

## SOLZHENITSYN'S TWO CENTURIES TOGETHER, Part 18

The Pogroms, part seven - Odessa in 1905

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### THE SECOND 'ALIYA'

The second 'aliya' - 'ascent' of relatively large numbers to Palestine - started in 1904 in the wake of events in Kishinev and Gomel and continued through the 'revolution' of 1905 and the restoration of Russian government authority in 1906-7. The numbers were relatively large in relation to the normal pattern of emigration to Palestine, but they were pitifully small in relation to emigration to the United States. As mentioned in an earlier article in this series, Jonathan Frankel gives as figures for Jewish emigration to the United States:

1900: 37,011

1904: 77,544

1905: 92,388

1906: 125,234<sup>1</sup>

The connection to the events surrounding the 1905 revolution is obvious. Of the emigration to Palestine, Frankel says: *'While close to 1,000,000 Jews left the Russian Empire for the United States alone in the decade before the First World War, a mere 20,000-30,000 settled in Palestine, and that is far from the whole story. No more than a third, or perhaps a quarter, of this number can be classified as youth. The majority were older people driven by traditional religious motives to come to the Holy Land. In many cases indeed the aim was not so much to live in the country as to ensure that one died and was buried there.'*

He continues:

*'However, more remarkable than the low number of those coming was the huge percentage of youth who left during the decade of the Second Aliya. On one occasion Ben Gurion asserted that no more than ten percent had remained in the country. A survey made at Jaffa for the year 1912 produced the information that (the Yemenites apart) some 750 prospective immigrants entered the city through that port, while almost exactly the same number had left.'*

He concludes: *'it follows, however extraordinary the fact may seem, that the more or less permanent force of labour youth - the group considered synonymous in popular parlance with the "Second Aliya" - was no more than a few hundred strong.'*

Yet Frankel still insists that this group was decisively important: 'It is improbable that a Jewish state could have been created without their intrusion into the *Yishuv*.' The importance was psychological rather than numerical and had its origins in the experience of the events surrounding the 1905 revolution:

*'The hard core within the immigrant youth, perhaps no more than two or three hundred, were charged to an exceptional degree with political energy - an energy drawing its force from the Russian revolutionary experience, on the one hand, and from Jewish messianism, on the other. The revolution had provided them, first, with a heightened belief in themselves, the youth, as the natural source of political leadership. Increasingly, in the*

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Frankel: *Prophecy and Politics - Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917*, Cambridge University Press, 1984 (first published 1981), p.135

*period between the Kishinev pogrom and the assembly of the First Duma [April 1903-March 1906 - PB], the very young had come to dominate Jewish politics in the Pale of Settlement. Those who had grown up in those tumultuous times took for granted that not only their future but also the present belonged to the youth. Second, they brought with them from this contact with the revolution and with radical thought in Russia generally a sharp cutting critical spirit, a profound urge to negate the existent, to damn every compromise or hypocrisy, every tradition as an obstacle to freedom and every sign of comfort as bourgeois.'* (all the above quotations from pp.366-7)

In wanting to discuss the Second Aliya and its consequences in Palestine I will be rather drifting away from the concerns of Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn is mainly interested in Zionism as a possible solution to Russia's Jewish problem. He broadly accepts the Zionist thesis that the Jews are a distinct people, a distinct nation, who could only find fulfilment as a people if they have their own national territory. Solzhenitsyn sees only two peoples - Russians and Jews. There is the complication that 'Russians' also include Ukrainians, Belorussians, Poles and, in the case of Kishinev, Roumanians. But they serve Solzhenitsyn mainly as a means of distancing the Russians proper from the worst excesses of antisemitism in the Pale. He has little enough to say about their own distinct existence, and the consequences of Zionism for the Arab population of Palestine are of no interest to him.

Nonetheless, the emergence of the state of Israel and the Jewish mentality that accompanied it - so very different from the traditional Judaism prior to the nineteenth century - was largely a consequence of the events in the Russian Empire that Solzhenitsyn describes in his book and that I have attempted to follow in this series of articles, a story that climaxes in the brutality of 1905 and the new Jewish self assertiveness that accompanied and provoked it. The great example of this is the pogrom in Odessa that followed Nicholas II's manifesto proclamation on October 17th (O.S.).

