

SOLZHENITSYN'S TWO CENTURIES TOGETHER, Part 15

The Pogroms, part four - Kishinev

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The pogroms for which Russia is so famous - despite the fact that very few Russians were involved in them - occurred in two main clusters: 1881-2 (with further outbreaks in 1883 and 1884 which however, though vicious, were quickly and efficiently suppressed¹) and 1903-6. As well as asking why pogroms occurred then we could also ask why they did not occur, at least on the same scale, between 1882(or 4) and 1903, and between 1906 and 1917.

The 1903-6 cluster could perhaps better be described as two clusters - 1903, dominated by Kishinev and Gomel, and 1905-6, the confrontations that occurred in the wake of the 1905 'revolution' and the 'October Manifesto', issued by the Tsar, conceding certain constitutional rights, including the establishment of a representational assembly - the 'duma'.

Kishinev, now called Chişinău, is the capital of Moldavia, now called Moldova, or at least of that part of it that was incorporated into the Russian Empire, initially under the name 'Bessarabia'. Moldavia and Wallachia had existed as semi-independent principalities under Ottoman rule but the area that included Kishinev was incorporated into the Russian Empire following the Turkish Russian war of 1806-12. Part of the territory, not including Kishinev, was regained by the Turks after the Crimean war but recovered by the Russians in 1878 when Romania gained its independence from the Ottomans. The whole area, including Kishinev, was taken by Romania in the chaos following the 1917 revolution and then incorporated into the Soviet Union as a result of the Second World War. It is now an independent state.

Its history is thus a little different from that of the other areas of the Pale, incorporated as a result of the Polish partitions. The population was largely Romanian speaking and, since the language of education and literature was Russian, there was a higher than usual illiteracy rate. Romanian is considerably more distant from Russian than Ukrainian. Kishinev had a Moldavian, Romanian speaking, majority but a large Jewish, yiddish-

¹ According to the Jewish Virtual Library account: 'In the spring of 1883, a sudden wave of pogroms broke out in the towns of Rostov and Yekaterinoslav and their surroundings. On this occasion, the authorities reacted with vigor against the rioters and there were several casualties among them. The last great outburst occurred in June 1884 in Nizhni Novgorod, where the mob attacked the Jews of the Kanavino quarter, killing nine of them and looting much property. The authorities tried over 70 of the rioters and severe penalties of imprisonment were imposed on them. This marked the end of the first wave of pogroms in Russia.' As mentioned in a previous article Nizhni Novgorod was unusual in that it was outside the Pale of Settlement. Jews were living there because they had served in that area in the army.

speaking, minority, highly visible through its shops and small businesses. The small minority characterised as 'Russian' was, Solzhenitsyn points out, mainly Ukrainian.

The pogrom that occurred in Kishinev over two days (Easter Sunday and Easter Monday) in April 1903 is particularly important, Steven Zipperstein, in his book *Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (New York, Liveright publishing Corp, 2018) says: '*Prior to Buchenwald and Auschwitz, no place-name evoked Jewish suffering more starkly than Kishinev*' (p.xiii).

Kishinev stood out for several reasons. First, because of the attacks on persons. We have seen that in the 1881-2 pogroms there seems to have been a principle at work that attacks on property were allowed but not attacks on persons. In the two days of the Kishinev pogrom, forty nine Jews were killed², almost twice as many as in the whole 1881-4 period and there many cases of rape, including gang rape. Secondly, although it was widely believed that the 1881-2 pogroms had government support (1883 and 1884 clearly hadn't) it was very difficult to prove and, again as we've seen, modern historiography following after Hans Rogger, is sceptical on the subject. In Kishinev, however, a particularly virulent antisemitism had clearly been fomented by the government approved journal *Bessarabets*; and there seemed to be definite evidence of government support in a letter said to have been addressed by the Minister of Interior Vyacheslav Konstantinovich Plehve to the governor general, R.S. von Raaben, shortly before the outbreak ordering him, in the event of a pogrom, not to use force to suppress it. Simon Dubnow in his highly influential *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* (vol iii, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920) also mentions '*an emissary of the political police, the gendarmerie officer Levendahl, who had been dispatched from St Petersburg; after Easter, when the sanguinary crime had already been committed, the same mysterious envoy vanished just as quickly.*' (p.71).

