

SOLZHENITSYN'S TWO CENTURIES TOGETHER, Part 17 ¹

- The Pogroms, part six - Self Defence

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JEWISH SELF ASSERTION IN GOMEL

Solzhenitsyn's main argument throughout the period covered so far has been that the Russian government was not involved in fomenting anti-Jewish pogroms: 'Why has the simple truth about the Kishinev pogrom seemed to be insufficient? Probably because the truth would have revealed the real nature of the government - an organism that had become sclerotic, guilty of anti-Jewish provocations [*brimades* in the French translation] but which remained unsure of itself, incoherent. So, with the help of outright lies, it has been represented as a deliberate persecutor, sure of itself, wicked. Such an *enemy* could only deserve a complete annihilation.'

The importance of this argument (and modern academic research seems to agree with it) is that throughout the world many people - the great majority of people who took an interest in the matter and certainly the great majority of Jews, saw the Tsarist government in much the same light as they were later, with much more justification, to see Nazi Germany. Within the Russian Empire itself the sense of moral outrage led many Jews into the Revolutionary movement with intense divisions as to whether Jews should work with other radical forces, Socialist or Liberal, or assert their own separate interest - an autonomous legal system, territorial or non-territorial, within the Russian Empire, or seeking a territory of their own outside the Empire, whether it had to be Palestine or not.

What all the tendencies had in common was a contempt for the Tsarist system. It should be said that this was not absolutely universal. In his book *The Education of a true believer*, Solzhenitsyn's old friend Lev Kopelev (the sympathetic 'Stalinist' Lev Rubin of *In the first circle*) talks of the portrait of the Tsar and family loyalty in his own Jewish childhood home in Kiev. Which he presents as having been wholly sincere. But one of Solzhenitsyn's recurrent complaints is that many professional or commercially successful Jews who themselves had done well out of the Tsarist system (and for that very reason tended to move in Liberal circles) still gave moral support to their own more radical children.

The Kishinev pogrom was followed in August 1903 by a pogrom in Gomel. Gomel, or Homel, in the south eastern part of modern Belorussia, had been the site of a major massacre of Jews during the Khelmnitsky rising in the seventeenth century. It had been incorporated into the Russian Empire in the first Polish partition. According to an account in the Jewish Encyclopaedia:

'Anti-Jewish outbreaks occurred in Gomel in Sept. 1903. Rumours of impending riots had been circulated in the latter part of the previous month. The trouble arose on Friday, Sept. 11, when a

¹ Although I am still giving page references to the French translation I have found that an unofficial translation of the whole text can be found on the internet (previously there was a selection, mainly from Vol ii, the Soviet period) at <https://mlpol.net/images/src/65A1DD03A79064CE0A0D0A173D863245-20619817.pdf>

*watchman wished to buy from a Jewish woman a barrel of herring worth six roubles for one rouble fifty copecks. In the fight which followed between the Jewish pedlars of the market-place and the Christians who came to the aid of the watchman, one of the Christians was injured and died the same day. The riot was renewed on the following day, and when it had been quelled the town was practically under martial law. Meanwhile a number of anti-Semitic agitators, probably executing the orders of the authorities, inflamed the passions of the mob, exhorting them not to leave their fellow Christians unavenged. On Monday, Sept. 14, about 100 railway employees gathered and began to break the windows and to enter and plunder the houses of the Jews in the poorest quarters of the town, one of which is called "Novaya Amerika" ("New America"). A number of Jews armed and began to defend themselves, but the soldiers prevented them from entering the streets where the plundering was going on, and forced them back to their homes, beating and arresting those who resisted. According to a reliable report, other soldiers and the police looked on in an indifferent way while the mob continued its plundering and committed all kinds of excesses. The shrieks of children could be heard in the streets which the soldiers had blocked against the Jews without; and when some of the Jews tried to force their way down the side-streets, the soldiers fired on them, wounding several among them and killing six. The total number of Jews killed is given as 25; seriously injured, 100; slightly injured, 200. Three hundred and seventy-two Jewish houses and 200 stores were plundered and destroyed.'*²

