later he became narkom of defense industry (with M. Kaganovich as his deputy), while the command over railroads was given to L. Kaganovich.[\[28\]](#) There were important changes in the Coal Trust: I. Schwartz was removed from the board and M. Deych was assigned to replace him.[\[29\]](#) T. Rozenoer managed *Grozneft* [Grozny Oil]. Yakov Gugel

headed the construction of the Magnitogorsk metallurgical giant; Yakov Vesnik was the director of the Krivoy Rog Metallurgical industrial complex; and the hell of the Kuznetsk industrial complex with its 200,000 hungry and ragged workers was supervised by S. Frankfurt, and after him by I. Epshtein (the latter was arrested in 1938 but landed on his feet because he was sent to take command over the construction of the Norilsk industrial complex).[\[30\]](#)

The Supreme Soviet of the National Economy still existed, but its significance waned. After Unshlikht, it was headed by A. Rozengolts, and then by Ordzhonikidze, with Jews comprising the majority of its board.[\[31\]](#)

At that time, the Gosplan [state planning ministry] gathered strength. In 1931, under the chairmanship of Kuibyshev, Jews comprised more than half of its 18-member board.[\[32\]](#)

Let's now examine the top posts in economy during the "last burgeoning year" of Stalin's era, 1936. In 1936 *Izvestiya* published[\[33\]](#) the complete roster of the board of the people's commissariat of domestic trade. Those 135 individuals had essentially ruled over the entire domestic trade in the USSR (and they were hardly disinterested men). Jews comprised almost 40% of this list, including two deputies to the narkom, several trade inspectors, numerous heads of food and manufactured goods trades in the oblasts, heads of consumer unions, restaurant trusts, cafeterias, food supplies and storage, heads of train dining cars and railroad buffets; and of course, the head of Gastronom No.1 in Moscow ("Eliseyevsky") was also a Jew. Naturally, all this facilitated smooth running of the industry in those far from prosperous years.

In the pages of *Izvestiya* one could read headlines like this: "The management of the Union's Fishing Trust made major political mistakes." As a result, Moisei Frumkin was relieved of his post at the board of the People's Commissariat of Domestic Trade (we saw him in the 1920s as a deputy of the Narkom of Foreign Trade). Comrade Frumkin was punished with a stern reprimand and a warning; comrade Kleiman suffered the same punishment; and comrade Nepryakhin was expelled from the party.[\[34\]](#)

Soon after that, *Izvestiya* published[\[35\]](#) an addendum to the roster of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry with 215 names in it. Those wishing to can delve into it as well. A present-day author thus writes about those people: by the 1930s "the children of the déclassé Jewish petty bourgeois succeeded ... in becoming the 'commanders' of

the “great construction projects.” And so it appeared to those who, putting in 16 hours a day for weeks and months, never leaving the foundation pits, the swamps, the deserts, and taiga ..., that it was “their country.”[\[36\]](#) However, the author is wrong: it was the blackened hard-workers and yesterday’s peasants, who had no respite from toiling in foundation pits and swamps, while the directors only occasionally promenaded there; they mainly spent time in offices enjoying their special provision services (“the bronze foremen”). But undoubtedly, their harsh and strong-willed decisions helped to bring these construction projects to completion, building up the industrial potential of the USSR.

Thus the Soviet Jews obtained a weighty share of state, industrial, and economic power at all levels of government in the USSR.

The personality of B. Roizenman merits particular attention. See for yourself: he received the Order of Lenin “in recognition of his exceptional services” in the adjustment of the state apparatus “to the objectives of the large-scale offensive for Socialism.” What secrets, inscrutable to us, could be hidden behind this “offensive”? We can glance into some of them from the more direct wording: for carrying out “special missions of top state importance on the clean-up of state apparatus in the Soviet diplomatic missions abroad.”[\[37\]](#)

Now let’s look at the state of affairs in diplomacy. The 1920s were examined in the preceding chapter. Now we encounter other important people. For example, in spring of 1930, *Izvestiya* reported on page 1 and under a separate heading that “F.A. Rotshtein, the board member of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, returned from vacation and resumed his duties.”[\[38\]](#) (Well, didn’t they only write this way about Stalin? To the best of my knowledge, neither Ordzhonikidze, nor Mikoyan – other very top functionaries – was honored in such a way?) Yet very soon Rotshtein made a slip and his career ended just two months later, in July 1930. With the designation of Litvinov as narkom, Rotshtein was removed from the board (even though, we may remember, he claimed credit for the creation of the British Communist Party). In the 1930s, at the peak of Litvinov’s power, a new generation appeared. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* writes: “there was a notion of ‘the Litvinov school of diplomacy’” that included the outstanding personalities of K. Umansky, Ya. Surits, B. Shtein (he was already successful by the beginning of the 1920s) and E. Gnedin (son of Parvus).[\[39\]](#)

Ehrenburg added here the name of E. Rubinin. Just as in the 1920s diplomacy attracted a cadre of Jews, so it did through the early and mid-1930s. From the moment the USSR was accepted into the League of Nations, we see Litvinov, Shtein, Gnedin, and also Brenner, Stashevsky, Marcus, Rozenberg, and Svanidze (a Georgian) as the senior members of the Soviet delegation. It was these people who represented Soviet Russia at that forum of nations. There were Soviet plenipotentiaries in Europe of Jewish origin: in England — Maisky; in Germany (and later in France)—Ya. Surits; in Italy—B. Shtein (after Kamenev); we also see Jewish plenipotentiaries in Spain, Austria, Romania, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Belgium, Norway, and in Asia. For example, the above-mentioned Surits represented the Soviet Union in Afghanistan as early as the Russian Civil War; later, from 1936, B. Skvirsky served in Afghanistan; for many years he was the unofficial Soviet representative in Washington.[\[40\]](#) In the early and mid-1930s, a great number of Jews successfully continued to work in Soviet trade delegations. (Here we find another Belenky, already the sixth individual of that name, B.S.Belenky, who was the trade representative in Italy from 1934 to 1937).[\[41\]](#)

Concerning the Red Army, the aforementioned Israeli researcher, Aron Abramovich, writes that in the 1930s “a significant number of Jewish officers served” in the army. “There were many of them, in particular in the Revolutionary Military Soviet, in the central administrations of the people’s commissariat of defense, in the general staff, and at lower levels – in the military districts, in the armies, corps, divisions, brigades, and all military units. The Jews still played a prominent role in the political organs.”[\[42\]](#) The entire Central Political Administration of the Red Army came under command of the trustworthy Mekhlis after the suicide of the trustworthy Gamarnik. Here are several names from the cream of the Political Administration: Mordukh Khorosh was the deputy director of the Political Administration of the Red Army in the 1930s, and later, until his arrest, he was in charge of the Political Administration of the Kiev military district. From 1929 through to 1937, Lazar Aronshtam headed the political administration of the Belorussian military district, then of the Special Far Eastern Army, and later – of the Moscow military district. Isaak Grinberg was the Senior Inspector of the Political Administration of the Red Army, and later the deputy director of the Political Administration of the Leningrad district. Boris Ippo (he participated in the pacification of Central Asia during the Civil War as the head of the Political Administration of the Turkestan Front and later of the Central-Asian district) was the head of the political administration of the Caucasus Red Army; and later the director of the Military Political Academy. The already-mentioned Mikhail Landa from 1930 to 1937 was the chief editor of *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*The Red Star*, the official newspaper

of the Soviet military). Naum Rozovsky was a military prosecutor since the Civil War; by 1936 he was the chief military prosecutor of the Red Army.[\[43\]](#)

Gamarnik remained the deputy to Voroshilov, the chairman of the Revolutionary Military Soviet until 1934 (when the organization was disbanded). In the 1930s, in addition to those named in the previous chapter, among the heads of the central administrations of the Red Army, we encounter the following individuals: Abram Volp (the head of the Administrative Mobilization Administration; in the previous chapter he was identified as the chief of staff of the Moscow military district), Semyon Uritsky (of the Military Intelligence Administration, until 1937), Boris Feldman – the head of the Central Personnel Administration, and Leontiy Kotlyar – the head of the Central Military Engineering Administration in the pre-war years. Among the commanders of the branches of the military we find A. Goltsman, the head of military aviation from 1932 (we already saw him in the Central Control Commission, and as a union activist; he died in a plane crash). Among the commanders of the military districts we again see Iona Yakir (Crimean district, and later the important Kiev District), and Lev Gordon (Turkestan district).[\[44\]](#) Although we have no data on Jewish representation in the lower ranks, there is little doubt that when a structure (be it a political administration of the army, a supply service, or a party or a commissariat apparatus) was headed by a Jew, it was accompanied, as a rule, by a quite noticeable Jewish presence among its staff.

Yet service in the army is not a vice; it can be quite constructive. So what about our good old GPU-NKVD? A modern researcher, relying on archives, writes: “The first half of the 1930s was characterized by the increasingly important role of Jews in the state security apparatus.” And “on the eve of the most massive repressions ... the ethnic composition of the supreme command of the NKVD ... [can be understood with the help of] the list of decorated Chekists on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD. The list of 407 senior officials published in the central press contained 56 Jews (13.8%), and 7 Latvians (1.7%).”[\[45\]](#)

When the GPU was reformed into the NKVD (1934) with Yagoda at the head, they twice published the names of the supreme commissars of the NKVD (what a rare chance to peek behind a usually impenetrable wall[\[46\]!](#)): commissars of State Security of the 1st Rank Ya.S. Agranov (the first deputy to Yagoda), V.A. Balitsky, T.D. Deribas, G.E. Prokovev, S.F. Redens, L.M. Zakovsky; of the 2nd Rank: L.N. Belskiy, K.V. Pauker (they were already decorated in 1927 on the decennial of the Cheka), M.I. Gay, S.A. Goglidze,

L.B. Zalin, Z.B. Katsnelson, K.M. Karlson, I.M. Leplevsky, G.A. Molchanov, L.G. Mironov, A.A. Slutsky, A.M. Shanin, and R.A. Pilyar. Of course, not all of them were Jews but a good half were. So, the Jewish Chekists were still there; they didn't leave, nor were they forced out of the NKVD, the same NKVD which was devouring the country after the death of Kirov, and which later devoured itself.

A.A. Slutsky was the director of the NKVD's foreign section; that is, he was in charge of espionage abroad. "His deputies were Boris Berman and Sergey Shpigelglas." Pauker was a barber from Budapest, who connected with the communists while he was a Russian POW in 1916. Initially, he was in charge of the Kremlin security and later became the head of the operations section of the NKVD.[\[47\]](#) Of course, due to secrecy and the non-approachability of these highly placed individuals, it is difficult to judge them conclusively. Take, for instance, Naum (Leonid) Etingon, who orchestrated the murder of Trotsky and was the organizer of the "Cambridge Five" espionage ring and who oversaw the nuclear espionage after the war — a true ace of espionage.[\[48\]](#)

Or take Lev Feldbin (he used a catchy pseudonym of 'Aleksandr Orlov'). A prominent and long-serving Chekist, he headed the economic section of the foreign department of GPU, that is, he supervised all foreign trade of the USSR. He was a trusted agent, of those who were instructed in the shroud of full secrecy on how "to extract false confessions [from the victims]." "Many [of the NKVD investigators] ended up being subordinate to him."[\[49\]](#) And yet he was completely hidden from the public and became famous only later, when he defected to the West. And how many such posts were there?

Or take Mikhail Koltsov-Fridlyand ("the political advisor" to the Republican government of Spain)[\[50\]](#), who took part in some of the major GPU adventures.