But perhaps most important in establishing the importance of Kishinev in the Jewish collective memory, were two pieces of writing - the poem *City of Slaughter* by Hayyim Nahman Bialik which, according to Zipperstein (p.xviii) is 'widely considered the most influential poetic work written in a Jewish language [Hebrew, though Bialik also produced a version in Yiddish - PB] since the Middle Ages'; and the detailed in-depth reporting of the Irish Nationalist and land reformer Michael Davitt 'whose book, based on his newspaper reports titled *Within the Pale: the true story of anti-semitic persecution in Russia* set the standard for Western descriptions of Russian Jewish life for the decade to come' (ibid, pp.xviii-ix).

Solzhenitsyn, basing his account on the case drawn up by the local prosecutor, V.N.Goremykin (a source dismissed by Dubnow as invidious) tells a story that is rather different from the other versions I have read. He describes a relatively mild bout of stone

² Zipperstein's figure. Solzhenitsyn has 38.

throwing on the Sunday afternoon, dealt with inadequately by the police. *'In the evening the disorders calmed down. "No act of violence was perpetrated against the Jews that day."* (p.357, apparently quoting Goremykin). The police arrested sixty persons. By contrast Zipperstein says: *'Attacks on women that night were ferocious. In an apartment near the New Market on Nikolaevskii Street, one of the city's major boulevards, a woman was raped repeatedly for four consecutive hours by members of a mob that included seminarians, according to Davitt.'* (p.69). He goes on to say however: *'Curiously, despite the day's horrors, many Jews - including communal leaders - remained convinced that the riot was not nearly as bad as had been feared, or that it had now been contained.'* He agrees with Solzhenitsyn's figure of sixty arrests.

Solzhenitsyn goes on to say, again in quotes presumably from the trial, that the next day (7th April): *"More than one hundred Jews had gathered, armed with stakes and posts ['pieux et piquets' - following Harraps Dictionary they both seem to mean the same thing - PB], with rifles, here and there - some shots were fired. The Christians didn't have fire arms. The Jews said 'yesterday you didn't disperse the Russians, today we're going to defend ourselves.' And some were holding bottles of vitriol which they threw at the Christians they met"* *'The chemists shops ere traditionally kept by Jews,'* Solzhenitsyn adds in a parenthesis. *"Rumours spread across the town that Christians were being attacked by the Jews" ... It was said that the Jews have sacked the cathedral and killed the priest ...'* (p.357).

Interestingly Zipperstein confirms the Jewish effort at self defence on the Monday morning:

'Yehiel Pesker, the owner of a glass store at the New Market who, like Yisrael Rossman, went to inspect his shop early Monday for damage, encountered on the way home a large group of Jews - he recalled that they numbered at least two hundred - gathered in the wine courtyard, armed and prepared to fight. He saw the clubs in their arms; it turned out that several were carrying guns as well. Returning home inspired by what he had seen, Pesker set in motion plans to protect his building. He armed himself with a club, too, and instructed his neighbours to join him in battling the mob. This they did until they were overwhelmed.' He continues: *'In arguments made by defence attorneys at the trials of pogrom-related crimes, Sunday's rioting was dismissed as a ruckus that would quickly have come to an end - much as the governor general assured the Jewish delegation on Monday morning - had Jews not overreacted. In this version it was the all-but-unprovoked aggression of Jews and subsequent rumours of attacks on a church and the killing of a priest that set in motion the unfortunate but, under the circumstances, understandable violence.'* (p.87)

BIALIK AND JEWISH COWARDICE

The point is important because part of the power of Bialik's poem, and of its huge influence on subsequent Jewish culture, was the accusation that the Jews did nothing to defend themselves. The poem has played such an important role in Jewish - and especially Zionist - culture that it is worth quoting at length:

*'Pause not upon this havoc; go thy way -
Unto the attic mount, upon thy feet and hands;
Behold the shadow of death among the shadows stands.
Crushed in their shame, they saw it all;
They did not pluck their eyes out; they
Beat not their brains against the wall!
Perhaps, perhaps, each watcher had it in his heart to pray:
A miracle, O Lord, and spare my skin this day!*