Solzhenitsyn, basing his account on police reports and on the accounts of the trial, describes it as confrontation between two equally aggressive sides. In March 1903, he says, the Bund had organised celebrations of the assassination of Alexander II. We saw in the article on Kishinev³ that one of the major effects on Jewish consciousness was shame at the failure to fight back (though we also saw from Steven Zipperstein's account that there had been more resistance on the part of the Jews than was publicly acknowledged at the time). An article by Stefan Wiese quotes 'a leaflet published soon after the pogrom and authored by eminent Jewish writers from Russia, among them Bialik, Simon Dubnov and Ahad Ha'am' as saying:

'Had we not been deprived of fundamental human rights, had the masses not seen us daily in our humiliation in this country and not felt the hatred and contempt showered upon us from on high, the power of a few agitators would not have been strong enough to lead the masses to robbery and murder in broad daylight. But [...] as the boorish masses see our degradation and hear our shame day in and out - it is only natural that this constant agitation implants a strong belief in the hearts of the rabble that a Jew is not human; that there is no obligation to treat him justly, like other human beings; that his property, his honour, and his very life are disowned, and for spilling his blood no one is held accountable. [...] Do we still intend to remain contented with tears and supplications in the future? It is a disgrace for five million human souls [...] to stretch their necks to slaughter and cry for help, without as much as attempting to defend their own property, honour and lives. [...] Brothers! The blood of our brethren in Kishinev cries out to us! Shake off the dust and become men! Stop weeping and pleading, stop lifting your hands for mercy to those who hate and exclude you! Look to your own hands for rescue! A permanent organisation is needed in all our

² Jewish Encyclopedia (1901-1905), Volume 16 p450-451

³ *Church and State*, No.142, October-December, 2020 and <http://www.peterbrooke.org/politics-and-theology/solzhenitsyn/pogroms-4/>

communities, which would be standing guard and prepared to face the enemy at the outset, to quickly gather to the place of riots any men who have the courage to face danger.'

He continues:

'This new development among Jewish intellectuals coincided with another among socialists. Not long before the onset of the new wave of pogroms, various revolutionary parties began to establish their own armed detachments as a defensive measure against the government's apparatus of repression and, in the long run, as a nucleus for a future revolutionary uprising. The Bund, for example, established its first "battle squads" in 1902 and re-designated most of them as self-defence units in 1903. Since Jewish and socialist circles most widely interpreted the pogroms as instigated by the state, there was a great tendency to see the goals of opposition to autocracy, resistance to pogroms and an emotional rehabilitation of Russia's Jews as being congruent.

'This was the situation when, after the Kishinev pogrom, a self-defence movement emerged. Young men (and some women) willing to risk their lives joined with experienced political activists providing organisational knowledge and skills, while the more wealthy Jews granted material support. When the next significant pogrom came in September 1903 in the city of Gomel', a well organised self-defence unit was present, and its actions were seen as a major success. It motivated Vladimir I. Zhabotinskii to modify Bialik's then famous words on Kishinev ("the grief is huge but so is the shame"). With regard to Gomel', Zhabotinskii wrote:

*"'The Jewish street before and after Kishinev is by far not the same [...] The shame of Kishinev was the last shame. Then came Gomel'. Jewish grief was repeated even more merciless than before - but not the shame.'"*⁴

At the trial in October 1904, according to Solzhenitsyn, the Jewish lawyers walked out because Jews (the self-defence groups) were being tried together with the Christians (44 Christians and 36 Jews). Solzhenitsyn also says (p.371) that in Autumn 1903, liberal lawyers had been willing to defend those accused of engaging in the Kishinev pogrom provided they gave evidence that they had received government support; they resigned collectively because the court had refused to arraign the Minister of the Interior, Plehve.

1905 - WAR AND REVOLUTION

There was a large increase in Jewish emigration to the US in the years 1904 and 1905. Solzhenitsyn attributes this not to Kishinev or Gomel but to the desire to avoid conscription in the Russo-Japanese war, which began in February 1904 (NS) with the surprise Japanese attack on Port Arthur in China which had been leased to Russia as the only port on the Pacific that the Russians could use all the year round. The war turned on rivalry between the two powers for influence in China and Korea. He quotes the Jewish Encyclopaedia saying that the proportion of Jews in 1902 was 30 and for 1903, 34 for every Christian evading conscription. But he also quotes the Encyclopaedia saying that during the war there were between 20,000 and 30,000 Jews serving together with 3,000 Jewish