M. Berman was assigned as deputy to the Narkom of Internal Affairs Ezhov within three days after the latter was installed on September 27, 1936. Still, Berman remained the director of the GULag.[\[51\]](#) And along with Ezhov, came his handymen. Mikhail Litvin, his long-time associate in the Central Committee of the party, became the director of the personnel department of the NKVD; by May 1937 he rose to the unmatched rank of director of the Secret Political section of the Main Directorate of State Security of the NKVD. In 1931-36, Henrikh Lyushkov was the deputy director of that section; he deserted to Japan in 1938 and was then killed by a Japanese bullet in 1945 — by the end of the war the Japanese did not want to give him back and had no option but shoot him. In this way, we can extensively describe the careers of each of them. In the same section,

Aleksandr Radzivilovsky was an “agent for special missions.” Another long-time Ezhov colleague, Isaak Shapiro, was Ezhov’s personal assistant from 1934, and then he became the director of the NKVD Secretariat, and later was the director of the infamous Special Section of the Main Directorate of State Security of the NKVD.[\[52\]](#)

In December 1936, among the heads of ten sections (for secrecy, designated only by number) of the Main Directorate of State Security of the NKVD, we see seven Jews: the Security section (section #1)—K. Pauker; Counter-Intelligence (3) — L. Mironov; Special section (5)—I. Leplevsky; Transport (6)—A. Shanin; Foreign section (7) — A. Slutsky; Records and Registration (8)—V. Tsesarsky; Prisons (10)—Ya. Veinshtok. Over the course of the meat-grinding year of 1937 several other Jews occupied posts of directors of those sections: A. Zalpeter—Operations section (2); Ya. Agranov, followed by M. Litvin—Secret Political section (4); A Minaev-Tsikanovsky—Counter-Intelligence (3); and I. Shapiro – Special section (9).[\[53\]](#)

I named the leadership of the GULag in my book, ***GULag Archipelago***. Yes, there was a large proportion of Jews among its command. (Portraits of the directors of construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, which I reproduced from the Soviet commemorative corpus of 1936, caused outrage: they claimed that I have selected the Jews only on purpose. But I did not select them, I’ve just reproduced the photographs of ***all the High Directors*** of the ***BelBaltlag*** [White Sea - Baltic Canal camp administration] from that immortal book. Am I guilty that they had turned out to be Jews? Who had selected them for those posts? Who is guilty?) I will now add information about three prominent men, whom I did not know then. Before the ***BelBaltlag***, one Lazar Kogan worked as the head of the GULag; Zinovy Katsnelson was the deputy head of the GULag from 1934 onward; Izrail Pliner was the head of the GULag from 1936, and later he oversaw the completion of construction of the Moscow-Volga Canal (1937).[\[54\]](#)

It can’t be denied that History elevated many Soviet Jews into the ranks of the arbiters of the fate of all Russians.

Never publicized information about events of different times flows from different sources: about the regional ***Plenipotentiaries of GPU-NKVD*** in the 1930s (before 1937). The names of their offices fully deserved to be written in capital letters, for it was

precisely them and not the secretaries of the **obkoms**, who were the supreme masters of their **oblasts**, masters of the life and death of any inhabitant, who reported directly only to the central NKVD in Moscow. The full names of some of them are known, while only initials remain from others; and still of others, we know only their last names. They moved from post to post, between different provinces. (If we could only find the dates and details of their service! Alas, all this was done in secret). And in all of the 1930s, many Jews remained among those provincial lords. According to the recently published data, in the regional organs of State Security, not counting the Main Directorate of State Security, there were 1,776 Jews (7.4% of the total members serving).[\[55\]](#)

A few Jewish plenipotentiaries are listed here: in Belorussia – Izrail Leplevsky (brother of the deputy General Prosecutor Grigory Leplevsky, we already saw him in the Cheka; later, he worked in a senior post in the GPU as a Commissar of State Security of 2nd Rank; and now we see him as the Narkom of Internal Affairs of Belorussia from 1934 to 1936); in the Western Oblast – I.M. Blat, he later worked in Chelyabinsk; in the Ukraine – Z. Katsnelson, we saw him in the Civil War all around the country, from the Caspian Sea to the White Sea. Now he was the deputy head of the GULag; later we see him as Deputy Narkom of Internal Affairs of Ukraine; in 1937 he was replaced by Leplevsky. We see D.M. Sokolinsky first in Donetsk Oblast and later in Vinnitsa Oblast; L.Ya. Faivilovich and Fridberg – in the Northern Caucasus; M.G. Raev-Kaminsky and Purnis – in Azerbaijan; G. Rappoport – in Stalingrad Oblast; P.Sh. Simanovsky – in Orlov Oblast; Livshits – in Tambov Oblast; G.Ya. Abrampolsky – in Gorkov Oblast; A.S. Shiyron, supervising the round-up of the dispossessed kulaks – in Arkhangel Oblast; I.Z. Ressin – in the German Volga Republic; Zelikman – in Bashkiriya; N. Raysky – in Orenburg Oblast; G.I. Shklyar – in Sverdlovsk Oblast; L.B. Zalin – in Kazakhstan; Krukovsky – in Central Asia; Trotsky – in Eastern Siberia, and Rutkovsky – in the Northern Krai.

All these high placed NKVD officials were tossed from one oblast to another in exactly the same manner as the secretaries of obkoms. Take, for instance, Vladimir Tsesarsky: was plenipotentiary of the GPU-NKVD in Odessa, Kiev and in the Far East. By 1937 he had risen to the head of the Special section of the Main Directorate of State Security of the NKVD (just before Shapiro). Or look at S. Mironov-Korol: in 1933-36 he was the head of the Dnepropetrovsk GPU-NKVD; in 1937 he was in charge of the Western Siberian NKVD; he also served in the central apparatus of the GPU-NKVD.[\[56\]](#) In the mid-1930s, we see L. Vul as the head of Moscow and later of Saratov Police. The plenipotentiary in Moscow was L. Belsky (after serving in Central Asia); later, he had

risen to the head of the Internal Service Troops of the NKVD. In the 1930s we see many others: Foshan was in charge of the border troops; Meerson was the head of the Economic Planning section of the NKVD; L.I. Berenzon and later L.M. Abramson headed the finance department of the GULag; and Abram Flikser headed the personnel section of the GULag. All these are disconnected pieces of information, not amenable to methodical analysis. Moreover, there were special sections in each provincial office of the NKVD. Here is another isolated bit of information: Yakov Broverman was the head of Secretariat of the Special Section of the NKVD in Kiev; he later worked in the same capacity in the central NKVD apparatus.[\[57\]](#)

Later, in 1940, when the Soviets occupied the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, the head of the Dvinsk NKVD was one Kaplan. He dealt so harshly with the people there, that in 1941, when the Red Army had hardly left and before the arrival of Germans, there was an explosion of public outrage against the Jews.

In the novel by D.P. Vitkovsky, *Half-life*, there is a phrase about the Jewish looks of investigator, Yakovlev (the action is set during Khrushchev's regime). Vitovsky put it rather harshly so that Jews, who by the end of the 1960s were already on the way of breaking away from communism and in their new political orientation developed sympathy to any camp memoirs, were nonetheless repulsed by such a description. I remember V. Gershuni asked me how many *other* Jewish investigators did Vitovsky come across during his 30-year-long ordeal?

What an astonishing forgetfulness betrayed by that rather innocent slip! Would not it have been more appropriate to mention not the "30 years" but 50 years, or, at least, 40 years? Indeed, Vitovsky might not have encountered many Jewish investigators during *his last thirty* years, from the end of the 1930s (though they could still be found around even in the 1960s). Yet Vitovsky was persecuted by the Organs for *forty* years; he survived the Solovki camp; and he apparently did not forget the time when a Russian investigator was a less frequent sight than a Jewish or a Latvian one.

Nevertheless, Gershuni was right in implying that all these outstanding and not so outstanding posts were fraught with death for their occupants; the more so, the closer it was to 1937-38.

Our arbiters confidently ruled from their heights and when they were suddenly delivered a blow, it must have seemed to them like the collapse of the universe, like the end of the world. Wasn't there anyone among them before the onslaught who reflected on the usual fate of revolutionaries?

Among the major communist functionaries who perished in 1937-38, the Jews comprise an enormous percentage. For example, a modern historian writes that if "from 1 January 1935 to 1 January 1938 the members of this nationality headed more than 50% of the main structural units of the central apparatus of the people's commissariat of internal affairs, then by 1 January 1939 they headed only 6%." [58]

Using numerous "execution lists" that were published over the recent decades, and the biographical tomes of the modern *Russian Jewish Encyclopedia*, we are able to trace to some degree the fates of those outstanding and powerful Chekists, Red commanders, Soviet party officials, diplomats, and others, whom we mentioned in the previous chapters of this book.

Among the Chekists the destruction was particularly overwhelming (the names of those *executed* are italicized):

G.Ya. Abrampolsky; L.M. Abramson, died in prison in 1939; *Yakov Agranov, 1938; [59] Abram Belenky, 1941; Lev Belsky-Levin, 1941; Matvey Berman, 1939; Boris Berman, 1939; Iosif Blat, 1937; Ya. Veinshtok, 1939; Leonid Vul, 1938, Mark Gai-Shtoklyand, 1937; Semyon Gendin, 1939; Benjamin Gerson, 1941; Lev Zadov-Zinkovsky, 1938; Lev Zalin-Levin, 1940; A. Zalpeter, 1939; Lev Zakharov-Meyer, 1937; N.Zelikman, 1937; Aleksandr Ioselevich, 1937, Zinovy Katsnelson, 1938; Lazar Kogan, 1939; Mikhail Koltsov-Fridlyand, 1940; Georg Krukovsky, 1938; Izrail Leplevsky, 1938; Natan Margolin, 1938; A. Minaev-Tsikanovsky, 1939; Lev Mironov-Kagan, 1938; Sergey Mironov-Korol, 1940; Karl Pauker, 1937; Izrail Pliner, 1939; Mikhail Raev-Kaminsky, 1939; Aleksandr Radzivilovsky, 1940; Naum Raysky-Lekhtman, 1939; Grigoriy Rappoport, 1938; Ilya Ressin, 1940; A. Rutkovsky; *Pinkhus Simanovsky, 1940; Abram Slutsky, poisoned in 1938; David Sokolinsky, 1940; Mikhail Trilisser; Leonid Fayvilovich, 1936; Vladimir Tsesarsky, 1940; A. Shanin, 1937; Isaak Shapiro, 1940; Evsey Shirvindt, 1938; Grigoriy Shklyar; Sergey Shpigelglas, 1940; Genrikh Yagoda, 1938.**

Nowadays entire directories, containing lists of the highest officials of the Central Apparatus of the Main Directorate of State Security of the NKVD who fell during the Ezhov's period of executions and repressions, are published. There we see many more Jewish names.[\[60\]](#)

But only accidentally, thanks to the still unbridled *glasnost* that began in the beginning of the 1990s, we learn about several mysterious biographies formerly shrouded in secrecy. For example, from 1937, professor Grigory Mayranovsky, a specialist in poisons, headed the "Laboratory X" in the Special Section of Operations Technology of the NKVD, which carried out death sentences through injections with poisons by "the direct decision of the government in 1937-47 and in 1950"; the executions were performed in a special prisoner cell at "Laboratory X" as well as abroad even in the 1960s and 1970s.[\[61\]](#) Mayranovsky was arrested only in 1951; from his cell he wrote to Beria: "Dozens of sworn enemies of the Soviet Union, including all kinds of nationalists, were destroyed by my hand."[\[62\]](#) And from the astonishing disclosure in 1990 we learned that the famous *mobile gas chambers* were invented, as it turns out, not by Hitler during the World War II, but in the Soviet NKVD in 1937 by Isai Davidovich Berg, the head of the administrative and maintenance section of the NKVD of Moscow Oblast (sure, he was not alone in that enterprise, but he organized the whole business). This is why it is also important to know who occupied middle-level posts. It turns out, that I.D. Berg was entrusted with carrying out the sentences of the "troika" of the NKVD of Moscow Oblast; he dutifully performed his mission, which involved shuttling prisoners to the execution place. But when three "troikas" began to work simultaneously in the Moscow Oblast, the executioners became unable to cope with the sheer number of executions. Then they invented a time-saving method: the victims were stripped naked, tied, mouths plugged, and thrown into a closed truck, outwardly disguised as a bread truck. On the road the exhaust fumes were redirected into the prisoner-carrying compartment, and by the time the van arrived to the burial ditch, the prisoners were "ready." (Well, Berg himself was shot in 1939, not for those evil deeds, of course, but for "the anti-Soviet conspiracy". In 1956 he was rehabilitated without any problem, though the story of his murderous invention was kept preserved and protected in the records of his case and only recently discovered by journalists)[\[63\]](#)

There are so many individuals with outstanding lives and careers in the list above! Bela Kun, the Butcher of Crimea, himself fell at that time, and with him the lives of twelve Commissars of the communist government of Budapest ended.[\[64\]](#)

However, it would be inappropriate to consider the expulsion of Jews from the **punitive organs** as a form of persecution. There was no anti-Jewish motif in those events. (Notwithstanding, that if Stalin's praetorians valued not only their present benefits and power but also the opinion of the people whom they governed, they should have left the NKVD and not have waited until they were kicked out. Still, this wouldn't have spared many of them death, but surely it would have spared them the stigma?) The notion of purposeful anti-Jewish purge doesn't hold water: "according to available data, at the end of the 1930s the Jews were one of the few national minorities, belonging to which did not constitute a "crime" for an NKVD official. There were still no regulations on national and personnel policy in the state security agencies that was enforced ... from the end of the 1940s to the early 1950s"[65]

Many Party activists fell under the destructive wave of 1937-1938. From 1936-37 the composition of the Soviet of People's Commissars began to change noticeably as the purges during the pre-war years ran through the prominent figures in the people's commissariats. The main personage behind collectivization, Yakovlev, had met his bullet; the same happened to his comrades-in-arms, Kalmanovich and Rukhimovich, and many others. The meat-grinder devoured many old "honored" Bolsheviki, such as the long-retired Ryazanov or the organizer of the murder of the Tsar Goloshchekin, not to mention Kamenev and Zinovyev. (Lazar Kaganovich was spared although, he himself was the "iron broom" in several purges during 1937-38; for example, they called his swift purge of the city of Ivanov the "Black Tornado.")[66]

They offer us the following interpretation: "This is a question about the victims of the Soviet dictatorship; they were used by it and then mercilessly discarded when their services became redundant." [67] What a great argument! So for twenty years these powerful Jews were really **used**? Yet weren't they themselves the zealous cogs in the **mechanism of that very dictatorship** right up to the very time when their "services became redundant"? Did not they make the great contribution to the destruction of religion and culture, the intelligentsia, and the multi-million peasantry?