*'Come, now, and I will bring thee to their lairs
The privies, jakes and pigpens where the heirs
Of Hasmoneans lay, with trembling knees,
Concealed and cowering - the sons of the Maccabees!
The seed of saints, the scions of the lions!
Who, crammed by scores in all the sanctuaries of their shame
So sanctified My name!
It was the flight of mice they fled,
The scurrying of roaches was their flight;
They died like dogs, and they were dead!
And on the next morn, after the terrible night
The son who was not murdered found
The spurned cadaver of his father on the ground.
Now wherefore dost thou weep, O son of Man?'*

The poem is written in the first person of a God who says:

*'See, I am fallen from My high estate.
I grieve for you, my children. My heart is sad for you.
Your dead were vainly dead; and neither I nor you
Know why you died or wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws;
Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause.'*

It is an attack on the tradition of Jewish passivity in the face of persecution - the very tradition that, as discussed in the previous article in this series, is celebrated by Yaakov Rabkin:

*'Turn, then, thy gaze from the dead, and I will lead
Thee from the graveyard to thy living brothers,*

*And thou wilt come, with those of thine own breed,
Into the synagogue, and on a day of fasting,
To hear the cry of their agony,
Their weeping everlasting.
Thy skin will grow cold, the hair on thy skin stand up,
And thou wilt be by fear and trembling tossed;
Thus groans a people which is lost.
Look in their hearts - behold a dreary waste,
Where even vengeance can revive no growth,
And yet upon their lips no mighty malediction
Rises, no blasphemous oath.
Speak to them, bid them rage!
Let them against me raise the outraged hand,
Let them demand!
Demand the retribution for the shamed
Of all the centuries and every age!
Let fists be flung like stone
Against the heavens and the heavenly Throne!
And thou, too, pity them not, nor touch their wound;
Within their cup no further measure pour.
Wherever thou wilt touch, a bruise is found,
Their flesh is wholly sore.
For since they have met pain with resignation
And have made peace with shame,
What shall avail thy consolation?
They are too wretched to evoke thy scorn.
They are too lost thy pity to evoke.
So let them go, then, men to sorrow born,
Mournful and slinking, crushed beneath their yoke.
So to their homes, and to their hearth depart
Rot in the bones, corruption in the heart.⁸*

Bialik had been commissioned to go to Kishinev to collect eye witness accounts on behalf of the 'Kishinev Historical Commission', headed by Dubnow. According to an account by an American historian, specialist in the twentieth century history of Palestine/Israel, Monty Noam Penkower:

'What Bialik saw in Kishinev ... almost drove him mad. Aided by a local Hebrew teacher, Pesah Auerbakh, he investigated the pogrom in painstaking detail. For more than a month,

⁸ Taken from the website of the World Zionist Organisation

he collected documents, took photographs of the dead and of desecrated Torah scrolls, and got people who suffered to talk to him. Working in a state of mounting internal tension, as recalled by Yisrael Berman, a youth who escorted him about, the poet filled up four large notebooks [five, according to Zipperstein - PB] of almost 200 pages.⁴

Instead, however, of writing up his notes, he wrote the poem, which proved to be a much more effective piece of propaganda at least among Jews. He effectively buried his notebooks away and it was only in the 1990s that they were finally published. Penkower continues (p.197): *'Bialik chose, as well, to make no mention of the evidence about sporadic Jewish self defence that his own notebooks documented'* and Zipperstein says:

'Bialik's anguished cry had a particularly powerful impact on Jewish fighters once the poem was translated in 1904 into Russian and recited widely (and brilliantly) by the young, restless Vladimir Jabotinsky. Bialik's work left little doubt that the response of Kishinev Jews to violence had been gutless. Curiously enough, however, Bialik recorded in the transcripts of the interviews he conducted during his Kishinev stay, often in copious detail, many efforts at Jewish self-defense, including one so notorious - in the minds of local antisemites and their sympathisers, at least - that they would credit it, not their own actions, as the main cause for Monday's violence.' (p.86)

Zipperstein also says that *'Before the outbreak of violence preparations had been made to store arms at the home of Jacob Bernstein-Kogan, whose apartment had for years been the main office of the Zionist movement's correspondence bureau, and was equipped with a telephone. It was designated as a headquarters of sorts. But Bernstein-Kogan and his family fled their residence on the first day of the pogrom - soon afterward it was looted - and whether the arms were stored there were used or not is unclear.'* (p.88)

Bernstein-Kogan was an important member of Herzl's Zionist movement - sufficiently important that, according to the German Wikipedia account, disagreements he had with Herzl mattered. This brief passage leaves him looking rather unimpressive - fleeing the apartment where the guns were stored (Zipperstein doesn't seem to question their existence. Did they fall into the hands of the looters? Did Bernstein-Kogan distribute them?) Later in Zipperstein's account, as we shall see, however, he appears very impressive indeed, using his position as head of the correspondence bureau, in a town close to the border of the Russian Empire and therefore convenient for smuggling, to publicise very effectively the events in Kishinev.