⁴ Stefan Wiese: "Spit Back with Bullets!" Emotions in Russia's Jewish Pogroms, 1881 — 1905, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft - Gefühle gegen Juden*, October - December 2013, pp. 472-501. Passages quoted, pp. 488-90. Stefan Wiese is (or was, in 2016), Research assistant at the Department of History of Eastern Europe in the Humboldt University of Berlin. The lacunae in his quotations {...} are in his original.

doctors and that both the generally anti-semitic journal *Novoe Vremia* and General Denikin paid tribute to the quality of their service (Solzhenitsyn, pp.386-7). Nonetheless the Japanese military effort, and eventual spectacular victory, were rendered possible by a huge loan - \$200 million - from the American Jewish banker Jacon Schiff. Schiff also used his very considerable influence to prevent any American loans going to Tsarist Russia. Assuming that his intention was to improve the conditions of Jews in Russia it doesn't strike me as a good way of going about it.

In his account of the 1905 revolution and the events surrounding it, Solzhenitsyn lays great stress on the role of the Jews, in this case acting in support of the general revolutionary cause rather than a specifically Jewish interest. Notable examples include Grigori Gershuni and Mikhail Gots, who feature among the founders of the Social Revolutionary Party. Gershuni in particular was active, together with Mikhail's brother Abram Gots, in the Party's 'Combat Organisation', responsible for a number of important assassinations including, in 1904, Vyacheslav von Plehve, accused of being behind the Kishinev pogrom, and in 1905, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich who, as Governor of Moscow had been responsible for the mass expulsion of Jewish artisans in 1901.⁵ Gershuni was arrested in 1904 and replaced as head of the Combat organisation by Yevno Azef, also Jewish, later revealed as having been a police informer and agent provocateur.

Frankel (whose concern is mainly with specifically Jewish politics rather than Jews involved in general revolutionary politics) mentions Gershuni in passing as one of an array of revolutionaries who visited the Jewish community in New York in 1906 raising money for a variety of causes. He quotes the Jewish Socialist leader Moyshe Baranov, writing in January 1906:

*'Never has one danced in the Russian colony in New York as during this last year. One danced for the Bund; one danced for the free-thinking Socialist-Revolutionaries; and one even danced for the scientific Social Democrats. One danced for the Jewish widows and orphans in Odessa, for the revolutionary sailors in Sebastopol, for the Latvian socialists and the Polish socialists ... The more they went on strike and went hungry in Europe, the more one danced in New York. The more the shooting over there, the more the quailles danced over here.'*⁶

In particular, Solzhenitsyn (p.396) draws attention to the interesting case of Pinchas/Pyotr Rutenberg.

The starting point for the 1905 revolution is generally seen as 'Bloody Sunday' on the 9th (20th) January, when troops fired into a crowd of workers and peasants advancing on the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The crowd was led by an Orthodox priest, Father Georgiy Gapon, and was carrying icons and portraits of the Tsar. It was, in appearance at least, anything but revolutionary.

⁵ After the assassination, his wife Elizabeth - like her sister the Tsarina Alexandra, a grand daughter of Queen Victoria - became a nun and founded an order which, unusually for Orthodox monks and nuns, was devoted to good works among the poor. She was killed by the Cheka in 1918 and is recognised by the Orthodox Church as a saint and martyr.

⁶ Jonathan Frankel: *Prophecy and politics - Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917*, Cambridge University Press, 1984 (first published 1981), p.492.

Gapon had been the founder in 1904 of the 'Assembly of Russian Factory and Plant Workers.' This was one of the 'police unions' set up following an initiative of S.V.Zubatov, Chief of the Moscow Okhrana (political police), with the intention of emphasising purely economic rather than political demands. Zubatov had been appointed head of the whole Okhrana in August 1902 but was dismissed by the Interior Minister, Plehve, after the contradictions between the police and the police union were drawn to breaking point by a general strike in Odessa in 1903. However, Plehve continued to experiment with officially recognised unions. To give the account by Richard Pipes:

*'One of the post- Zubatov unions which he authorised was led by a priest, Father George Gapon. The son of a Ukrainian peasant, Gapon was a charismatic figure who genuinely identified with the workers and their grievances. He was inspired by Leo Tolstoy and agreed to cooperate with the authorities only after considerable hesitation. With the blessing of the governor-general of the capital, I. A. Fullon, he founded the Assembly of Russian Factory and Plant Workers to work for the moral and cultural uplifting of the working class. (He stressed religion rather than economic issues and admitted only Christians.) Plehve approved Gapon's union in February 1904. It enjoyed great popularity and opened branches in different quarters of the city: toward the end of 1904, it was said to have 11,000 members and 8,000 associates, which overshadowed the St. Petersburg Social-Democratic organisation, numerically insignificant to begin with and composed almost entirely of students. The police watched Gapon's activities with mixed feelings, for as his organisation prospered he displayed worrisome signs of independence, to the point of attempting, without authorisation, to open branches in Moscow and Kiev. It is difficult to tell what was on Gapon's mind, but there is no reason to regard him as a "police agent" in the ordinary meaning of the term - that is, a man who betrayed associates for money -because he indubitably sympathised with his workers and identified with their aspirations. Unlike the ordinary agent provocateur, he also did not conceal his connections with the authorities: Governor Fullon openly participated in some of his functions. Indeed, by late 1904 it was difficult to tell whether the police were using Gapon or Gapon the police, for by that time he had become the most outstanding labor leader in Russia.'*⁷

The period prior to 1905 saw intense activity on the part of the 'Union of Liberation' whose main activity in Russia consisted of a series of 'banquets' in which toasts were proposed demanding constitutional reform, following the example of the revolutionaries in France (and Britain) in the late eighteenth century. This was the movement that later in 1905 gave birth to the Constitutional Democratic Party - the 'Cadets'. Dismissed by the Social Democrats as 'bourgeois', its leading theorist, Peter Struve, had previously been responsible for the first programme of the Russian Social Democratic movement and the Liberation movement was closely allied with the Social Revolutionaries. If we follow Pipes's account it was this movement that provided the main political impetus through most of the events of 1905.

It also attracted the support of many Jews. Quoting Solzhenitsyn (pp.387-8) 'Like all the Russian liberals they showed themselves to be "defeatists" during the war with Japan. Like them they applauded the "execution" of the ministers Bogolepov, Sipiagin, Plehve.' It was

⁷ Richard Pipes: *The Russian Revolution, 1899-1919*, Fontana Press, 1992 (first published 1990), p.22.

in this context that the 'Society for the attainment of full civil rights for the Jewish people' was formed and its demands became a central feature of the Cadet platform.

Pipes quotes Gapon's own account of his involvement with the Liberation Movement:

'Meanwhile, the great conference of the Zemstvos took place in November, and was followed by the petition of Russian barristers for a grant of law and liberty. I could not but feel that the day when freedom would be wrested from the hands of our old oppressors would be near, and at the same time I was terribly afraid that, for lack of support on the side of the masses, the effort might fail. I had a meeting with several intellectual Liberals, and asked their opinion as to what the workmen could do to help the liberation movement. They advised me that we also should draft a petition and present it to the Government. But I did not think that such a petition would be of much value unless it were accompanied by a large industrial strike.'

Pipes continues:

'Gapon's testimony leaves no doubt that the worker petition that led to Bloody Sunday was conceived by his advisers from the Liberation Movement as part of the campaign of banquets and professional gatherings. At the end of November, Gapon agreed to introduce into his Assembly the resolutions of the Zemstvo Congress and to distribute to its members publications of the Union of Liberation.

'The opportunity for a major strike presented itself on December 20, 1904 with the dismissal of four workers belonging to his Assembly by Putilov, the largest industrial enterprise in the capital. Because the Putilov management had recently founded a rival union, the workers viewed the dismissals as an assault on their Assembly and went on strike. Other factories struck in sympathy. On January 7, an estimated 82,000 workers were out; the following day, their number grew to 120,000. By then, St. Petersburg was without electricity and newspapers; all public places were closed.

'Imitating the banquet campaign, Gapon on January 6 scheduled for Sunday, January 9, a worker procession to the Winter Palace to present the Tsar with a petition. As was the case with all the documents drafted by or with the assistance of the Union of Liberation, the petition generalised and politicised specific and unpolitical grievances, claiming that there could be no improvement in the condition of the workers unless the political system was radically changed. Written in a stilted language meant to imitate worker speech, it called for a Constituent Assembly and made other demands taken from the programme of the Union of Liberation. Gapon sent copies of the petition to high officials. Preparations for the demonstration went ahead despite the opposition of the socialists.' (pp.22-4)

PYOTR/PINCHAS RUTENBERG - SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY AND PIONEER OF THE ELECTRIFICATION OF PALESTINE / ISRAEL