A great many Red Army commanders fell under the axe. "By the summer of 1938 without exception all... commanders of military districts ... who occupied these posts by June 1937 disappeared without a trace." The Political Administration of the Red Army "suffered the highest losses from the terror" during the massacre of 1937, after the

suicide of Gamarnik. Of the highest political officers of the Red Army, death claimed all 17 army commissars, 25 out of 28 corps commissars, and 34 out of 36 brigade (divisional) commissars.[\[68\]](#) We see a significant percentage of Jews in the now-published lists of military chiefs executed in 1937-38.[\[69\]](#)

Grigory Shtern had a very special military career; he advanced along the political officer's path. During the Civil War he was military commissar at regimental, brigade, and divisional levels. In 1923-25 he was the head of all special detachments in the Khorezm [a short-lived republic after the Bolshevik revolution] troops during the suppression of rebellions in Central Asia. Until 1926, he was the head of the political administration division. Later he studied at the military academy for senior military officers [and thus became eligible for proper *military* posts]; in 1929-34 he was a "military advisor to the Republican government in Spain" (not to be confused with Manfred Shtern, who also distinguished himself among the Red Spaniards under the alias of "General Kleber"). Later he was the Chief of Staff of the Far Eastern Front and conducted bloody battles at Lake Khasan in 1938 together with Mekhlis, at the same time conspiring against Marshall Blücher, whom he ruined and whose post of the front commander he took over after the arrest of the latter. In March 1939, at the 18th Party Congress, he made this speech: "Together we have destroyed a bunch of good-for-nothings— the Tukhachevskys, Gamarniks, Uborevichs [former Soviet Marshalls] and similar others." Well, he himself was shot later, in autumn 1941.[\[70\]](#) Shtern's comrade-in-arms in aviation, Yakov Smushkevich, also had a head-spinning career. He too began as a political officer (until the mid-1930s); then he studied at the academy for top officers. In 1936-37 he had also fought in Spain, in aviation, and was known as "General Douglas". In 1939 he was commander of the aviation group at Khalkhin Gol [on the Manchurian-Mongolian border, site of Soviet-Japanese battles won by the Russians]. After that he rose to the commander of all air forces of the Red Army – the General Inspector of the Air Force; he was arrested in May 1941 and executed in the same year.[\[71\]](#)

The wave of terror spared neither administrators, nor diplomats; almost all of the diplomats mentioned above were executed.

Let's name those party, military, diplomatic, and managerial figures whom we mentioned before on these pages who now were persecuted (the names of the *executed* are italicized):

Samuil Agursky, arrested in 1938; **Lazar Aronshtam, 1938; Boris Belenky, 1938; Grigory Belenky, 1938; Zakhar Belenky, 1940; Mark Belenky, 1938; Moris Belotsky, 1938; German Bitker, 1937; Aron Vainshtein, 1938; Yakov Vesnik, 1938; Izrail Veitser, 1938; Abram Volpe, 1937;** Yan Gamarnik, committed suicide in 1937; **Mikhail Gerchikov, 1937;** Evgeny Gnedin, arrested in 1939; **Philip Goloshchekin, 1941; Ya. Goldin, 1938;** Lev Gordon, arrested in 1939; **Isaak Grinberg, 1938; Yakov Gugel, 1937; Aleksandr Gurevich, 1937; Sholom Dvoilatsky, 1937; Maks Deych, 1937; Semyon Dimanshtein, 1938; Efim Dreitser, 1936; Semyon Zhukovsky, 1940; Samuil Zaks, 1937;** Zinovy Zangvil, **Isaak Zelensky, 1938; Grigory Zinovyev, 1936; S. Zorin-Gomberg, 1937; Boris Ippo, 1937;** Mikhail Kaganovich, committed suicide in expectation of arrest, 1941; **Moisey Kalmanovich, 1937; Lev Kamenev, 1936; Abram Kamensky, 1938; Grigoriy Kaminsky, 1938;** Ilya Kit-Viytenko, arrested in 1937 and spent 20 years in camps; **I.M. Kleiner, 1937; Evgeniya Kogan, 1938; Aleksandr Krasnoshchyokov-Tobinson, 1937; Lev Kritsman, 1937; Solomon Kruglikov, 1938; Vladimir Lazarevich, 1938; Mikhail Landa, 1938; Ruvim Levin, 1937; Yakov Livshits, 1937;** Moisey Lisovsky, arrested in 1938; **Frid Markus, 1938; Lev Maryasin, 1938; Grigory Melnichansky, 1937;** Aleksandr Minkin-Menson, died in camp in 1955; **Nadezhda Ostrovskaya, 1937; Lev Pechersky, 1937; I. Pinson, 1936; Iosif Pyatnitsky-Tarshis, 1938; Izrail Razgon, 1937; Moisey Rafes, 1942;** Grigory Roginsky, 1939; **Marsel Rozenberg, 1938; Arkady Rozengolts, 1938; Naum Rozovsky, 1942; Boris Royzenman, 1938;** E. Rubinin, spent 15 years in camps; **Yakov Rubinov, 1937; Moisey Rukhimovich, 1938; Oskar Ryvkin, 1937; David Ryazanov, 1938; Veniamin Sverdlov, 1939; Boris Skvirsky, 1941; Iosif Slavin, 1938;** Grigoriy Sokolnikov-Brilliant, killed in prison, 1939; Isaak Solts, died in confinement in 1940; **Naum Sokrin, 1938; Lev Sosnovsky, 1937; Artur Stashevsky-Girshfeld, 1937; Yury Steklov-Nakhamkis, 1941; Nikolay Sukhanov-Gimmer, 1940; Boris Tal, 1938; Semyon Turovsky, 1936; Semyon Uritsky, 1937; Evgeny Fainberg, 1937; Vladimir Feigin, 1937; Boris Feldman, 1937;** Yakov Fishman, arrested in 1937; **Moisey Frumkin, 1938;** Maria Frumkina-Ester, died in camp, 1943; **Leon Khaikis, 1938;** Avenir Khanukaev; Moisey Kharitonov, died in camp, 1948; **Mendel Khataevich, 1937; Tikhon Khvesin, 1938; Iosif Khodorovsky, 1938; Mordukh Khorosh, 1937;** Isay Tsalkovich, arrested in 1937; **Efim Tsetlin, 1937;** Yakov Chubin; N. Chuzhak-Nasimovich; **Lazar Shatskin, 1937; Akhiy Shilman, 1937;** Ierokhim Epshtein, arrested in 1938; **Iona Yakir, 1937; Yakov Yakovlev-Epshtein, 1938; Grigory Shtern, 1941.**

This is indeed a commemoration roster of many top-placed Jews.

Below are the fates of some prominent Russian Jewish socialists, who did not join the Bolsheviks or who even struggled against them.

Boris Osipovich Bogdanov (born 1884) was an Odessan, the grandson and son of lumber suppliers. He graduated from the best commerce school in Odessa. While studying, he joined Social Democrat societies. In June 1905, he was the first civilian who got on board the mutinous battleship, ***Potemkin***, when she entered the port of Odessa; he gave a speech for her crew, urging sailors to join Odessa's labor strike; he delivered letters with appeals to consulates of the European powers in Russia. He avoided punishment by departing for St. Petersburg where he worked in the Social Democratic underground; he was a Menshevik. He was sentenced to two 2-year-long exiles, one after another, to Solvychevodsk and to Vologda. Before the war, he entered the elite of the Menshevik movement; he worked legally on labor questions. In 1915 he became the secretary of the Labor Group at the Military Industrial Committee, was arrested in January 1917 and freed by the February Revolution. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of Petrograd, and regularly chaired its noisy sessions which attracted thousands of people. From June 1917 he was a member of the Bureau of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and persistently opposed ongoing attempts of the Bolsheviks to seize power. After the failed Bolshevik rebellion in July 1917 he accepted the surrender of the squad of sailors besieged in the Petropavlovsk Fortress. After the October coup, in 1918 he was one of the organizers of anti-Bolshevik workers movement in Petrograd. During the Civil War he lived in Odessa. After the Civil War he tried to restart the Menshevik political activity, but at the end of 1920 he was arrested for one year. That was the beginning of many years of unceasing arrests and sentences, exiles and camps, and numerous transfers between different camps — the so-called “Great Road” of so many socialists in the USSR. And all that was just for being a Menshevik in the past and for having Menshevik convictions even though by that time he no longer engaged in politics and during brief respites simply worked on economic posts and just wanted a quiet life; however, he was suspected of economic “sabotage.” In 1922 he requested permission to emigrate, but shortly before departure was arrested again. First he was sent to the Solovki prison camp and later exiled to the Pechora camp [in the Urals]; his sentences were repeatedly extended by three years; he experienced solitary confinement in the Suzdal camp and was repeatedly exiled. In 1931 they attempted to incriminate him in the case of the “All-Soviet Bureau of Mensheviks,” but he was lucky and they left him alone. Yet he was

hauled in again in 1937, imprisoned in the Omsk jail (together with already-imprisoned communists), where he survived non-stop interrogations which sometimes continued without a pause for weeks, at any time of the day or night (there were three shifts of investigators); he served out 7 years in the Kargopol camp (several other Mensheviks were shot there); later he was exiled to Syktyvkar; in 1948 he was again sentenced and exiled to Kazakhstan. In 1956 he was rehabilitated; he died in 1960, a worn-out old man.

Boris Davidovich Kamkov-Kats (born 1885) was the son of a country doctor. From adolescence, he was a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Exiled in 1905 to the Turukhan Krai, he escaped. Abroad, he graduated from the Heidelberg University School of Law. He was a participant in the Zimmerwald [Switzerland] Conference of socialists (1915). After the February Revolution he returned to Russia. He was one of the founders of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party; at the time of the October coup he entered into a coalition with the Bolsheviks. He took part in the dispersal of the Russian Constituent Assembly in January 1918. From April he urged breaking the alliance with the Bolsheviks; in June he already urged “a revolutionary uprising against them. After the failed rebellion of the Socialist Revolutionaries, he went underground. After a brief arrest in 1920, he was arrested again in 1921, and exiled in 1923. Between exiles he spent two years in prison and experienced the same “Great Road.” In 1933 he was exiled to Archangel; he was arrested again in 1937 and executed in 1938.