MICHAEL DAVITT

⁴ Monty Noah Penkower: 'The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903: A Turning Point in Jewish History', *Modern Judaism*, Oct., 2004, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Oct., 2004), p.196.

He was at the top of Michael Davitt's list of people to meet when he arrived in Kishinev. Davitt had been commissioned to report on the pogrom for William Randolph Hearst's paper *The New York American*. Solzhenitsyn is unimpressed: *'But it was by far the European and American press which showed itself to be the most virulent (notably the press magnate William Hearst).'* He quotes the *Jewish Chronicle* referring to the pogrom as a *'holocaust'* and imploring *'the God of Justice to come down and finish with Russia as He finished with Sodom and Gomorrah ... and that he remove from the face of the Earth this centre of pestilence.'* (p.366, quoting from the *Jewish Chronicle* 15th and 22nd May 1903. My translation of a French translation of a Russian translation. I'm not in a position to consult the English original).

While on his way to Kishinev, Davitt found himself *'by coincidence ... travelling in a sleeping car on a seat across from the British businessman and Marxist politician (the author of the first introduction to Marx in the English language) Henry Hyndman'* (Zipperstein, p.120). According to Zipperstein, following Hyndman's Memoirs, they had an interesting exchange, beginning with Davitt's observation that *'There is not a police bureau in Europe [that] would believe this was an accidental meeting.'*

Zipperstein continues:

'The gist of what Hyndman took away regarding Davitt's views of Jews was that, while he felt great antipathy for those responsible for the massacre, he saw Jews as fanning discontent or worse. "Undoubtedly, Davitt in private while not excusing the Russian authorities felt that Russia would be much better off if she had no Jews at all in her boundaries." ... He never did rationalise their oppression, but it was a sufficient argument for Jewish mass migration elsewhere - preferably, as Davitt would come to see it, to Palestine.'

Despite his suggestion that *'Hyndman might have exaggerated Davitt's antagonism to Jews in light of his own jaundiced opinions: "Anglo-Hebraic empire in Africa" was how he referred to South Africa'*, Zipperstein says: *'In a bloated six-hundred-page tome published in 1902, The Boer War for Freedom, he [Davitt] singled out as prime exploiters of the beleaguered South African region no fewer than forty "Anglicised and German Jews" who, alongside Cecil Rhodes, were "the capitalist kings" most responsible for oppression of the Boers. Davitt never entirely turned his back on such notions: In the preface to his Kishinev book, written the following year, he states: "Where anti-Semitism stands in fair political combat . . . or against the engineers of a sordid war as in South Africa . . . I am resolutely in line with its spirit and programme."'*

Davitt seems to be among those - like Solzhenitsyn himself, Plehve, Churchill and the SS Commander Baron Leopold Edler von Mildenstein⁵ - who believed that the presence of Jews was a problem for the people among whom they lived and that the solution was the formation of a Jewish state, with Palestine as the obvious choice of territory. By Zipperstein's account he became something of a folk hero among New York Jews. After describing a play called *Kishineff*, whose hero, 'a naive and good-hearted journalist from the United States, whose courage is all the more impressive since he was one-handed' (as was Davitt), Zipperstein continues (p.105):

'he was responsible for the most harrowing - certainly the most widely read - accounts of the Kishinev pogrom, all of which were sympathetic to the Jewish victims, which catapulted him to meteoric fame. He was the inspiration for several other plays, too, as well as Yiddish poetry. His untimely death in 1906 would be treated much like the death of a holy martyr, marked by Jewish commemorative events attended by huge appreciative crowds.'