What Pipes doesn't mention is that, marching at Gapon's side, was the Social Revolutionary Pyotr Rutenberg who, after his student days, had become a worker in the Putilov works. According to Solzhenitsyn (p.396): 'In 1905 he trained groups of fighters in Petersburg and furnished them with arms. Inspirer of Gapon, he was at his side on the 9th January, 1905.'. More detail is given in an article on the Tel Aviv street name website, based

on research by Tel Aviv University Professor Matityahu Mintz (presumably translated rather awkwardly from an original in Hebrew)⁸:

'Rutenberg heard from the workers at the Putilov factory about the intention to hold a mass march headed by Father Gapon. The march was supposed to march toward the Winter Palace to present a petition to Tzar Nicholas II of Russia. This demonstration took place in January and was called "Bloody Sunday". It marked the beginning of the revolution of 1905. Rutenberg reported the plan to his party leaders and they ordered him to take part in the demonstration and supervise its actions. He was an activist and also engaged in political assassinations, so he knew a thing or two about organising and demonstrating. He tried to persuade Father Gapon and his men to equip themselves with weapons and prepare escape routes ... Gapon never imagined that the revered ruler would shoot his soldiers / loyal sons. Of course, the naïve predictions did not materialise, and the soldiers fired at the unarmed crowd. The only one who did not lose his temper was Rutenberg. Having been ordered to follow Gapon. Rutenberg convinced Gapon to quickly cut his hair and shave his beard, and dress in ordinary clothes. Rutenberg then transferred the wanted priest by the authorities from one apartment to another until they hid him in the apartment of his best friend, the writer Maxim Gorky.

'On the orders of his party leaders, Rutenberg smuggled the priest out of Russia and accompanied him on his tours of European cities. The arrival of Gapon aroused great excitement with the leaders of the various camps of the Russian revolutionary movement. He became a sought-after guest in the home of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Krupskaya, as well as in the home of Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism. Rutenberg even brought him to Paris where he met Georges Clemenceau and Jean Jaures. As a faithful, conservative, and monarchist cleric, he did not find a common language with the radical revolutionaries. The only one with whom he had created a friendship with, was Rutenberg, whose status in the party because of his connections with him had been upgraded. In the meantime, the revolution in Russia gained momentum and Gapon missed his homeland and its workers rising on barricades. Rumours circulated [sic. circulating? - PB] in Russia about his hedonistic way of life, his visits to the casino and his contacts with women caused him to seek to purify his name again. He applied for a return and his request was accepted.'

In 1906, however, after his return, Gapon was accused in Social Revolutionary circles of being a police agent and Rutenberg was instrumental in his execution. Since Azef, who really was a police informer, was involved in the accusation the whole affair is very murky.

Rutenberg's subsequent career is interesting. Apparently upset by his role in Gapon's murder, he took refuge in Italy, where he became friendly with the still Socialist Benito Mussolini. There, according to Mintz, 'he began to remember his Jewishness. Along with the understanding that the revolution would not, as many Jews believed, defeat anti-semitism and the atmosphere of national awakening that enveloped everything, made him "return to his people."' (Grammar as in original).

During the First World War he took up the idea of a Jewish Legion formed in support of the British 'liberation' of Palestine - an idea mainly associated with Jabotinsky, but Mintz felt Rutenberg's role had been underestimated. Mintz also argues that he continued his

⁸ <https://www.en.tlvstreets.com/Pinchas-Rutenberg.html>. Mintz, a Polish Jew who escaped to Israel in 1941, died in 2016.

allegiance to the Russian Social Revolutionary cause: 'The evidence of maintaining the connection and preference for the interests of the party will be its [sic. his?] rapid and smooth integration in the future at the top of the government during the Kerensky Social Revolutionary period.' Kerensky appointed him deputy governor of Petrograd 'where he took a hard hand against opponents of the regime. It was reported that he had proposed to arrest and hang the Bolshevik leaders, Lenin and Trotsky, but the liberal and hesitant Kerensky refused.' He was one of the last to hold out against the Bolshevik coup in the siege of the Winter Palace. After a period of imprisonment he escaped Russia and turned up at the Versailles Peace Conference where he met 'his great friend Nahman Syrkin' (who is discussed in the last article in this series) in arguing for a recognition of Jewish national rights.