Abram Rafailovich Gots (born 1882) was the grandson of a millionaire tea merchant, V.Ya. Visotsky. From the age of 14, he was in the the Socialist Revolutionary movement from the very creation of the SR party in 1901 (his brother Mikhail was the party leader). From 1906, he was a terrorist, a member of the militant wing of the SRs. From 1907-1915 he was in hard labor camps; he spent some time sitting in the infamous Aleksandrovsky Central. He was a participant of the February Revolution in Irkutsk and later in Petrograd. He was a member of the executive committees of the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies of Petrograd and of the Soviet Peasant’s Deputies and a member of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. From 25 October 1917 he headed the anti-Bolshevik Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland and Revolution. During the Civil War he continued his struggle against Bolsheviks. In 1920 he was arrested; at the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries in 1922 he was sentenced to death, commuted to 5 years of imprisonment. Later he experienced the “Great Road” of endless new prison terms and exiles. In 1939 he was sentenced to 25 years in the camps and died in one a year later.

Mikhail Yakovlevich Gendelman (born 1881) was an attorney-at-law and a Socialist Revolutionary from 1902. He participated in the February Revolution in Moscow, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies, a member of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, and a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. On 25 October 1917, he left the meeting of the 2nd All-Russian Congress of the Soviets in protest against the Bolsheviks. He was elected to the Constituent Assembly and participated in its only session, on 5 January 1918. Later in Samara he participated in the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly. He was arrested in 1921; in 1922 he was sentenced to death at the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, commuted to 5 years in prison. After numerous prison terms and exiles, he was shot in 1938.

Mikhail Isaakovich Liber-Goldman (born 1880) was one of the founders of the Bund (1897), a member of the Central Committee of the [General Jewish Labor] Bund of Lithuania, Poland and Russia in Emigration; he represented the Bund at the congresses of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. He participated in the revolution of 1905-06. In 1910 he was exiled for three years to Vologda Province, fled soon thereafter and emigrated again. He was a steady and uncompromising opponent of Lenin. He returned to Russia after 1914, and joined the Socialist "Defender" movement ("Defense of the Motherland in War"). After the February revolution, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies, and later he was a member of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. (He left the latter post after the October coup). Then he briefly participated in the Social Democratic Workers' Party of the Mensheviks. He worked on economic positions and was one of the leaders of the Menshevik underground in the USSR. His "Great Road" arrests and exiles began in 1923. He was arrested again and executed in Alma-Ata in 1937.

For many, there was a similar fate, with repeated sentences and exiles, right up to the climax of 1937-38.

Yet in those years purges swept all over the country, destroying the lives of countless ordinary people, including Jews, people who had nothing to do with politics or authority. Here are some of the Jews who perished:

Nathan Bernshtein (born 1876) a music scholar and critic; he taught the history of music and aesthetics and wrote a number of books; arrested in 1937, he died in prison.

Matvei Bronshtein (born 1906) a talented theoretical physicist, Doctor of Science, who achieved extraordinary results. He was the husband of Lyudmila K. Chukovskaya. Arrested in 1937, he was executed in 1938.

Sergey Ginter (born 1870) an architect and engineer; arrested in 1934, exiled to Siberia, arrested again in 1937 and executed.

Veniamin Zilbermints (born 1887) a mineralogist and geochemist; specialist on rare elements, he laid the foundation for semi-conductor science; he was persecuted in 1938.

Mikhail Kokin (born 1906) an Orientalist, Sinologist and historian, arrested in 1937 and executed.

Ilya Krichevsky (born 1885) a microbiologist, immunologist (also trained in physics and mathematics), Doctor of Medical Sciences, founder of a scientific school, chairman of the National Association of Microbiologists; arrested in 1938 and died in 1943.

Solomon Levit (born 1894), geneticist; he studied the role of heredity and environment in pathology. Arrested in 1938 and died in prison.

Iokhiel Ravrebe (born 1883), an Orientalist, Judaist, one of the founders of the reestablished Jewish Ethnographic Society in 1920. Accused of creating a Zionist organization, he was arrested in 1937 and died in prison.

Vladimir Finkelshtein (born 1896), a chemical physicist, professor, corresponding member of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences; he had many works in applied electrical chemistry; persecuted in 1937.

Ilya Khetsrov (born 1887), a hygienist and epidemiologist; he studied environmental hygiene, protection of water resources, and community hygiene. Arrested in 1938 and executed.

Nakhum Schwartz (born 1888), a psychiatrist, studied Jewish psychology. In 1921-23 he taught Hebrew and wrote poetry in Hebrew. Accused of Zionist activity, he was arrested in 1937 and later died in prison.

Here are the fates of the three brothers *Shpilrein* from Rostov-on-Don. **Jan (born 1887)** was a mathematician; he applied mathematical methods in electrical and heat engineering, he was professor at the Bauman Moscow State Technical University and later the dean of its Electrical Engineering Department. He was persecuted and died in 1937. **Isaak (born 1891)** was a psychologist, Doctor of Philosophy. In 1927 he became the head of the All-Russian Society of Psychotechnology and Applied Psychophysiology; he performed extensive psychological analysis of professions and optimization of working environment. He was arrested in 1935 and later executed. **Emil (born 1899)** was a biologist, the dean of the Biology Department of Rostov University. He was shot in 1937.

Leonid Yurovsky (born 1884) Doctor of Political Economy, one of the authors of the monetary reform of 1922-24. A close friend to A.V. Chayanov and N.D. Kondratyev [prominent Russian scientists], he was arrested in 1930, freed in 1935, then arrested again in 1937 and executed.

Despite the overwhelming percentage of high-placed, “aristocratic” Jews, who fell under Stalin’s axe, the free Western press did not perceive the events as specifically the persecution of Jews: the Jews were massacred simply because of their abundance in the top tiers of the Soviet hierarchy. Indeed, we read such a stipulation in the collection of works *Evreysky Mir [The Jewish World]* (1939): “No doubt that the Jews in the USSR have numerous opportunities, which they did not have before the revolution, and which they do not have even now in some democratic countries. They can become generals, ministers, diplomats, professors, the most high-ranking and the most servile aristocrats.” Opportunities but “in no way rights”, because of the absence of such rights, “Yakir, Garmanik, Yagoda, Zinovyev, Radek, Trotsky” and the rest fell from their heights and lost their very lives.”[\[72\]](#) Still, no nationality enjoyed such a right under the communist dictatorship; it was all about the ability to cling to power.

The long-time devoted socialist, emigrant S. Ivanovich (S.O. Portugeis), admitted: “Under the Tsars, the Jews were indeed restricted in their ‘right of living’; yet their ‘right to live’ was incomparably greater than under Bolshevism.” Indeed. However, at the same time, despite being perfectly aware of collectivization, he writes that the “awkward attempts to establish ‘socialism’ in Russia took the heaviest toll from the Jews”; that “the

scorpions of Bolshevism did not attack any other people with such brutal force as they attacked Jews.”[\[73\]](#)

Yet during the Great Plague of dekulakization, it was not thousands but millions of peasants who lost both their ‘right of living’ and the ‘right to live’. And yet all the Soviet pens (with so many Jews among them) kept complete silence about this cold-blooded destruction of the Russian peasantry. In unison with them, the entire West was silent. Could it be really out of the lack of knowledge? Or was it for the sake of protecting the Soviet regime? Or was it simply because of indifference? Why, this is almost inconceivable: 15 million peasants were not simply deprived of entering the institutes of higher learning or of the right to study in graduate school, or to occupy nice posts — no! They were dispossessed and driven like cattle out of their homes and sent to certain death in the taiga and tundra. And the Jews, among other passionate urban activists, enthusiastically took the reins of the collectivization into their hands, leaving behind them persistent evil memory. And who had raised their voices in defense of the peasants *then*? And now, in 1932-33, in Russia and Ukraine — on the very outskirts of Europe, five to six million people died from hunger! And the free press of the free world maintained utter silence... And even if we take into account the extreme Leftist bias of the contemporary Western press and its devotion to the socialist “experiment” in the USSR, it is still impossible not to be amazed at the degree to which they could go to be blind and insensitive to the sufferings of even tens of millions of fellow humans.

If you don’t see it, your heart doesn’t cry.

During the 1920s, the Ukrainian Jews departed from their pro-Russian-statehood mood of 1917-1920, and by the end of the 1920s “the Jews are among Ukrainian chauvinists and separatists, wielding enormous influence there—but only in the cities.”[\[74\]](#) We can find such a conclusion: the destruction of Ukrainian-language culture in 1937 was in part aimed against Jews, who formed “a genuine union” with Ukrainians “for the development of local culture in Ukrainian language.”[\[75\]](#) Nevertheless, such a union in cultural circles could not soften the attitudes of the wider Ukrainian population toward Jews. We have already seen in the previous chapter how in the course of collectivization “a considerable number of Jewish communists functioned in rural locales as commanders and lords over life and death.”[\[76\]](#) This placed a new scar on Ukrainian-Jewish relations, already tense for centuries. And although the famine was a direct result of Stalin’s policy, and not only in Ukraine (it brutally swept across the Volga Region and the Urals), the suspicion widely arose among Ukrainians that the entire

Ukrainian famine was the work of the Jews. Such an interpretation has long existed (and the Ukrainian émigré press adhered to it until the 1980s). “Some Ukrainians are convinced that 1933 was the revenge of the Jews for the times of Khmelnytsky.”[\[77\]](#) [A 17th century Cossack leader who conducted bloody anti-Jewish pogroms in Ukraine].

Don't expect to reap wheat where the weed was sown. The supreme authority of so many Jews along with only a small number of Jews being touched by the grievances which afflicted the rest of population could lead to all sorts of interpretations.

Jewish authors who nervously kept an eye on anti-Semitism in the USSR did not notice this trampled ash, however, and made rather optimistic conclusions. For instance, Solomon Schwartz writes: “From the start of the 1930s, anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union quickly abated”, and “in the mid-1930s it lost the character of a mass phenomenon ...anti-Semitism reached the all-time low point.” He explains this, in part, as the result of the end of the NEP (the New Economic Policy) and thereby the disappearance of Jewish businessmen and petty Jewish merchants. Later, “forced industrialization and lightning-fast collectivization,” which he favorably compares with a kind of “shock therapy, i.e., treatment of mental disorders with electric shocks,” was of much help. In addition he considers that in those years the ruling communist circles began to struggle with Great-Russian “chauvinism.” (Well, they did not begin; they just continued the policy of Lenin's intolerance). Schwartz soundly notes that the authorities were “persistently silent about anti-Semitism”, “in order to avoid the impression that the struggle against Great-Russian chauvinism is a struggle for the Jews.”[\[78\]](#)

In January 1931, first the *New York Times*,[\[79\]](#) and later the entire world press published a sudden and ostentatious announcement by Stalin to the Jewish Telegraph Agency: “The Communists, as consistent internationalists, cannot help but be an irreconcilable and sworn enemy of anti-Semitism. In the USSR, anti-Semitism is strictly prosecuted by law as a phenomenon deeply hostile to the Soviet order. Active anti-Semites are punished, according to the laws of the USSR, with the death penalty.”[\[80\]](#) See, he addressed the democratic West and did not mind specifying the punishment. And it was only one nationality in the USSR that was set apart by being granted such a protection. And world opinion was completely satisfied with that.

But characteristically, the announcement by the Leader *was not printed* in the Soviet press (because of his cunning reservations); it was produced for export and he hid this

position from his own citizens; in the USSR it was only printed at the end of 1936.[\[81\]](#) Then Stalin sent Molotov to make a similar announcement at the Congress of Soviets.

A contemporary Jewish author, erroneously interpreting Molotov's speech, suggests that speaking on behalf of the government he threatened to punish "anti-Semitic feelings" with death.[\[82\]](#) **Feelings!** No, Molotov did not mention anything like that; he did not depart from Stalin's policy of persecuting "active anti-Semites." We are not aware of any instance of death penalty in the 1930s for anti-Semitism, but people **were** sentenced for it according to the Penal Code. (People whispered that **before** the revolution the authorities did not punish as harshly even for libels against the Tsar.)

But now S. Schwartz observes a change: "In the second half of the 1930s, these sentiments [people's hostility toward Jews] became much more prevalent ... particularly in the major centers, where the Jewish intelligentsia and semi-intelligentsia were concentrated.... Here again the legend about "Jewish domination" gradually began to come back to life, and they began to spread exaggerated notions about the role of Jews in the middle and top ranks of government." Well, whether or not it was really a legend, he immediately attempted to explain it, though in a quite naïve manner, suggesting the same old excuse that the Jewish intelligentsia and semi-intelligentsia simply had almost no other source of livelihood under Soviet conditions except the government service."[\[83\]](#)

This is so shameful to read. What oppression and despair! See, they had almost no other sources of livelihood, only privileged ones. And the rest of population was absolutely free to toil on kolkhoz fields, to dig pits, and to roll barrows at the great construction projects of the 5-year plans...