JOHN KLIER ON SOLZHENITSYN

In previous articles, centred round the 1881-2 pogroms, I've shown, or at least suggested, that modern English language research on Russian-Jewish supports Solzhenitsyn's view that the pogroms were not provoked, or at all wanted, by the Russian government, that government representatives, whatever their personal feelings about Jews, tried to suppress them, though often in a fumbling manner. Zipperstein broadly goes along with this. He points out that internationally Russia had the reputation of being a highly efficient police state. In this respect he quotes (p.90) Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*: "*Russia, as well as ancient Peru, Egypt, and Sparta, exemplify that owning of the individual by the state . . . for a social system adapted for war.*" Hence the difficulty in believing that anything like a pogrom could occur without government compliance. 'In reality' he continues, '*Russia was far less militarised than then believed. The guidelines for the use of the military in civil disturbances were hopelessly complicated and designed largely for rural disturbances, not urban ones. The military typically resented being used for such purposes, and, more often than not, befuddlement or obtuseness were the main reasons why Russian officials like those in Kishinev so mishandled urban riots - which were increasingly common at the turn of the century, mostly in the form of ever-more-violent industrial disputes.*'

In the earlier articles I made great use of writings by the specialist in nineteenth century Russian Jewish relations, John Klier. It happens that in the case of the Kishinev pogrom

⁵ Yakov M.Rabkin: *What is modern Israel?*, Pluto Books, London, 2016, p.93, discusses his enthusiasm for Palestine as the solution to Germany's Jewish problem.

we have an article by Klier directly commenting on Solzhenitsyn's account.⁶ He again agrees that the government did not instigate the pogrom. We remember that in Dubnow's account the government had encouraged the virulent anti-semitism of *Bessarabets*, that the pogrom had been preceded by the arrival of the mysterious Okhrana (secret police) official, Baron Levendahl, who had just as mysteriously disappeared after it and, as the most convincing proof, there was the letter from Plehve to the governor, von Raaben, instructing him, in the event of a pogrom, not to use force to suppress it.

According to Solzhenitsyn, the finger was pointed at Levendahl by *'the famous lawyer Zaroudny, sent to Kishinev by the Jewish Defence Committee to investigate the situation.'* He quotes a report by a member of the committee, M.Krohl, published in 1903, as saying *'it was on his order that the police and the army helped the murderers and looters.'* According to Krohl, Levendahl planned the pogrom with *'a merchant named Pronin and a notary called Pissarjevsky.'* Zipperstein hardly bothers mentioning Levendahl (only in passing as the possible model for the villain in the New York play celebrating the heroism of Michael Davitt, *Kishineff*) but he does take the view that a group gathered round *'the builder Georgi Pronin'* had a role in directing events. His book includes a photograph of Pronin's house which is a very grand mansion. Pronin was expelled from Kishinev by von Raaben's successor, Sergei Urussov.

Klier, like Solzhenitsyn, sees no reason to think that 'Levandal' had anything to do with it. Far from disappearing after the events he stayed in post in Kishinev and in May (before Urussov's arrival in June) participated in a meeting to organise measures against another possible outbreak.

The Plehve letter, which Zipperstein says was of huge importance as a rare documentary proof of government compliance, was published in the *Times* in London on 18th May 1903. In response, the government, in Solzhenitsyn's account, *'could think of nothing better than to produce a casual denial signed by the chief of the police department A [Alexei] Lopukhin, and that only on the ninth day after the scandalous publication of the Times but instead of investigating the forgery it merely expelled Braham [the Times journalist who published it - PB] from the territory.'*

He continues:

'We can say with certainty that it was a fake, for several reasons. Not only because Braham never advanced the slightest proof of the letter's authenticity. Not only because Lopukhin, a declared enemy of Plehve's, himself denied the text [he was police chief under Plehve. Zipperstein says he reaffirms Plehve's innocence of the letter in his often very frank and revealing memoirs - PB]. Not only because Prince Urussov, very sympathetic to

⁶ John Klier: 'Solzhenitsyn and the Kishinev pogrom - a slander against Russia', *European Jewish Affairs*, Vol 33, No 1, 2003, pp.49-59.