## THE ODESSA POGROM

Frankel (p.135) says, rather sloppily, that 800 Jews were killed in Odessa on October 18th and later (p.149) he adds: *'In Odessa alone, the number of dead and wounded was alleged to have reached 6,000.'* According to the historian Robert Weinberg: *'the police reported that at least 400 Jews and 100 non-Jews were killed and approximately 300 people, mostly Jews, were injured, with some 1,632 Jewish houses, apartments and stores incurring damage.'* A contemporary Jewish paper, *Voskhod*, reported that *'over 800 were killed and another several thousand were wounded.'* The lawyer Maxim Vinaver, an important member of the Constitutional Democratic Party ('Cadets'), *'wrote in 1907 that over 400 were killed and approximately 2,000 were wounded.'*<sup>2</sup>

In addition, although Odessa was by far the worst, there were throughout the Russian Empire, over 600 pogroms between October 1905 and January 1906. According to another account:

*'S.A. Stepanov, using data from police investigations, reckoned that during the October pogroms 1,622 people died and 3,544 were injured. Determining nationality was only possible for 75 percent of the murdered and 73 percent of the injured; from this Stepanov*

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Weinberg: 'Workers, Pogroms, and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa', *The Russian Review*, Jan., 1987, Vol. 46, No. 1, p.53 Robert Weinberg is Professor of History and International Relations in Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania and author of books on the Beilis blood libel trial, the project for a Jewish national territory in Birobidzhan and the events in Odessa in 1905,

*concluded that Jews accounted for 711 of the murdered and 1,207 of the injured; Orthodox Christians (Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians) accounted for 428 murdered and 1,246 injured; Armenians 47 of the murdered and 51 of the injured. Shlomo Lambroza, not trusting police sources, used data from opposition materials; only among Jews, he counted 800 deaths in Odessa alone and 3,103 for the entire country during the 1905-1906 pogrom waves. Victims were often random people and not at all revolutionaries. During the horrible Tomsk massacre, when pogromists burned a railroad officers' building and killed all who tried to escape the blaze, 68 people died, of whom only one, according to the police, was linked to the revolutionary movement; most of the rest had not come to attend a revolutionary intelligentsia meeting (as the pogromists thought) but simply to receive salaries.*<sup>3</sup>

According to Podbolotov, while attacks on Jews were concentrated in the Pale of Settlement in Northern and Central Russia the pogroms were directed against 'students and the intelligentsia.' The impetus of the violence, then, was against what were seen as the forces that were behind the 1905 revolution, forces that were seen as having rejoiced in Russia's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese and that had then triumphed with the proclamation of October 17th.

#### AFTER THE OCTOBER MANIFESTO

Weinberg (p.61) describes the rejoicing that followed the proclamation:

*'The storm broke on October 18. News of the October Manifesto had reached Odessa officials on the previous evening, and by the next morning thousands of people thronged the streets to celebrate. As one university student exclaimed, "A joyous crowd appeared in the streets - people greeted each other as if it were a holiday." Jews were joined by non-Jews in vigorously and enthusiastically celebrating the granting of civil rights and political liberties.*

*'At first the crowds were peaceful, but the quiet did not last long. Soon after the demonstrations began, several individuals began to unfurl red flags and banners with anti-government slogans. Others shouted slogans like "Down with the Autocracy," "Long Live Freedom," and "Down with the Police." Apartment dwellers draped red carpets and shawls from their balconies and windows, while groups of demonstrators forced passersby to doff their hats or bow before the flags. In the city дума building, demonstrators ripped down the portrait of the tsar, substituted a red flag for the Imperial colors and collected money for weapons. The city governor also reported that one group of demonstrators tied portraits of the tsar to the tails of dogs and then released them to roam the city. The mood of the demonstrators grew more violent as the day wore on. Mobs of demonstrators - primarily Jewish youths, according to official accounts - viciously attacked and disarmed policemen. By mid-afternoon Neidgart [the Odessa governor - PB] had received reports that two policemen had been killed, ten wounded and 22 disarmed, and that many others had abandoned their posts in order to avoid possible injury.'*

Already, though, there was some opposition to all this rejoicing (p.62):

*'Armed confrontations originated near the Jewish district of Moldavanka in the afternoon and early evening of October 18. The clashes apparently started when a group of Jews*

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<sup>3</sup> Sergei Podbolotov: "... and the Entire Mass of Loyal People Leapt up": The attitude of Nicholas II Towards the Pogroms' *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Jan.-June, 2004, Vol. 45, No. 1/2, p.195. Podbolotov is a Professor in the 'Independent not-for-profit' European University at St Petersburg.