In official policy, nothing had changed in the 1930s in the Jewish Question from the time of the revolution; no official hostility toward Jews existed. Indeed, they used to dream and proclaim about the impending end of all national conflicts.

And the foreign Jewish circles did not and could not sense any oppression of the Jews in the USSR. In the article ***The Jews and the Soviet Dictatorship***, S. Ivanovich wrote: "Abroad, many believe that there is no anti-Semitism in Russia, and on that basis they are favorably disposed toward the Soviet authorities. But in Russia they know that this is not true." However, Jews "pray for the long-life of the Soviet regime ... and are strongly afraid of its demise," for "Stalin protects them from pogroms and hopefully would

protect them in future.” The author sympathizes with such an opinion, although he considers it flawed: “If the Bolshevik dictatorship falls, no doubt there will be wild anti-Semitic ravages and violence ...The fall of the Soviet regime would be a catastrophe for the Jews, and any friend of the Jewish people should reject such a prospect with horror”; yet at the same time he remarks that “the Soviet dictatorship is already embarrassed by the Judeophilia and Jewish dominance attributed to it.”[\[84\]](#)

The resolution on Stalin’s report at the 16th Party Congress provided the general political direction for the 1930s, calling for an energetic struggle against chauvinism, and primarily against the ***Great Russian chauvinism***. The Party language was easily understood by all. And for several more years this struggle was enthusiastically carried on. Yet what kind of Stalinist madness was it? By that time there was no trace left of the Great Russian chauvinism. Stalin was not able to envision the immediate future [of WWII] – when only Russian patriotism would save him from imminent doom.

Then they have already started to sound the alarm about the danger of any rebirth of Russian patriotism. In 1939, S. Ivanovich claimed to notice a trend “of this dictatorship returning to some national traditions of Moscovite Russ and Imperial Russia”; he caustically cited several stamps that entered popular discourse around that time such as the “‘love for the Motherland’, ‘national pride’ etc.”[\[85\]](#)

See, this is where the mortal danger for Russia lurked then, immediately before Hitler’s assault – in that ugly Russian patriotism!

This alarm did not leave the minds of Jewish publicists for the next half century, even when they looked back at that war, when mass patriotism blazed up, at the war which saved Soviet Jewry. So in 1988 we read in an Israeli magazine: “Vivid traditions of the Black Hundreds ... were the foundation of ‘vivifying Soviet patriotism’, which blossomed later, during the Great Patriotic War”[\[86\]](#) [the official Russian designation for the Eastern front in WWII].

Looking back at that war of 1941-1945, let’s admit that this is a highly ungrateful judgment.

So, even the purest and most immaculate Russian patriotism has no right to exist – not now, not ever?

Why is it so? And why it is that Russian patriotism is thus singled out?

An important event in Jewish life in the USSR was the closing of the YevSek at the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks in 1930. Though in accord with the Soviet blueprint, this act blocked any separate development of a Jewish society having “national, cultural, and individual Jewish autonomy.” From now on Jewish cultural development lay within the Soviet mainstream. In 1937-38 the leading Yevseks – Dimanshtein, Litvakov, Frumkina-Ester and their associates Motl Kiper, Itskhok Sudarsky, Aleksandr Chemerissky – who, in words of Yu. Margolina, “in the service of the authorities carried out the greatest pogrom against Jewish culture,”[\[87\]](#) were arrested and soon executed. Many Yevseks, “occupying governing positions in the central and local departments of the Society for Settling Toiling Jews on the Land (OZET) and in the Jewish community, Jewish cultural and educational structures,” also fell under the juggernaut. In 1936-39, the majority of them were persecuted.”[\[88\]](#) The poisonous atmosphere of 1930s now reached these levels too. During open public meetings they began to accuse and expose prominent Jewish communists, who at some time before were members either of the Bund or of the Zionist Socialist Party, or even of Poale-Zion, all of which were crippled under the Soviet regime. Was there anyone, whose past the Bolsheviks did not try to criminalize? “Who have you been *before...*?” In 1938 *Der Emes* was closed also.

What about education? “Right up to 1933 the number of Jewish schools and Jewish students in them increased despite the early (1920s) critique “of nationalistic over-zealousness” in the actions of the *Yevseks* on the ‘forced transition of Jewish education into Yiddish.’”[\[89\]](#) From 1936 to 1939 a “period of accelerated decline and even more accelerated inner impoverishment” of the schools in Yiddish was noted.[\[90\]](#) After 1936-37 “the number of Jewish schools began to decline quickly even in Ukraine and Belorussia”; the desire of parents to send their children to such schools had diminished. “Education in Yiddish was seen as less and less prestigious; there was an effort to give children an education in the Russian language.” Also, from the second half of the 1930s the number of institutions of higher education lecturing in Yiddish began to decline rapidly”; “almost all Jewish institutions of higher education and technical schools were closed by 1937-38.”[\[91\]](#)

At the start of 1930s the Jewish scientific institutes at the academies of science of Ukraine and Belorussia were closed; in Kiev ‘The Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture’ fell into desolation.” And soon after this arrests followed (*Mikhail Kokin* of the Leningrad Institute of Philosophy, literature and History was executed; Iokhiel Rabrebe, formerly of the Petrograd Institute of Higher Jewish Studies, who in the 1930s headed the Jewish Section of the Public Library, was sentenced to 8 years and died in the transit camp).[\[92\]](#)

Persecutions spread to writers in Yiddish: Moyshe Kulbak was persecuted in 1937; Zelik Akselrod, in 1940; Abram Abchuk, a teacher of Yiddish and a critic, in 1937; writer Gertsl Bazov , was persecuted in 1938. Writer I. Kharik and critic Kh. Dunets were persecuted also.

Still, “literature in Yiddish was actively published until the end of the 1930s. Jewish publishers were working in Moscow, Kiev, and Minsk.” Yet what kind of literature was it? In the 1930s “the overwhelming majority of works were written stereotypically, in accordance with the unshakable principles of ‘socialist realism.’”[\[93\]](#) Literature in Yiddish “from the 1930s up to June 1941 ... was marked by the cult of Stalin. Unbridled flattery for Stalin flowed from the bosom of Jewish poetry...”[\[94\]](#) Itsik Feder “managed to light up even official propaganda with lyrical notes. These monstrous sayings are ascribed to his pen: ‘You betrayed your father — this is great!’, and ‘I say ‘Stalin’ but envision the sun.’”[\[95\]](#) Most of these writers, who zealously tried to please Stalin, were arrested ten years later. But some of them, as mentioned above, had already drawn this lot.

Similarly, “the ideological press of official communist doctrine signified for many Jewish artists and sculptors a complete break up, quite often tragic, with the national Jewish traditions.” (Still, what culture in the USSR was not touched by this?) So it comes as little surprise that “the overwhelming majority ... of Jewish theaters devoted much attention to propaganda performances.” This included all 19 aforementioned professional Yiddish theaters and “numerous independent collectives, studios, and circles.”[\[96\]](#)

Concerning Hebrew culture which preserved the national traditions: it was by now conclusively banished and went underground.

It has already been mentioned that the Zionist underground was crushed by the beginning of the 1930s. Many Zionists were already rounded up, but still many others were accused of “the Zionist conspiracy.” Take Pinkhas Dashevsky (from Chapter 8) – in 1933 he was arrested as a Zionist. Pinkhas Krasny was not a Zionist but was listed as such in his death sentence. He was former Minister of Petliura’s Directorate, emigrated but later returned into the USSR. He was executed in 1939. Volf Averbukh, a Poale-Zionist from his youth, left for Israel in 1922, where “he collaborated with the communist press.” In 1930, he was sent back to the USSR, where he was arrested.[\[97\]](#)

“Most of the semi-legal cheder schools and yeshivas were shut down” around that time. Arrests rolled on from the late 1920s in the Hasidic underground. Yakov-Zakharia Maskalik was arrested in 1937, Abrom-Levik Slavin was arrested in 1939. By the end of 1933, “237 synagogues were closed, that is, 57% of all existing in the first years of Soviet authority ... In the mid-1930s, the closure of synagogues accelerated.” From 1929, “the authorities began to impose excessive tax on matzo baking.” In 1937, “the Commission on the Questions of Religions at the Central Executive Committee of the USSR prohibited baking matzo in Jewish religious communities.” In 1937-38 “the majority of clergy of the Jewish religious cult were persecuted. There were no rabbis in the majority of still-functioning synagogues.”[\[98\]](#) “In 1938 a ‘hostile rabbinical nest’ was discovered in the Moscow Central Synagogue; the rabbis and a number of parishioners were arrested.”[\[99\]](#) The Rabbi of Moscow, Shmuel-Leib Medalia, was arrested and executed in 1938. (His son, Moishe Medalia, was arrested at the same time). In 1937, the Rabbi of Saratov, Iosif Bogatin, was arrested.[\[100\]](#)

In the early 1930s, when the Jewish religion was restricted in the USSR, the closing of thousands of Orthodox Christian temples and the destruction of many of them rolled along throughout the entire country. They especially hurried to “liberate” Soviet Moscow from the church; Boris Iofan was in charge of that “reconstruction.” In that bitter and hungry year of devastating breakdown of the country, they promoted projects for a grand Palace of Soviets in place of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. *Izvestiya* reports: “So far, eleven projects are presented at the exhibition. Particularly interesting among them are the works of architects Fridman, B. Iofan, Bronshtein, and Ladovsky.”[\[101\]](#) Later, the arrests reached the architects as well.

The move toward “settling the toiling Jews on the land” gradually became irrelevant for Soviet Jews. “The percentage of Jewish settlers abandoning lands given to them remained high.” In 1930-32, the activity of foreign Jewish philanthropic organizations

such as Agro-Joint, OKG, and EKO in the USSR, had noticeably decreased.” And although in 1933-38 it had still continued within the frameworks of new restrictive agreements, “in 1938 the activity ceased completely.” “In the first half of 1938, first the OZET and then the Committee for Settling the Toiling Jews on the Land (KomZET) were dissolved. The overwhelming majority of remaining associates of these organizations, who were still at liberty, were persecuted.” By 1939, “the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine decided to liquidate ...’the artificially created national Jewish districts and boroughs.”[\[102\]](#)

Nonetheless, the idea of a Jewish colony in Birobidzhan was not abandoned in the 1930s and was even actively advanced by government. In order to put spirit into the masses, the authorities staged the Second All-Union Congress of the OZET in Moscow in December 1930.[\[103\]](#) By the end of 1931, the general population of that oblast was 45,000 with only 5,000 Jews among them, although whole villages with homes were built for their settlement and access roads were laid (sometimes by inmates from the camps nearby; for example, the train station of Birobidzhan was constructed in this manner).[\[104\]](#) Yet non-Jewish colonization of the region went faster than Jewish colonization.

In order to set matters right, in autumn of 1931 the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR decreed that another 25,000 Jews should be settled in Birobidzhan during the next two years, after which it would be possible to declare it the Jewish Autonomous Republic. However, in the following years the number of Jews who left exceeded the number of Jews arriving, and by the end of 1933, after six years of colonization, the number of settled Jews amounted only to 8,000; of them only 1,500 lived in rural areas, i.e. worked in kolkhozes; that is, the Jews comprised less than 1/5 of all kolkhoz workers there. (There is also information that the land in the Jewish kolkhozes was fairly often tilled by hired Cossacks and Koreans). The oblast could not even provide enough agricultural products for its own needs.[\[105\]](#)

Nevertheless, in May 1934, when the non-Jewish population had already reached 50,000, Birobidzhan was loudly declared a Jewish Autonomous Oblast. (It still did not qualify for the status of a “republic.”)