the Jews, who succeeded von Raaben and took charge of the governorship archives, found no "Plehve letter". Not only because poor von Raaben, sacked, his life and career broken, never, in his desperate efforts to restore his reputation, complained of having received instruction "from above" - which would have immediately saved his career and made him the idol of liberal society. The main reason lies in the fact that the state archives had nothing in common with the faked up archives of the Soviet era when any old document could be put together on demand, while another could be got rid of secretly. No. In the Russian archives everything was kept, inviolably and for ever. Right after the February revolution, a commission of enquiry set up by the provisional government and, even more zealous, the "Special Commission for the study of the history of the pogroms", with investigators as serious as S.Dubnow and G.Krasny-Adnoni, found neither in Petersburg nor in Kishinev, the incriminating document, nor any record of it having been received or sent. They only found the translation of Braham's English text ...' (p.368)

Dubnow's *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol iii, published in English in 1920, does concede (p.77) that *'The authenticity of this letter is not entirely beyond suspicion. But', he continues, 'there can be no doubt that instructions to that effect, rather by word of mouth than in writing, probably through the secret agent Levendahl, had been actually transmitted to the authorities in Kishinev.'*

Klier regards the letter as a forgery but nonetheless indicates an element of doubt, saying that, according to the archive Dubnow and his colleagues examined, there should have been four files relating to Kishinev but they only found one. And he adds that the letter was convincing because it corresponded so well to the behaviour of the government. It didn't actually call for a pogrom. It said that in the event of actions against the Jews they should be stopped by *'admonitions ... without at all having recourse, however, to the use of arms'* in order to avoid *'instilling, by too severe measures, anti-governmental feelings into the population, which is not yet affected by [revolutionary] propaganda.'* It wasn't until he had authorisation from Plehve, late on Monday afternoon, that von Raaben gave von Bekman, commander of the local garrison, freedom to act, which he did very quickly and efficiently, bringing the whole thing to an end in a couple of hours (with 600 arrests - there were 900 altogether).

Klier's main criticism of Solzhenitsyn is that he doesn't take sufficient account of the atmosphere of the time created by a government which gave little indication that violence against Jews would not be tolerated. In 1881 the government had promoted the idea that Jews were exploiting the peasantry, in 1903 that they were over-represented in the revolutionary movement. Plehve had, only shortly before the Kishinev pogrom, made a speech to that effect in neighbouring Odessa. And the government had indeed, as Dubnow complains, permitted the vicious anti-semitism of *Bessarabets*. Klier also says (p.54) that Solzhenitsyn *'fails to appreciate the impact of the pogrom on Russian Jewry.'* He gives a

brief account of it. And it was indeed huge, not just on Russian Jewry but on Jewish politics in New York, on the wider Zionist movement and on Palestine since, together with the events surrounding the 1905 'revolution', it prompted the second aliyah. It is indeed for that reason that I've devoted so much space to this one single pogrom, one among many, but the one that had probably a much greater impact than any of the others.

PAVEL KRUSHEVAN AND THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION

But before leaving Kishinev and moving on to these wider consequences, I'd like to say a word about *Bessarabets* and particularly about how it, or its founder, Pavel Krushevan, is understood by Zipperstein.

Zipperstein admits to being fascinated by Krushevan: *'Capable of producing the vilest, most contemptible trash, Krushevan also wrote work of distinction, even beauty. He was rightly depicted during his lifetime as a sensitive, yielding man, and a hysteric; a rank pogrom monger and yet also Bessarabia's most distinguished intellectual.'* In particular *'His lavishly illustrated guide to Bessarabia had elicited a commendation from the Tsar. That volume was deemed so impressive that the new governor general, Urussov, regarded it as his main source of information about the province before his arrival.'* (p.165) His writings, including at least one novel and an ambitious general account, *What is Russia?*, are currently being reprinted in Russia where *'He is now touted as an early, singularly incisive exponent of "Christian Socialism", which is seen as a healthy antidote to liberalism's anonymity, its soullessness and its susceptibility to the machinations of Jews'* (p.148).

Prior to the pogrom breaking out, and at the beginning of the Jewish Passover the body of a peasant boy was discovered with multiple stab wounds in the nearby town of Dubassary. There was an immediate suspicion that it was a Jewish ritual killing to obtain Christian blood for baking unleavened bread. In Dubnow's account: *'The Bessarabets immediately launched a campaign against the Jews, accusing them of ritual murder. "Death to the Jews! Let all Zhyds be massacred!" - such appeals were almost daily repeated in the paper which was read in all the saloons and public houses of Bessarabia.'* Dubnow doesn't mention that the local police quickly gave the lie to the charge of ritual murder (it was a cousin of the boy, deep in debt, hoping to secure his inheritance) but it is certainly true that despite these findings *Bessarabets* continued to make it. I find it difficult to believe, however, that it actually had headlines saying *'Let all Zhyds be massacred.'* Zipperstein seems to have gone to the trouble of reading it and gives some examples (p.165):