*carrying red flags in celebration of the October Manifesto attempted to convince a group of Russian workers to doff their caps to the flags. Harsh words were exchanged, a scuffle ensued, and then shots rang out. Both groups scattered, but quickly reassembled in nearby streets and resumed their fighting. The clashes soon turned into a pogrom, as Russians indiscriminately attacked Jews and began to vandalise and loot Jewish homes, apartments and stores. The military on October 18 was equally vigilant in its efforts to restrain both gentile and Jewish rioters, vigorously suppressing the disturbances. Cossacks soon arrived on the scene and restored order by early evening'*

It was the following day, October 19th, that 'the pogrom began in full force'. A patriotic rally was organised to show loyalty to the Tsar. It included many workers, including day labourers working on the docks, the group Weinberg eventually identifies as mainly responsible for the pogrom. The crowd carried icons and portraits of the Tsar and held a brief service in the cathedral:

*'Suddenly, shots rang out, and a young boy carrying an icon lay dead. Most accounts of the incident assert that the shots came from surrounding buildings. No one knows for certain who was responsible for the shots, but evidence strongly suggests that they were fired by revolutionaries or members of Jewish and student self-defence brigades. In any case, the crowd panicked and ran through the streets as more shots were fired from rooftops, balconies, and apartment windows. Revolutionaries and self-defence units organised by students and Jews threw homemade bombs at the demonstrators, indicating that they were ready to instigate confrontations. The shootings triggered a chain reaction. Convinced that the Jews were responsible for the shootings, members of the patriotic demonstration began to shout "Beat the Kikes" and "Death to the Kikes," and went on a rampage, attacking Jews and destroying Jewish apartments, homes, and stores.'*

## THE 'LOYALISTS'

Weinberg's account of what then happened is horrifying. He says that the most prominent element in the pogroms were the day labourers working in the port and he goes on to describe their conditions of life. In order to get work day by day, they had to put their names on a sub-contractor's list which meant getting up at two or three o'clock in the morning. If they succeeded in getting work they often had to wait in an inn until 10.30 at night to get their money. A third of their wage went to the sub-contractor. Many of them were living for years on end in terrible conditions in dosshouses. Not only were they in competition with Jews for what work there was but *'the domination of the grain trade by Jewish merchants predisposed many dock workers against the Jews whom they conveniently saw as the source of the troubles, particularly the lack of jobs ...'* The conditions of their lives predisposed them to drunkenness and hopeless rage. In June, in the events surrounding the arrival of the Battleship Potemkin, *'dockworkers and day labourers exploded in a fit of wanton rage but chose to challenge the authorities by destroying the harbour,'* not, on that occasion, attacking the Jews.

Weinberg says of the Loyalist demonstration: *'This demonstration had the earmarks of a rally organised by extreme right-wing political organisations like the Black Hundred, which had emerged earlier in the year.'* This suggests that there was an organisation called the Black Hundreds, one among several. 'Black Hundreds' seems to have been a general term applied to anti-semitic and anti-liberal agitators and to the people who engaged in the pogroms, but the extent to which this was an organised activity - still less an activity organised or promoted by the central government, as widely believed - is very dubious.

Hans Rogger, who has been quoted in earlier articles arguing against the idea that the pogroms were willed by the government, says that, prior to 1905:

*'traditional conservatism ... had tended to shun political action and to consider it either a prerogative of the state or the illegal activity of liberals and socialists. The post-1905 Right was more militant, more demagogic, more intransigent vis-a-vis the state and its officials than conservatives either wished or dared to be. In this period, traditional conservatism was characterised by intellectual poverty and an unwillingness to descend into the political arena. These characteristics stemmed not only from a distaste for politics and a reluctance to see the larger public become involved in it, not alone from the belief that the historic interests of the nation would best be protected by established institutions and their servants, but also from the genuinely conservative inclination not to bestir oneself, to leave things as they were, to let them take their course and hope that in time they would come out all right.'*<sup>4</sup>