Thus, there was no “national enthusiasm among the Jewish masses, which would ease the overcoming of the enormous difficulties inherent in such colonization.” There was no industry in Birobidzhan, and “the economic and social structure” of the settlers

“resembled that of contemporary Jewish towns and shtetls in Ukraine and Belorussia” This was particularly true for the city of Birobidzhan, especially considering “the increased role of the Jews in the local administrative apparatus.”[\[106\]](#)

Culture in Yiddish had certainly developed in the autonomous oblast – there were Jewish newspapers, radio, schools, a theater named after Kaganovich (its director was the future author E. Kazakevich), a library named after Sholem Aleichem, a museum of Jewish culture, and public reading facilities. Perets Markish had published the exultant article, ***A People Reborn***, in the central press.”[\[107\]](#) (In connection with Birobidzhan, let’s note the fate of the demographer Ilya Veitsblit. His position was that “the policy of recruitment of poor urban Jews in order to settle them in rural areas should end”; “there are no declass  individuals among the Jews, who could be suitable for Birobidzhan.” He was arrested in 1933 and likely died in prison).[\[108\]](#)

Yet the central authorities believed that that the colonization should be stimulated even further; and from 1934 they began a near compulsory recruitment among Jewish artisans and workers in the western regions, that is, among the urban population without a slightest knowledge of agriculture. The slogan rang out: “The entire USSR builds the Jewish Autonomous Oblast!” – meaning that recruitment of non-Jewish cadres is needed for quicker development. The ardent Yevsek Dimanshtein wrote that “we do not aim to create a Jewish majority in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast as soon as possible; ... this would contradict to the principles of internationalism.”[\[109\]](#)

But despite all these measures, during the next three years only another 11,000 to eight or nine thousand Jews were added to those already living there; still, most of newcomers preferred to stay in the oblast capital closer to its railroad station and looked for opportunities to escape). Yet as we know, the Bolsheviks may not be defeated or dispirited. So, because of dissatisfaction with the KomZET, in 1936 the “Central Executive Committee of the USSR decided to partially delegate the overseeing of Jewish resettlement in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast to the resettlement department of the NKVD.”[\[110\]](#) In August of 1936, the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR proclaimed that “for the first time in the history of the Jewish people, their ardent desire to have their own homeland has been realized and their own national statehood has been established.”[\[111\]](#) And now they began planning resettlement of 150,000 more Jews to Birobidzhan.

Looking back at it, the Soviet efforts to convert the Jews to agriculture suffered the same defeat as the Tsarist efforts a century before.

In the meantime, the year 1938 approached. KomZET was closed, OZET was disbanded, and the main Yevseks in Moscow and the administrators of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast were arrested. Those Birobidzhan Jews who could left for the cities of the Far East or for Moscow. According to the 1939 Census, the general population of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast consisted of 108,000 people; however, “the number of Jews there remained secret ... the Jewish population of Birobidzhan was still low.” Presumably, eighteen Jewish kolkhozes still existed, of 40-50 families each,[\[112\]](#) but in those kolkhozes ... they conversed and corresponded with the authorities in Russian.

Yet what could Birobidzhan have become for Jews? Just forty-five years later, the Israeli General Beni Peled emphatically explained why neither Birobidzhan nor Uganda could give the Jewish people a sense of connection with the land: “I simply feel that I am not ready to die for a piece of land in Russia, Uganda, or New Jersey!...”[\[113\]](#)

This sense of connection, after thousands of years of estrangement, was restored by Israel.

The migration of Jews to the major cities did not slow down in the 1930s. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* reports that, according to the Census of 1926, there were 131,000 Jews in Moscow; in 1933, there were 226,500; and in 1939, there were 250,000 Jews. “As a result of the massive resettlement of Ukrainian Jews, their share among Moscow Jewry increased to 80%.”[\[114\]](#) In the *Book on the Russian Jewry* (1968), we find that in the 1930s up to a half-million Jews “were counted among government workers, sometimes occupying prominent posts, primarily in the economy.”[\[115\]](#) (The author also reports, that in the 1930s “up to a half-million Jews became involved in industry, mainly in manual labor.” On the other hand, Larin provides another figure, that among the industrial workers there were only 2.7% Jews or 200,000[\[116\]](#) or 2.5 times less than the first estimate). “The flow of Jews into the ranks of office workers grew constantly. The reason for this was the mass migration to cities, and also the sharp increase of the educational level, especially of Jewish youth.”[\[117\]](#) The Jews predominantly lived in the major cities, did not experience artificial social restrictions, so familiar to their Russian

peers, and, it needs to be said, they studied devotedly, thus preparing masses of technical cadres for the Soviet future.

Let's glance into statistical data: "in 1929 the Jews comprised 13.5% of all students in the higher educational institutions in the USSR; in 1933—12.2%; in 1936—13.3% of all students, and 18% of graduate students" (with their share of the total population being only 1.8%);[\[118\]](#) from 1928 to 1935, "the number of Jewish students per 1,000 of the Jewish population rose from 8.4 to 20.4 [while] per 1,000 Belorussians there were 2.4 students, and per 1,000 Ukrainians – 2.0"; and by 1935 "the percentage of Jewish students exceeded the percentage of Jews in the general population of the country by almost seven times, thus standing out from all other peoples of the Soviet Union."[\[119\]](#) G.V. Kostirchenko, who researched Stalin's policies on Jews, comments on the results of the 1939 census: "After all, Stalin could not disregard the fact that at the start of 1939 out of every 1,000 Jews, 268 had a high school education, and 57 out of 1,000 had higher education" (among Russians the figures were, respectively, 81 and 6 per 1,000).[\[120\]](#) It is no secret that "highly successful completion of higher education or doctoral studies allowed individuals to occupy socially-prestigious positions in the robustly developing Soviet economy of the 1930s."[\[121\]](#)

However, in *The Book on Russian Jewry* we find that "without exaggeration, after Ezhov's purges, not a single prominent Jewish figure remained at liberty in Soviet Jewish society, journalism, culture, or even in the science."[\[122\]](#) Well, it was absolutely not like that, and it is indeed a gross exaggeration. (Still, the same author, Grigory Aronson, in the same book, only two pages later says summarily about the 1930s, that "the Jews were not deprived of general civil rights ... they continued to occupy posts in the state and party apparatus", and "there were quite a few Jews ... in the diplomatic corps, in the general staff of the army, and among the professors in the institutions of higher learning...Thus we enter into the year 1939."[\[123\]](#)

The voice of Moscow was that of the People's Artist, Yury Levitan – "the voice of the USSR", that incorruptible prophet of our Truth, the main host of the radio station of the Comintern and a favorite of Stalin. Entire generations grew up, listening to his voice: he read Stalin's speeches and summaries of Sovinformburo [the Soviet Information Bureau], and the famous announcements about the beginning and the end of the war.[\[124\]](#)

In 1936 Samuil Samosud became the main conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre and served on that post for many years. Mikhail Gnesin continued to produce music “in the style of modern European music and in the style of the so-called ‘New Jewish music’”; Gnesin’s sisters successfully ran the music school, which developed into the outstanding Musical Institute. The ballet of Aleksandr Krein was performed in the Mariinsky and Bolshoi theatres. Well, Krein distinguished himself by his symphony, **Rhapsody**, that is, a Stalin’s speech set to music. Krein’s brother and nephew flourished also.^[125] A number of brilliant musicians rose to national and later to international fame: Grigory Ginzburg, Emil Gilels, Yakov Zak, Lev Oborin, David Oistrakh, Yakov Flier and many others. Many established theatre directors, theatre and literary critics, and music scholars continued to work without hindrance.

Examining the culture of the 1930s, it is impossible to miss the extraordinary achievements of the songwriter composers. Isaak Dunaevsky, “a founder of genres of operetta and mass song in Soviet music”, “composed easily digestible songs ... routinely glorifying the Soviet way of life (**The March of Merry Lads**, 1933; **The Song of Kakhovka**, 1935; **The Song about Homeland**, 1936; **The Song of Stalin**, 1936, etc.). Official propaganda on the arts declared these songs ... the embodiment of the thoughts and feelings of millions of Soviet people.”^[126] Dunaevsky’s tunes were used as the identifying melody of Moscow Radio. He was heavily decorated for his service: he was the first of all composers to be awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour and elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in the notorious year 1937. Later he was also awarded the Order of Lenin. He used to preach to composers that the Soviet people do not need symphonies.^[127]

Matvey Blanter and the brothers Daniil and Dmitry Pokrass were famous for their complacent hit song **If War Strikes Tomorrow** (“we will instantly crush the enemy”) and for their earlier hit the **Budyonny March**. There were many other famous Jewish songwriters and composers in 1930s and later: Oskar Feltsman, Solovyev-Sedoy, Ilya Frenkel, Mikhail Tanich, Igor Shaferan, Yan Frenkel and Vladimir Shainsky, etc. They enjoyed copy numbers in the millions, fame, royalties — come on, who dares to name those celebrities among the oppressed? And after all, alongside the skillfully written songs, how much blaring Soviet propaganda did they churn out, confusing, brainwashing, and deceiving the public and crippling good taste and feelings?

What about movie industry? The modern Israeli **Jewish Encyclopedia** states that in the 1930s “the main role of movies was to glorify the successes of socialism; a movie’s

entertainment value was minimal. Numerous Jewish filmmakers participated in the development of standards of a unified and openly ideological film industry, conservative in form and obsessively didactic. Many of them were already listed in the previous chapter; take, for example, D. Vertov's *Symphony of the Donbass*, 1931, released immediately after the Industrial Party Trial. Here are a few of the then-celebrated names: F. Ermler (*The Coming, The Great Citizen, Virgin Soil Upturned*), S. Yutkevich (*The Coming, The Miners*), the famous Mikhail Romm (*Lenin in October, Lenin in 1918*), L. Arnshtam (*Girlfriends, Friends*), I. Trauberg (*The Son of Mongolia, The Year 1919*), A. Zarkhi and I. Kheifits (*Hot Days, Ambassador of the Baltic*).^[128] Obviously, filmmakers were not persecuted in the 1930s, though many cinematography, production and film distribution managers were arrested; two high-ranking bosses of the central management of the cinema industry, B. Shumyatsky and S. Dukelsky, were even shot.^[129]

In the 1930s, Jews clearly comprised a majority among filmmakers. So, who was really the victim – deceived viewers, whose souls were steamrolled with lies and rude didactics, or the filmmakers, who “forged documentaries, biographies and produced pseudo-historical and essentially unimportant propaganda films,” characterized by “phony monumentality and inner emptiness”? *The Jewish Encyclopedia* adds sternly: “Huge numbers of Jewish operators and directors were engaged in making popular science, educational, and documentary films, in the most official sphere of the Soviet cinematography, where adroit editing helped to produce a “genuine documentary” out of a fraud. For example, R. Karmen, did it regularly without scruples.”^[130] (He was a glorified Soviet director, producer of many documentaries about the civil war in Spain and the Nuremberg Trials; he made “the anniversary-glorifying film *The Great Patriotic War*”, *Vietnam*, and a film about Cuba; he was a recipient of three USSR State Prizes (the Stalin Prize) and the Lenin Prize; he held the titles of the People’s Artist of the USSR and the Hero of the Socialist Labor).^[131] Let’s not forget filmmaker Konrad Wolf, the brother of the famous Soviet spy, Marcus Wolf.^[132]

No, the official Soviet atmosphere of 1930s was absolutely free of ill will toward Jews. And until the war, the overwhelming majority of Soviet Jewry sympathized with the Soviet ideology and sided with the Soviet regime. “There was no *Jewish Question* indeed in the USSR before the war – or almost none”; then the “open anti-Semites were not yet in charge of newspapers and journals ... they did not control personnel departments”^[133] (quite the opposite – many such positions were occupied by Jews).

Sure, then Soviet “culture” consisted of “Soviet patriotism,” i.e., of producing art in accordance with directives from above. Unfortunately, many Jews were engaged in that pseudo-cultural sphere and some of them even rose to supervise the Russian language culture. In the early 1930s we see B.M. Volin-Fradkin at the head of the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs (GlavLit), the organ of official censorship, directing the development of the culture. Many of the GlavLit personnel were Jewish. For example, in GlavLit, from 1932 to 1941 we see A.I. Bendik, who would become the Director of the Book Palace during the war.^[134] Emma Kaganova, the spouse of Chekist Pavel Sudoplatov was “trusted to manage the activities of informants among the Ukrainian intelligentsia.”^[135] After private publishers were abolished, “a significant contribution to the organization and management of Soviet government publishers was made by S. Alyansky, M. Volfson, I. Ionov (Bernshtein), A. Kantorovich, B. Malkin, I. Berite, B. Feldman, and many others.”^[136] Soon all book publishing was centralized in the State Publishing House and there was no other place for an author to get his work published.