Subsequently, in Palestine, he introduced electricity to the country through the 'Jaffa Electric Corporation' (1921) which became the 'Palestine Electric Corporation Ltd' in 1923 (and the 'Israel Electric Corporation' in 1961). Solzhenitsyn, with his Zionist sympathies, approves: 'In 1919 he emigrated to Israel where he distinguished himself in the electrification of the country. There he showed that he was capable of building; but in the days of his youth in Russia, he was far from any work of engineering, he was a destroyer!'. He was one of the founders of the Hagannah and, with a well established strong man reputation, became leader of the Jewish National Council in the crises of 1929 and 1939.

SELF DEFENCE - THE BUND AND THE ZHITOMIR POGROM

Solzhenitsyn (pp.400-401) tells us that the Bund played a central role in the events following Bloody Sunday:

'The Bund immediately published a proclamation ("with around 200,000 copies"): "The revolution has begun. It has taken fire in the capital, its flames will cover the the whole country ... To arms! Seize the armouries by force and take hold of all the weapons ... Let every street become a battlefield."

'According to the Red Chronicle⁹ account of the beginnings of the Soviet régime, "the events of the 9th January in Petersburg struck a chord with the heart of the Jewish workers movement: they were followed by mass demonstrations of the Jewish proletariat throughout the Zone of Residence. These were led by the Bund." To ensure mass participation in these demonstrations, detachments from the Bund visited workshops, factories, installations and even the homes of workers calling on them to stop work; they used force to empty boilers of their steam, tore out drive belts; they threatened the owners of the enterprises, here and there shots were fired, in Vitebsk one of them had sulphuric acid thrown at him. It wasn't "a spontaneous mass demonstration but a carefully prepared and organised action." N. Buchbinder regrets, however, that "almost everywhere the strikes were followed only by the Jewish workers... In a whole series of towns the Russian workers put up a strong resistance to the attempts to stop factories and plants." There were week-long strikes in

⁹ According to the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (3rd ed, 1970-9), The Red Chronicle (Krasnaia letopis') was 'a historical journal of the Petrograd (later Leningrad) Institute of Party History ... Krasnaia Letopis' was published from 1922 to 1934 and from 1936 to 1937. The journal published memoirs and articles on the history of the Bolshevik Party and of the Great October Socialist Revolution, devoting its main attention to the history of the Leningrad party organisation and the history of Leningrad's factories and plants.'

Vilnius, Minsk, Gomel, Riga, of two weeks in Libava. The police had to intervene, naturally, and in several cities the Bund constituted "armed detachments to combat police terror." In Krinki (the province of Grodno), the strikers shot at the police, interrupted telegraphic communications, and for two days all the power was in the hands of the strike committee. "The fact that workers, and among them a majority of Jews, had thus been able to hold power from the beginning of 1905, was very significant of what this revolution was, and gave rise to many hopes." It is no less true that the Bund's important participation in these actions "might lead one to believe that discontent was above all the doing of the Jews, while the other nationalities were not as revolutionary as all that."

The last quotation comes from Semyon Dimanstein, an Old Bolshevik active in Vilnius in 1904 in opposition to the Bund, appointed head in 1918 of the Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs, and a supporter of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in the Russian Far East (Birobidzhan). Executed in 1938. The Bund, it should be said, are barely mentioned in the 840 odd pages of Pipes's book.

Solzhenitsyn goes on to talk about the pogrom which occurred in April 1905 in Zhitomir, quoting Dimanstein as saying: 'It wasn't a pogrom but a fight against the forces of the counter revolution.' Stefan Wiese, whom I quoted earlier on Jewish determination to fight back against violence and insults, has an account of the events in Zhitomir which partly confirms Solzhenitsyn's view, but only partly. One is left with the impression of two different confrontations, one of which could be described as a confrontation between two equally aggressive parties, but the other is more like an old fashioned nineteenth century pogrom.

Zhitomir is situated to the West of Kiev, on the main road between Kiev and Brest. Jews constituted about a third of the population. The Christian population was divided almost equally between Catholic and Orthodox. There was a Catholic cathedral. The fact that modern Zhitomir has at least three Orthodox churches claiming to be 'cathedrals' - one attached to the Moscow patriarchate, one to the Kyiv patriarchate and a third I think attached to the older Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church - suggests, together with its situation to the West, that there is a strong sense of Ukrainian national identity. So the rumour that Jewish self defence groups were using a portrait of the Tsar for target practice may not have been quite as offensive to the sensibilities of the Orthodox population as Solzhenitsyn thinks it should have been. Nonetheless the fact that Jews were retiring to the woods to train in the use of firearms was worrying enough in itself.