Owing to the success of the liberal revolution of 1905, crowned by the October Manifesto, however, 'some way had to be found for supporters of the status quo to demonstrate that popular sentiment was not all on the side of the opposition and that the state could count on allies in society if only it would resist the headlong rush to concession and innovation.' But 'The efforts made in this direction before October 1905 - the staging or encouraging of pogroms and the organisation of a number of monarchist organisations, mostly of local scope, were not notably successful. They failed to transform sporadic outbursts of popular passion or dynastic loyalty into sustained or organised political action; they were uncertain of their aims in the face of the government's own uncertainty, and they did not prevent the issuance of the October Manifesto which, with its promise of civil liberties, political rights, and a popularly elected legislative duma, made it all the more necessary that conservatives abandon their self-imposed restraint and bring a broadly based movement into the field against the liberals and radicals who had organised themselves into political parties long before October 1905.'<sup>5</sup>

He is explaining the formation of the 'Union of the Russian People', established on October 22nd 1905 (not, as claimed by Walter Laqueur, March 1906<sup>6</sup> - the month, as it happens, of the formation of the first Duma, created as a result of the October Manifesto). The term 'Black Hundred', according to Podbolotov (p.194), 'came from mediaeval Russia, where it signified the lower class which stayed outside the town walls. Although violent and mutinous' they 'were conservative by virtue of their illiteracy and supposedly unquestioningly supported the autocracy and "the established traditions." At the beginning of the twentieth century the opponents of the autocracy nicknamed, disdainfully, the monarchists Black Hundreds because of their supposed "backwardness" and "proneness to violence"' The populist URP, whose programme included redistribution of land to the

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Rogger: 'Was There a Russian Fascism? The Union of Russian People', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec., 1964), p.398.

<sup>5</sup> In fact it was only in October that the Constitutional Democratic Party was formed, though it was preceded in July 1903 by the conspiratorial Union of Liberation which was the main political driving force of the events of 1905. See Shmuel Galai: *The Liberation Movement in Russia, 1900-1905*, Cambridge University Press, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Laqueur: *Black Hundred - the rise of the extreme right in Russia*, New York, HarperPerennial, 1994, p.18.

peasantry and legally regulated employer-employee relations<sup>7</sup>, *'willingly accepted this nickname as they claimed to be representatives of the "Black millions" of simple, silent-majority Russians.'*

The appearance of this organised political anti-semitism did not result in an increase in political violence. On the contrary, whatever might have been the ambitions of its founders or its members, it coincided with the decline in political violence that accompanied the tough security measures and economic reforms introduced by Pyotr Stolypin after his appointment as Interior Minister (April 1906) and Prime Minister (July 1906).

### ... AND JEWISH RADICALISM

But from the point of view of understanding the shape of Jewish politics in Palestine, it is the intellectual and political development of the Jews in the Russian Empire, not their opponents, that counts. Here there are two figures that seem to me to be of particular interest - Ber Borochov and Vladimir Jabotinsky. Borochov was the theorist of the Jewish Social Democratic and Labour Party - Poale Zion (ESDRP-PZ). Frankel (p.330) says of him: *'He himself died in Kiev in December 1917, following a short illness, at the age of thirty six. But his followers and comrades from the Poale Zion party became dominant figures in the Yishuv, rising with successor organisations, Ahdut Ha-Avoda and Mapai. Yitshak Ben Zvi, the second President of the State of Israel, and Zalman Rubashev (Shazar), the third President, had been among Borochov's closest personal associates in the Russian party in its year of formation, 1906. Three Prime Ministers of Israel (David Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett and Golda Meir) were also veteran party members although not personally identified with Borochov. His works have been republished in numerous editions in many languages ... Streets and city quarters have been called after him in Israel.'*

If Borochov was the founder of the Labour Zionism that dominated Israel in the early years of its formation, Jabotinsky was the founder of the 'Revisionist' Zionist tradition to which the opponents of Labour Zionism, Menachem Begin, Yitshak Shamir and Benjamin Netanyahu claimed to belong. Both men have an interest that is independent of their political influence - Borochov as a Marxist philosopher belonging to the camp of Lenin's main Bolshevik rival, Alexander Bogdanov, and Jabotinsky as a playwright, poet and novelist, author of the extraordinary novel *The Five* - an account of the differing fates of five children in a Jewish family in Odessa about the time of the 1905 revolution. They deserve an article to themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> They also seem to have had an understanding of Modern Money Theory. According to Rogger (p.411): *'There were denunciations of the government's financial conservatism; demands for easy credit and a paper ruble not backed by gold - "for the issue of paper notes depends on the will of the Tsar and the needs of the people"'*