The Jewish presence was also apparent in all branches of the printed propaganda Works of the clumsy caricaturist Boris Efimov could be found in the press everyday (he produced extremely filthy images of Western leaders; for instance, he had portrayed Nicholas II in a crown carrying a rifle, trampling corpses). Every two to three days, sketches of other dirty satirists, like G. Riklin, the piercingly caustic D. Zaslavsky, the adroit Radek, the persistent Sheinin and the brothers Tur, appeared in press. A future writer L. Kassil wrote essays for *Izvestiya*. There were many others: R. Karmen, T. Tess, Kh. Rappoport, D. Chernomordikov, B. Levin, A. Kantorovich, and Ya. Perelman. These names I found in *Izvestiya* only, and there were two dozen more major newspapers feeding the public with blatant lies. In addition, there existed a whole sea of ignoble mass propaganda brochures saturated with lies. When they urgently needed a mass propaganda brochure devoted to the Industrial Party Trial (such things were in acute demand for all of the 1930s), one B. Izakson knocked it out under the title: “Crush the viper of intervention!” Diplomat E. Gnedin, the son of Parvus, wrote lying articles about the “incurable wounds of Europe” and the imminent death of the West. He also wrote a rebuttal article, *Socialist Labor in the Forests of the Soviet North*, in response to Western “slanders” about the *allegedly* forced labor of camp inmates felling timber. When in the 1950s Gnedin returned from a camp after a long term (though, it appears, not having experienced tree felling himself), he was accepted as a venerable sufferer and no one reminded him of his lies in the past.

In 1929-31 Russian historical science was destroyed; the Archaeological Commission, the Northern Commission, Pushkin House, the Library of the Academy of Sciences were all abolished, traditions were smashed, and prominent Russian historians were sent to rot in camps. (How much did we hear about *that* destruction?) Third and fourth-rate **Russian historians** then surged in to occupy the vacant posts and brainwash us for the next half a century. Sure, quite a few Russian slackers made their careers then, but Jewish ones did not miss their chance.

Already in the 1930s, Jews played a prominent role in Soviet science, especially in the most important and technologically-demanding frontiers, and their role was bound to become even more important in the future. “By the end of 1920s, Jews comprised 13.6% of all scientists in the country; by 1937 their share increased to 17.6%”; in 1939 there were more than 15,000 or 15.7% Jewish scientists and lecturers in the institutions of higher learning.”[\[137\]](#)

In physics, member of the Academy A. F. Ioffe nurtured a highly successful school. As early as 1918, he founded the Physical-Technical Institute in Petrograd. Later, “fifteen affiliated scientific centers were created”; they were headed by Ioffe’s disciples. “His former students worked in many other institutes, in many ways determining the scientific and technological potential of the Soviet Union.”[\[138\]](#) (However, repressions did not bypass them. In 1938, in the Kharkov Physics-Technological Institute, six out of eight heads of departments were arrested: Vaisberg, Gorsky, Landau, Leipunsky, Obreimov, Shubnikov; a seventh—Rueman—was exiled; only Slutskin remained).[\[139\]](#) The name of Semyon Aisikovich, the constructor of **Lavochkin** fighter aircraft, was long unknown to the public.[\[140\]](#) Names of many other personalities in military industry were kept secret as well. Even now we do not know all of them. For instance, M. Shkud “oversaw development of powerful radio stations,”[\[141\]](#) yet there were surely others, whom we do not know, working on the development of no less powerful jammers.)

Numerous Jewish names in technology, science and its applications prove that the flower of several Jewish generations went into these fields. Flipping through the pages of biographical tomes of the **Russian Jewish Encyclopedia**, which only lists the Jews who were born or lived in Russia, we see an abundance of successful and gifted people with real accomplishments (which also means the absence of obstacles to career entry and advancement in general).

Of course, scientists had to pay political tribute too. Take, for example, "the First National Conference for the Planning of Science" in 1931. Academician Ioffe stated that "modern capitalism is no longer capable of a technological revolution," it is only possible as a result of a social revolution, which has "transformed the once barbaric and backward Russia into the Socialist Union of Republics." He praised the leadership of the proletariat in science and said that science can be free only under Soviet stewardship. "Militant philosopher" E. Ya. Kolman ("one of main ideologists of Soviet science in the 1930s"; he fulminated against the Moscow school of mathematics) asserted that "we should ... introduce labor discipline in the sciences, adopt collective methods, socialist competition, and shock labor methods; he said that science advances "thanks to the proletarian dictatorship," and that each scientist should study Lenin's ***Materialism and Empirico-criticism***. Academician A.G. Goldman (Ukraine) enthusiastically chimed in: "The academy now became the leading force in the struggle for the Marxist dialectic in science!"[\[142\]](#)

The Jewish Encyclopedia summarizes: "At the end of 1930s, the role of the Jews in the various spheres of the Soviet life reached its apogee for the entire history of the Soviet regime." According to the 1939 census, 40% of all economically active Jews were state employees. Around 364,000 were categorized among the intelligentsia. Of them, 106,000 were engineers or technologists, representing 14% of all professionals of this category country-wide; 139,000 were managers at various levels, 7% of all administrators in the USSR; "39,000 doctors, or slightly less than 27% of all doctors; 38,000 teachers, or more than 3% of all teachers; "more than 6,500 writers, journalists, and editors; more than 5,000 actors and filmmakers; more than 6,000 musicians; a little less than 3,000 artists and sculptors; and more than 5,000 lawyers."[\[143\]](#)

In the opinion of the ***Encyclopedia***, such impressive representation by a national minority, even in the context of official internationalism and brotherhood of the peoples of the USSR, created the prerequisites for the backlash by the state."[\[144\]](#)

During his political career, Stalin often allied with Jewish leaders of the communist party and relied on many Jewish back-benchers. By the mid-1930s he saw in the example of Hitler all the disadvantages of being a self-declared enemy of the Jews. Yet he likely harbored hostility toward them (his daughter's memoirs support this), though even his closest circle was probably unaware of it. However, struggling against the

Trotskyites, he, of course, realized this aspect as well — his need to further get rid of the Jewish influence in the party. And, sensing the war, he perhaps was also grasping that “proletarian internationalism” alone would not be sufficient and that the notion of the “homeland,” and even the “Homeland”, would be much needed.

S. Schwartz lamented about anti-revolutionary transformation of the party as the “unprecedented ‘purge’ of the ruling party, the virtual destruction of the old party and the establishment of a new communist party under the same name in its place – new in social composition and ideology.” From 1937 he also noted a “gradual displacement of Jews from the positions of power in all spheres of public life.” “Among the old Bolsheviks who were involved in the activity before the party came to power and especially among those with the pre-revolutionary involvement, the percentage of Jews was noticeably higher than in the party on average; in younger generations, the Jewish representation became even smaller... As a result of the purge, almost all important Jewish communists left the scene.”^[145] Lazar Kaganovich was the exception. Still, in 1939, after all the massacres, the faithful communist Zemlyachka was made the deputy head of the Soviet of People’s Commissars, and S. Dridzo-Lozovsky was assigned the position of Deputy to the Narkom of Foreign Affairs.^[146] And yet, in the wider picture, Schwartz’s observations are reasonable as was demonstrated above.

S. Schwartz adds that in the second half of 1930s Jews were gradually barred from entering “institutions of higher learning, which were preparing specialists for foreign relations and foreign trade, and were barred from military educational institutions.”^[147] The famous defector from the USSR, I.S. Guzenko, shared rumors about a secret percentage quota on Jewish admissions to the institutions of higher learning which was enforced from 1939.

In the 1990s they even wrote that Molotov, taking over the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in the spring of 1939, publicly announced during the general meeting with the personnel that he “will deal with the synagogue here,” and that he began firing Jews on the very same day. (Still, Litvinov was quite useful during the war in his role as Soviet ambassador to the U.S. They say that upon his departure from the U.S. in 1943 he even dared to pass a personal letter to Roosevelt suggesting that Stalin had unleashed an anti-Semitic campaign in the USSR).^[148]

By the mid-1930s the sympathy of European Jewry toward the USSR had further increased. Trotsky explained it in 1937 on his way to Mexico: “The Jewish intelligentsia

... turns to the Comintern not because they are interested in Marxism or Communism, but in search of support against aggressive [German] anti-Semitism.”[\[149\]](#) Yet it was **this same** Comintern that approved the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the pact that dealt a mortal blow to the East European Jewry!

“In September 1939, hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews fled from the advancing German armies, fleeing further and further east and trying to head for the territory occupied by the Red Army.... For the first two months they succeeded because of the favorable attitude of the Soviet authorities. The Germans quite often encouraged this flight.” But “at the end of November the Soviet government closed the border.”[\[150\]](#)

In different areas of the front things took shape differently: in some areas, the Soviets would not admit Jewish refugees at all; in other places they were welcomed but later sometimes sent back to the Germans. Overall, it is believed that around 300,000 Jews managed to migrate from the Western to the Eastern Poland in the first months of the war, and later the Soviets evacuated them deeper into the USSR. They demanded that Polish Jews register as Soviet citizens, but many of them did not rush to accept Soviet citizenship: after all, they thought, the war would soon be over, and they would return home, or go to America, or to Palestine. (Yet in the eyes of the Soviet regime they thereby immediately fell under the category of “suspected of espionage,” especially if they tried to correspond with relatives in Poland).[\[151\]](#) Still, we read in the Chicago **Sentinel** that the Soviet Union gave refuge to 90% of all European Jewish refugees fleeing from Hitler.”[\[152\]](#)

According to the January 1939 census, 3,020,000 Jews lived in the USSR. Now, after occupation of the Baltics, annexation of a part of Poland, and taking in Jewish refugees, approximately two million more Jews were added, giving a total of around 5 million.[\[153\]](#) Before 1939, the Jews were the seventh largest people in the USSR number-wise; now, after annexation of all Western areas, they became the **fourth** largest people of the USSR, after the three Slavic peoples, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian. “The mutual non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939 between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union evoked serious fear about the future of Soviet Jewry, though the policy of the Soviet Union toward its Jewish citizens was not changed.” And although there were some reverse deportations, overall, “the legal status of Jewish population remained unchanged during the 20 months of the Soviet-German collaboration.”[\[154\]](#)

With the start of war in Poland, Jewish sympathies finally crystallized and Polish Jews, and the Jewish youth in particular, met the advancing Red Army with exulting enthusiasm. Thus, according to many testimonies (including M. Agursky's one), Polish Jews, like their co-ethnics in Bessarabia, Bukovina and Lithuania, became the main pillar of the Soviet regime, supporting it tooth and nail.

Yet how much did these East European Jews know about what was going on in the USSR?

They unerringly sensed that a catastrophe was rolling at them from Germany, though still not fully or clearly recognized, but undoubtedly a catastrophe. And so the Soviet welcome appeared to them to embody certain salvation.

[1] *Izvestiya*, January 22, 1928, p. 1.

[2] *Izvestiya*, January 26, 1928, p. 3.

[3] A. Sutton. *Wall Street and the Bolshevik Revolution*. Moscow, 1998; p. 210, 212.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 214, 215.

[5] A. Voronel // “22”: Obshchestvenno-politicheskiy i literaturniy zhurnal evreyskoy intelligentsii iz SSSR v Izraile [*Social, Political and Literary Journal of the Jewish Intelligentsia from the USSR in Israel* (henceforth – “22”)]. Tel-Aviv, 1986, (50), p. 160.

[6] *Izvestiya*, November 30, 1936, p. 2.

[7] *Rossiyskaya Evreiskaya Entsiklopediya* [*The Russian Jewish Encyclopedia* (henceforth— RJE)]. 2nd Ed. Moscow, 1994. v.1, p. 527-528.

[8] Robert Conquest. *Bolshoy Terror* [The Great Terror]. Firenze: Edizioni Aurora, 1974, p. 70, 73.

[9] RJE, v. 3, p. 95.

[10] *Izvestiya*, July 14, 1930, p. 1.

[11] *Izvestiya*, February 11, 1934, p. 1-2.

[12] RJE, v. 2, p. 163.

[13] RJE, v. 3, p. 189.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 283, 344.

[15] *Izvestiya*, January 18, 1936, p. 1 and February 6, 1936, p. 3.

[16] RJE, V. 1, p. 394.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[18] See, for example: *Izvestiya*, June 12, 1930; March 14 and 17, 1931; January 6, 1934; January 10 and February 21, 1936.