The inspiration for the development of self defence groups was Gomel, seen as the beginning of the reassertion of Jewish pride. According to Wiese:

'Large swathes of the local Jewry supported the foundation of a self-defence unit in Zhitomir. But organising the illegal battle-squads, obtaining firearms and establishing conspiratorial commando-structures was impossible without the resources of local socialist networks. In Zhitomir, the main players were the SR and the Bund [...] It must also be acknowledged that a conflict of interest existed between the majority of the Jewish population, that strove to prevent or minimise violence, and the agenda of revolutionary parties which, by their very nature, thrived through the destabilisation and discrediting of state order.'

'This conflict inspired the battle-squad units of Zhitomir from the point of their first public action, which occurred during demonstrations against "Bloody Sunday" in January 1905. On 15 January,

they participated in a rally, accompanying their revolutionary songs and slogans with revolver shots. Then, from 25 to 26 January, local socialists planned to impose a general strike on the city. Groups armed with knives and revolvers threatened those employers who were unwilling to close their shops down; some additionally had their windows smashed.'

As a result, despite the opposition of older Jews, 'The message of the revolutionary self-defense was thus construed by large parts of the non-Jewish population as ethnic, not social or political opposition.'

In addition, as a result of the new Jewish self assertiveness there were 'repeated gentile complaints about Jews jamming the sidewalks and unwilling to give way to passers-by. Some of them were, allegedly, even insulted and attacked by young men out of a Jewish crowd. Consequently, "people in the city began to say: The Jew is revolting, the Jews must be curbed.'" The quote is from a letter sent by the Attorney of the Zhitomir regional court to the Minister of Justice.

Ziev continues:

'It was the self-defence itself that added one more disquieting ingredient to the already delicate situation in the city, as its leadership began to convene secret meetings for the purpose of military practice and political agitation. For conspiratorial reasons, they usually took place in the forests outside the city; but here they could not pass unnoticed by local peasants. In the villages, news spread about hundreds of Jews, who practiced shooting at a portrait of the Tsar. While contemporary press accounts depicted the latter as a mere myth, an investigation by the deputy Director of the Police Department produced considerable if not definite evidence to suggest that the gunshots at the Emperor's portrait had in fact occurred. For instance, on 13 April 1905, a self-defence meeting close to the village of Psyshche with speeches and shooting practice dispersed into small groups. One of them headed for the village crossing a sown field and was attacked by local peasants. Despite having defended themselves with firearms, one Jew was seriously wounded, while the peasants were left unharmed.

'News about the shooting of the Tsar's portrait spread rapidly in Zhitomir and its surroundings, and so did the idea that Jews might seek vengeance for their defeat near Psyshche. Peasants began to guard their houses at night fearing Jewish attacks or arson. In more general terms, the very emergence of the self-defence was interpreted as a threat, because rumour had it that "the Jews intend to retaliate against the Christians for the pogroms of Kishinev and Gomel." As Easter approached, it was even said that the Jews planned to blow up the (Orthodox or Catholic, by different versions) cathedral and to "massacre the Christians." In the mind of the populace, thus was the message of active self-defence mingled with current fears of terrorist attacks and prevalent understandings of reciprocal violence. Hence, large parts of the gentile population expected a major outbreak of violence as much as did the Jews, but with the inverted role of prospective victim and perpetrator.'

Trouble was expected at Easter and the governor had ordered a massive increase in military and police patrols but the actual confrontation began on St Georges Day, when a group of Jews out on a boating trip were stoned by a group of peasants enjoying a picnic on the bank. This produced a standoff the following day on the Cathedral Square 'between a group of some seventy "tidily dressed Christian workers" that occupied the one side, and a number of Jews on the other'. In the middle of this news spread of the assassination of

the police superintendent Kuiarov, head of the first police district of the city, accused of 'excessive violence' in putting down the troubles that had followed the events of Bloody Sunday. Later accounts attribute to Kuiarov a role similar to that of Khrushchev in Kishinev of fomenting anti-Jewish sentiment in the town but Ziev finds this very doubtful. He also points out that Kuiarov was in trouble with his own superiors: 'Zhitomir's police chief stated that he was more than willing to have Kuiarov removed from office, the Governor confirming the necessity of this measure; his dismissal was imminent at the time of his assassination.' By Ziev's account the assassination had the effect of scaring the Chief of Police, Ianovitskii, into inaction, leaving the responsibility for dealing with the situation in the hands of the army which, however, was forbidden by its rules of engagement from using force without the permission of the civil authority. Ziev stresses, as did Klier writing about the nineteenth century pogroms, that in any case the Russian police were grossly undermanned and underfunded.