"Zhidy think about how best to rob the honour, the conscience, the truth of peasants" (March 17, 1903). *"What is the source of the success of the Jews? It is their unification under one single corruption and their capacity to act collectively, all for one and*

one for all. And we can mirror them united into one guild, one brotherhood” (March 4, 1903). “Everywhere Jews live they figure among the bulk of deviants, counterfeiters, handlers of illegal documents, goods, food, wine, medical supplies, delicacies” (March 23, 1903).’

But he doesn't repeat the headlines calling for massacre which I would have thought would have been worth mentioning. At the time of the pogrom Krushevan was in Saint Petersburg, working on a new venture, *Znamia* (The Banner). After mentioning the Tsar's approval of his guide to Bessarabia, Zipperstein continues:

'Krushevan had also recently received a handsome subsidy of five thousand rubles for the publication of Znamia. These expressions of sympathy reinforced the impression that Krushevan lived something of a charmed life and was supported generously by officialdom. Yet barely three weeks after Krushevan received the tsar's laudatory letter, his debts were deemed so crushingly heavy that he was served with a bailiff's letter inventorying his belongings for auction. The list was strikingly meager: bits and pieces of furniture, including one chair, one table, a few bookcases, and two printing presses, all stuffed into a modest flat on Gogol Street. He had sold Bessarabets, taking payment for the newspaper but managing nonetheless not to deliver it to its new owner; subscription payments were still in his hands. As a result legal proceedings were now initiated against him ... His new St. Petersburg publication was a four-page, large-size weekly available only by subscription because censors feared its explosive content, especially its antisemitism.'

It is at this point that the story gets very interesting. It was in *Znamia*, in 1903, that the first version of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published.

According to what has become the standard account, the Protocols were put together by the then Paris based Okhrana chief, Pyotr Rachkovsky in the mid to late 1890s. This is a theme that is developed, with a great deal of detail on the inner workings of the Russian court and government, by Norman Cohn in his book *Warrant for genocide*.⁷ According to the Italian linguist Cesare G. De Michelis, however,: *'the PSM [initials of the Russian language version - PB] were realised between April 1902 and August 1903. One can even say that at that second date they weren't yet "completed"'*⁸

As we know the Protocols follow very closely a French original text, the *Dialogue aux enfers* by Maurice Joly, originally published in 1864 as a satire on the rule of Napoleon III. It had nothing to do with Jews. It takes the form of a dialogue between the eighteenth

⁷ Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1970. First published in 1967.

⁸ Cesare G. De Michelis: 'Les "Protocoles des sages de Sion"', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, July-Sept 1997, Vol.38, No 3, pp.263-303. My translation from the French. Zipperstein gives as reference a book, Idem: *The Non-existent manuscript, a study of the Protocols of the Sages of Zion*, (Lincoln, NE, 2001).

century liberal political philosopher Montesquieu (Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu) and the Renaissance political philosopher of *realpolitik* Niccolò Machiavelli. The arguments of the Elder of Zion are taken from 'Machiavelli's argument for a benign but utterly ruthless despotism (not, it seems, unlike the arguments advanced by Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*). The case De Michelis puts for 1902-3 as the probable date of composition is based on a detailed examination of the differences between the French text and the Russian, including arguments on the ways in which French words have been interpreted. Zipperstein takes it as a definitive repudiation of the thesis that it originated with Rachkowski in Paris in the 1890s.

The text had little impact until 1917. In 1920 the *Times* in London regarded it as the authentic record of a Jewish project until in 1921, also in the *Times*, a journalist called Philip Graves drew attention to the resemblances with the *Dialogue aux enfers*. At the time Graves presented Joly's text as extremely obscure, but De Michelis points out that actually in the late nineteenth century it was quite well known: *'Republished several times in French, it was immediately translated into German and some years later was also translated into Spanish. What is more the "personalities" of this late "dialogue of the dead" were well known in Russia, also as personalities in the literary genre; and in the second half of the nineteenth century, Machiavelli's Russian reputation had undergone a sudden revival, linked to the revolutionary movement'* (p.282).