[19] *Izvestiya*, December 25, 1930, p. 1.

[20] *Izvestiya*, March 14, 1931, p. 3-4; March 17, p. 1-2.

[21] *Izvestiya*, February 2, 1931, p. 4; May 30, p. 1.

[22] *Izvestiya*, February 20, 1936, p. 4.

[23] RJE, v. 3, p. 497.

[24] RJE, v. 2, p. 98, 256.

[25] RJE, v. 1, p. 418.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 483.

[27] See, for example: *Izvestiya*, May 17, 1931, p. 3.

[28] *Izvestiya*, December 9, 1936, p. 1.

[29] *Izvestiya*, July 7, 1930, p. 2.

[30] RJE, v.1, p. 222, 387; v. 3, p. 237, 464.

[31] *Izvestiya*, November 14, 1930, p. 2; November 16, p. 4.

[32] *Izvestiya*, February 13, 1931, p. 3.

[33] *Izvestiya*, April 9, 1936, p. 2.

[34] *Izvestiya*, November 5, 1930, p. 2; November 11, p. 5.

[35] *Izvestiya*, June 11, 1936, p. 2.

[36] *V. Boguslavskiy. V zashchitu Kunyayeva* [In Defense of Kunyayev] // “22”, 1980, (16), p. 174.

[37] *Izvestiya*, April 24, 1931, p. 2.

[38] *Izvestiya*, May 18, 1930, p. 1.

[39] *Kratkaya Evreiskaya Entsiklopediya* [*The Short Jewish Encyclopedia* (henceforth—SJE)]. Jerusalem, 1976-2001. v. 4, p. 879.

[40] RJE, v. 3, p. 58.

[41] RJE, v. 1, p. 101.

[42] Aron Abramovich. *V reshayushchey voyne: Uchastie i rol evreyev SSSR v voyne protiv natsizma* [In the Deciding War: Participation and Role of Soviet Jews in the War against Nazism]. 2nd Edition. Tel-Aviv, 1982. v.1, p. 61.

[43] RJE, v. 1, p. 63, 376, 515; v. 2, p. 120, 491; v. 3, p. 300-301.

[44] RJE, v. 1, p. 244, 350; v. 2, p. 78; v. 3, p. 179, 206-207, 493-494. See also Aron Abramovich. *V reshayushchey voyne*. [In the Deciding War], v. 1, p. 62.

[45] L.Yu. Krichevsky. *Evrei v apparate VChK-OGPU v 20-e gody* [The Jews in the apparatus of the Cheka-OGPU in the 1920s] // *Evrei i russkaya revolyutsia: Materiali i issledovaniya* [Jews and the Russian Revolution: Materials and Research] Compiled by O.V. Budnitsky. Moscow; Jerusalem: Gesharim, 1999, p. 343-344; see also *Izvestiya*, December 20, 1937, p. 2.

[46] *Izvestiya*, November 27, 1935, p. 1; November 29, p. 1.

[47] Robert Conquest. *Bolshoy terror* [The Great Terror], p. 187.

[48] RJE, v. 3, p. 473.

[49] Aleksandr Orlov. *From the introduction to the book* Taynaya istoriya stalinskikh prestupleniy [The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes] // Vremya i my: Mezhdunarodny zhurnal literatury i obshchestvennykh problem [*Epoch and We: International Journal of Literature and Social Problems* (henceforth – *EW*)]. New York, 1982, No.67, p. 202.

[50] RJE, v. 2, p. 62.

[51] *Izvestiya*, September 27, 1936, p. 1; September 30, p. 3. See also RJE, v. 1, p. 124.

[52] RJE, v. 2, p. 187, 218, 432; v. 3, p. 358.

[53] A. Kokurin, N. Petrov. *NKVD: struktura, funktsii, kadry* [The NKVD: Organization, Functions, Cadres] // *Svobodnaya mysl* [Free Thought], 1997, (6), p. 113-116.

[54] RJE, v. 2, p. 22, 51-52, 389.

[55] A. Kokurin, N. Petrov. *NKVD: struktura, funktsii, kadry* [The NKVD: Organization, Functions, Cadres] // *Svobodnaya mysl* [Free Thought], 1997, (6), p. 118.

[56] RJE, v. 2, p. 293; v. 3, p. 311.

[57] RJE, v. 1, p. 170.

[58] G.V. Kostirchenko. *Taynaya politika Stalina: Vlast i antisemitizm* [Stalin's Secret Policy: Power and Anti-semitism]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnie otnosheniya [International Relations], 2001, p. 210.

[59] The names of those executed and the year of execution are italicized throughout the text; in other instances the date indicates the year of arrest; those who committed suicide on the eve of arrest and those who died in custody are mentioned specifically.

[60] See for example: NV. Petrov, K.V. Skorkin. *Kto rukovodil NKVD: 1934-1941: Spravochnik* [Who Ran the NKVD: 1934-1941. Information Book]. Moscow: Zvenya, 1999.

[61] Pavel Sudoplatov. *Spetsoperatsii: Lubyanka i Kreml: 1930s-1950s* [Special Operations: Lubyanka [Prison] and the Kremlin: the 1930s through the 1950s]. Moscow: OLMA-Press, 1997, p. 440-441.

[62] *Izvestiya*, May 16, 1992 p. 6.

[63] E. Zhirnov. "*Protседura kazni nosila omerzitelnyy kharakter*" [A Horrible Execution] // *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, October 28, 1990, p. 2.

[64] Robert Conquest. *Bolshoy Terror* [The Great Terror], p. 797-798.

[65] L.Yu. Krichevsky. *Evrei v apparate VChK-OGPU v 20-e gody* [The Jews in the apparatus of the Cheka-OGPU in the 1920s] // *Evrei i russkaya revolyutsia: Materiali i issledovaniya* [Jews and the Russian Revolution], p. 343, 344.

[66] Robert Conquest. *Bolshoy Terror* [The Great Terror], p. 459.

[67] Yu. Margolin. *Tel-Avivskiy bloknot* [Tel-Aviv Notebook] // *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* [The New Russian Word], New York, August 5, 1968.

[68] Robert Conquest. *Bolshoy Terror* [The Great Terror], p. 427-428, 430.

[69] See for example: O.F. Suvenirov. *Tragediya RKKA: 1937-1938*. [The Tragedy of the Red Army: 1937-1938] Moscow, Terra, 1998.

[70] RJE, v. 3, p. 430. See also Aron Abramovich. *V reshayushchey voyne*. [In the Deciding War], v. 1, p. 66. See also V. Katuntsev, I. Kots. *Intsident: Podopleyka Khasanskikh sobitiiy* [The Incident: the Causes of the Lake Khasan Conflict] // Rodina, 1991, (6), p. 17.

[71] RJE, v. 3, p. 82. See also Aron Abramovich, *V reshayushchey voyne*. [In the Deciding War] v. 1, p. 64-66.

[72] St. Ivanovich. *Evrei i sovetskaya diktatura* [The Jews and the Soviet Dictatorship] // *Evreyskiy Mir: Ezhegodnik na 1939* [Jewish World: Yearbook for 1939]. (henceforth — *JW-1*). Paris: Obединenie russko-evreyskoy intelligentsii [Association of the Russo-Jewish Intelligentsia], p. 43.

[73] Ibid., p. 44-46.

[74] *Pismo V.I. Vernadskogo I.I. Petrunkevichu ot 14 Iyunya 1927* [A letter from V.I. Vernadsky to I.I. Petrunkevich of June 14, 1927] // *Novy Mir* [New World], 1989, (12), p. 220.

[75] Mikhail Kheifetz. *Uroki proshlogo* [Lessons of the Past] // “22”, 1989, (63), p. 202.

[76] Sonja Margolina. *Das Ende der Lügen: Russland und die Juden im 20. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1992, S. 84.

[77] M. Tsarinnik. *Ukrainsko-evreyskiy dialog* [Ukraino-Jewish Dialogue] // “22”, 1984, (37), p. 160.

[78] S.M. Schwartz. *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soyuze* [Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union]. New York: Chekov’s Publishing House, 1952, p. 8, 98-99, 107-108.

[79] New York Times, January 15, 1931, p. 9.

[80] I.V. Stalin. **Sochineniya** (v 13 tomakh) [Written Works (in 13 volumes)]. M.: Gospolitizdat, 1946-1951. v. 13, p. 28.

[81] *Izvestiya*, November 30, 1936, p. 2.

[82] S. Pozner. **Sovetskaya Rossiya** [The Soviet Russia] // *JW-1*, p. 260.

[83] S.M. Schwartz. **Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soyuze** [Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union]. New York: Chekov's Publishing House, 1952, p. 118.

[84] St. Ivanovich. **Evrei i Sovetskaya diktatura** [The Jews and the Soviet Dictatorship] // *JW-1*, p. 50, 51, 52.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 51-52.

[86] B. Orlov. **Rossiya bez evreyev** [Russia without Jews] // "22", 1988, (60), p. 160.

[87] Yu. Margolin. **Tel-Avivskiy bloknot** [Tel-Aviv Notebook] // *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* [The New Russian Word], New York, August 5, 1968.

[88] SJE, v. 8, p. 167.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

[90] Yu. Mark. **Evreyskaya shkola v Sovetskom Soyuze** [The Jewish School in the Soviet Union] // **Kniga o russkom evreystve: 1917-1967** [The Book of Russian Jewry: 1917-1967 (henceforth — BRJ)]. New York: Association of Russian Jews, 1968, p. 239.

[91] SJE, v. 8, p. 176, 177, 179.

[92] RJE, v. 2, p. 58, 432.

[93] SJE, v. 8, p. 179, 181.

[94] Yu. Mark. *Literatura na idish v Sovetskoy Rossii* [Literature in Yiddish in Soviet Russia] // BRJ, p. 216.

[95] Ibid., p. 230.

[96] SJE, v. 8, p. 182-183.

[97] RJE, v. 1, p. 15, 417; v. 2, p. 84.

[98] SJE, v. 8, p. 198-199.

[99] Gershon Svet. *Evreiskaya religiya v Sovetskoy Rossii* [The Jewish Religion in Soviet Russia] // BRJ, p. 209.

[100] RJE, v. 1, p. 145; v. 2, p. 260.

[101] *Izvestiya*, July 19, 1931, p. 2.

[102] SJE, v. 8, p. 173, 190, 193.

[103] *Izvestiya*. December 12, 1930, p. 2.

[104] S.M. Schwartz, *Birobidjan* // BRJ, p. 170-171, 200.

[105] Ibid., p. 177-78.

[106] S.M. Schwartz, *Birobidjan* // BRJ, p. 173, 180.

[107] *Izvestiya*, October 26, 1936, p. 3.

[108] RJE, v. 1, p. 214.

[109] S.M. Schwartz. *Birobidjan* // BRJ, p. 176.

[110] SJE, v. 8, p. 190.

[111] S.M. Schwartz. *Birobidjan* // BRJ, p. 177.

[112] Ibid., p. 178, 179.

[113] Beni Peled. *Mi ne mozhem zhdad eshcho dve tisyachi let!* [We Cannot Wait Two Thousand Years More!] [Interview] // “22”, 1981, (17), p. 116.

[114] SJE, v. 5, p. 477-478.

[115] G. Aronson. *Evreyskiy vopros v epokhu Stalina* [The Jewish Question in the Stalin’s Era] // BRJ, p. 137

[116] Yu. Larin. *Evrei i anti-Semitism v SSSR* [The Jews and Anti-Semitism in the USSR]. M.; L.: GIZ, 1929, p. 245.

[117] SJE, v. 8, p. 190.

[118] Ibid.

[119] S. Pozner. *Sovetskaya Rossiya* [The Soviet Russia] // *JW-1*, p. 264.

[120] G. Kostirchenko. *Taynaya politika Stalina* [The Secret Policy of Stalin], p. 198.

[121] SJE, v. 8, p. 190.

[122] G. Aronson. *Evreyskiy vopros v epokhu Stalina* [The Jewish Question in the Stalin’s Era] // BRJ, p. 138.

[123] Ibid., p. 140-141.

[124] RJE, v. 2, p. 150.

[125] Gershon Svet. *Evrei v russkoy muzikalnoy culture v sovetskiy period* [The Jews in Russian Musical Culture in the Soviet Period] // BRJ, p. 256-262.

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