The Jewish group on Cathedral Square eventually broke when they realised that 'the real pogrom was not going to take place in the city centre, but in Podol. Within the "Christian" crowd, one more Jew was beaten to death before the military encircled some 50 members of the mob and took them in the police station. Yet, even as they were escorted, two pogromists managed to stab another Jew, an accidental bystander, while the convoy was interrupted by a trolley car.'

'Podol was the poor Jewish district of Zhitomir, situated along gulleys running down to the Kamenka river. A bridge connected it to the even poorer outskirt of Malevanka, inhabited predominantly by Russian old-believers¹⁰, who were notorious for their unruly and criminal behaviour.' Jews had been guarding the bridge in anticipation of trouble until the evening, when:

'some dozens of the hooligans bypassed the bridge and crossed the river at a nearby ford to enter into the Podolian "rear." Taken by surprise, the Jews at the bridge panicked, and the self-defence was crushed. In the course of a few minutes at least six persons were killed and 30 wounded. The pogromists began to sack shops and houses and to smash whatever valuables could not be carried away, such as stoves and window panes. Only around 11 p.m. the state showed up in Podol in the shape of some soldiers, who by their mere presence brought the pogrom to a preliminary end.'

But the violence resumed the next day until 'On 26 April, the Governor finally issued a conclusive firing order, military reinforcements arrived and the pogrom came to an end.'

One interesting aspect of this is that the Christians were in general armed with sticks, stones, knives, while the Jews were armed with revolvers, which they made a point of displaying prominently. Yet, according to Wiese: 'Of the 18 persons killed during the pogrom, 16 were Jews. If one adds Nikolai Blinov [a Christian who tried to intercede with the Christian mob on behalf of the Jews - PB], there remains one person killed under unclear circumstances. Nine Christians were wounded so gravely that they required treatment in one of the city's hospitals - compared to 82 Jews.' As Wiese comments

¹⁰ For those who don't know, 'old believers' were Orthodox Christians who had refused to accept certain liturgical reforms introduced by the Moscow Patriarchate in the seventeenth century. Solzhenitsyn often draws attention to them as a religious minority who suffered more legal restraints than the Jews.

'Although insufficient firearm skills and nerves may have played a role, it seems that in Zhitomir the "battle squads" largely confined themselves to warning shots above the heads of the attackers.' Wiese doesn't say it but I think one can assume that, despite the new aggressiveness of the Jews, there was a feeling that actually to shoot one of the "Christians" would have terrible consequences. Either that or among Jews of revolutionary sympathies the notion of shooting peasants and workers was intolerable. It was much better to regard them as the dupes of dark forces.

The main lesson Wiese extracts out of all that is that the self defence groups were more effective in provoking pogroms than in preventing them. He concludes:

'The local Jews, it seems, did learn a lesson from the events. When a wave of over 600 exceptionally cruel pogroms swept across the Pale of Settlement in October and November 1905, Zhitomir was spared. No commentator attributed this to a success of the local self-defence. Instead, a crucial role was played by the conservative parts of local Jewry that had formed a "Union for the pacification" in the wake of the April pogrom. They understood the prevalent pattern of pogroms arising from patriotic manifestations and organised an ostentatious Jewish demonstration of devotion and loyalty to the Tsar with several thousands of participants at the very day a pogrom was expected to break out. Even the progressive Jewish journal "Voskhod" assumed that this step was the single decisive measure to prevent a new pogrom. Efforts to avert pogroms were not the exclusive domain of young radicals, and self-defence was not always the most promising way to prevent anti-Jewish violence ...

'The battle squads were designed to prevent and to limit pogroms, but at the same time, they were part of a political, generational and emotional project. The self-defence promoted, at least indirectly, a socialist revolution; it was an instrument of the young and unattached to claim power over the elderly, conservative and well established. Additionally, it emphasised Jewish self-assertion and pride. The conflict of objectives that prevailed between these goals has not yet been fully recognised by historiography, although it significantly contributes to the explanation of the self-defence's failure, at least in Zhitomir.'