In other words the earliest compiler of the Protocols could reasonably expect that its source could be recognised. On that basis De Michelis suggests that it was originally intended not as a forgery - supposedly an account of an event that really occurred - but as a satire. And he goes on to suggest that the context of the project was the Fifth Congress of the Zionist movement held in Basle in December 1901, *'whose importance was enormous, since that was when the concrete plan for buying territories in Palestine was announced, the first step towards the constitution of a Jewish state entity [entité étatique]. The Russian judeophobe world was struck by the event.'*

Three and a half months later the first mention of the Protocols appeared in the widely read paper *Novoe Vremia* in an article by Mikhail Osipovitch Menshikov, who says he had been shown such a text in 1902 but *'doubted its authenticity and refused to have anything to do with it.'* (Zipperstein, p.168). When Krushevan published it he too raised doubts about its authenticity. According to Michelis, Krushevan's Russian text has a number of peculiarities that indicate a Ukrainian origin, ie not having been written by a Russian Okhrana agent in Paris. There are also indications that the text, particularly when compared with later versions, notably one by Krushevan's close associate Georgiy Butmi, was put out in something of a hurry in an incomplete state. Michelis speculates that the PSM are *'in the first place a parody of T.Herzl's Judenstaat'* and that *'they were originally conceived as a mock [prétendu] document preparatory to the Fifth Congress ... Then the*

events of 1903 could have pushed Krushevan into using this "product" still in a raw state; then came that terrible year for Russia, 1905, and someone ... "perfected" it and then one way or another Nilus [Sergei Nilus who published the final version, the one that took off in 1917 - PB] was implicated.'

The 'events in 1903' that would have inspired Krushevan to rush the document out were the consequences of the Kishinev pogrom - the fact that all of a sudden Kishinev was famous throughout the world, resulting in devastating consequences for the Russian government, including the withdrawal of a longstanding and important US-Russia trade agreement. And at the centre of this worldwide reaction to the pogrom was the local representative of the Zionist Congress, manager of the movement's correspondence bureau, Jacob Bernstein-Kogan, whom Krushevan knew well - they had been in school together.

The pogrom was followed by the visit to Russia of Theodor Herzl himself, a very controversial event among the Zionists since one of the purposes of his visit was to meet the arch villain Plehve - a meeting in which Plehve (soon, in 1904, to be assassinated, not by a Jew but on a Jewish initiative) agreed to use Russian influence with the Ottoman sultanate to allow Jewish settlement in Palestine.

For the antisemites, Herzl's visit was deeply disturbing: *'This would only be accentuated after news spread of the wildly enthusiastic reception he received when, on visiting Vilna, the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," thousands greeted his train in the middle of the night. Circles close to Krushevan as well as the Russian government registered all this with mounting concern. The government made this clear in a book-length report on the Zionists that was produced soon after the Minsk conference by the police director Aleksei Lopukhin, a particularly well-informed bureaucrat ... Mentioned frequently in the Lopukhin report is the prominence of Kishinev's Bernstein-Kogan, with nearly as many references to him as to Herzl. Bernstein-Kogan was described as occupying a role unmatched in the Zionist hierarchy, the virtual "president" of the movement in Russia'* (Zipperstein, pp. 177-8).

Zipperstein goes on to say that *'though he was far from the darkly influential figure imagined by St. Petersburg officials or Kishinev's far Right, Bernstein-Kogan's role in catapulting the city's pogrom into a world-famous event was pivotal. His ability to spread word of the pogrom - and with breathtaking speed - to newspapers, organisations, and influential figures throughout Europe, the United States, and elsewhere would consolidate the belief that he was at the epicentre of Jewry's worldwide machinations. Here was that rare moment when fantasy, or at least the previously unprovable, seemed to mesh seamlessly with reality.'*

Zipperstein is probably exaggerating when he says (p.182): *'So it was that an overweight, underpaid, midlevel political activist - someone known to Krushevan since boyhood, when both were clothed in the same gymnasium uniform - became the unlikely inspiration for the*

most terrifying Jew on the planet.' But he may well be right that this was the context in which Krushevan decided to present what had originally been conceived as a satire on Herzl and the Fifth Zionist Congress as a possibly (but guarding his back by expressing doubts as to its authenticity) genuine record of a real event.