What I want to do in this essay is to examine how prominent was the presence of Jews in the government and security apparatus of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of Poland and how this participation should be evaluated. The position of the Bolsheviks on the ‘Jewish question’ is well-known. National issues were seen by them as instrumental. They were to be judged on how they advanced the interest of the world revolution and the Soviet state. Where national groups were supported, this was a tactical alliance, like the alliance with the peasantry. The ultimate goal was the creation of a new socialist man who would be above petty nationalist divisions, and a single world socialist state. All those responsible for Jewish policy within the Bolshevik party sought this final goal; the only difference between them was their view on how long Jewish separateness could be tolerated. The aim was assimilation—a new version of Clermont-Tonnerre’s view that the Jews were to be given everything as individuals and nothing as a community.

The Jews, according to Bolshevik theory, were not a nation. In the course of the Bolsheviks’ conflict with the Bund, Lenin had asserted that ‘The idea of a Jewish nation was essentially totally false and reactionary.’ This view was confirmed by Stalin’s study of the problem, carried out at Lenin’s request in 1913. According to this, a nation should have four characteristics: a common territory, a common language, a common economic system, and a common culture. As Stalin himself put it, ‘The demand of national autonomy for Russian Jews is something of a curiosity—proposing autonomy for a people without a future and whose very existence has still to be proved.’

The long-term fate of the Jews whom he described as ‘a fiction bereft of territory’, was clearly to be integrated into the nations among whom they lived, and ultimately, especially during the Stalinist period, into the emerging Soviet nation. The Bolsheviks recognized that the Jews possessed some proto-national characteristics and that they were found in considerable numbers in the Soviet Union. In order to facilitate their integration into the new socialist world, for a period a specific socialist Jewish identity, expressed through a secularized version of Yiddish, could be tolerated. Some Jews, and even some Bolshevik leaders like the president of the USSR, Mikhail Kalinin, thought this could become permanent. A key role was to be played in the creation of this identity by the Jewish sections of the Communist Party, the Evsektsii.

The way these policies were implemented in the twenty years between the end of the Civil War and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union underwent a drastic change with Stalin’s rise to power. The early 1920s were a period of relative liberalization in Soviet policy. After the collapse of the revolutions in Germany and Hungary and the Soviet defeat in the battle of Warsaw in August 1920, which ended any hope of extending the revolution using the Red Army, Lenin had decided to abandon collectivization and also to

3 Ibid.
allow the development of private industry and trade. This period came to an end with the victory of Stalin in the struggle for power after Lenin’s death and his adoption of a radical policy of collectivization and rapid industrialization.

This ‘Great Turn’ of 1929–32 was of crucial importance in the evolution of Soviet policy towards the Jews. It was marked by an intensification of the terror, which often targeted Jews. Trotsky, whose Jewish origins were now strongly emphasized, became the focus of Stalin’s obsessive hatred, and he also manifested a growing obsession with Jews, starting with his opposition to the involvement of his daughter Svetlana with a Jew. At the same time, it should be stressed that Jews were not disproportionately represented among the victims.

Nationalism of all sorts was now suspect. Ukrainian and Belarusian national communists were purged, and Polish autonomy in Ukraine and Belarus was suppressed. Cultural life was also much more tightly controlled. The Soviet Union was now marked by greater isolationism and suspicion of the outside world. The Joint Distribution Committee and its subsidiary, the Agro-Joint, which had played a crucial role in the life of Soviet Jews in the 1920s, were now much less free to operate. In addition, Stalin began to reduce the percentage of Jews in the highest ranks of the NKVD and among judges and prosecutors.

The Soviets sought to foster the integration of Jews in the new society by abolishing all restrictions on where they could live or what occupations they could pursue. As a result, in the twenty years between the end of the civil war in 1921 and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union a major transformation took place within the Jewish population of the country. There had already been considerable Jewish urbanization in the tsarist empire before 1914 and this process was rapidly accelerating.

Urbanization had frequently been accompanied by the adoption of the Russian language. Russification was frequently associated with the adoption of the values of the Russian intelligentsia, a group deeply at odds with the surrounding society. The way of life of the Russian intelligentsia was extremely attractive to young Jewish gymnasium and university students. Their adoption of its values inevitably brought with it rejection of the Jewish ‘petit bourgeois principles’, ‘backwardness’, and ‘provinciality’ that seemed to be embodied in their families. Thus, the poet Osip Mandelstam believed that his mother had been saved from ‘Judaean chaos’ and the ‘talmudic thicket’ by her love of Pushkin, as a result of which she ‘loved to speak [Russian] and rejoiced in the rootedness and the sound of Great-Russian speech, slightly impoverished by intelligentsia conventions. Was she not the first in her family to master the clear and pure Russian sounds?’

In his autobiography Leon Trotsky described his breach with his parents as follows: ‘The instinct for acquisitiveness, the petit bourgeois outlook and way of life—from these I sailed away with a mighty push, never to return.’

As a group, certainly until the revolution of 1905, a large number of the Russian intelligentsia were committed to the revolutionary transformation of the tsarist empire. Not surprisingly, therefore, those Jews who aspired to be intelligentsia also frequently became revolutionaries, whether of the populist or the Marxist variety. The processes of acculturation and integration were enormously accelerated by the policies of the

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Bolsheviks. The emigration of over 2 million people from Russia in the aftermath of the revolution (some 50,000 of them Jews), most of them from the educated classes, created a huge gap in skilled personnel and created new opportunities for upwardly-mobile Jews.

Jews moved in large numbers to the towns, particularly to those in which they had previously been forbidden to live, or were allowed to live only in restricted numbers, before February 1917. By 1939 over 1.3 million were living in such areas. The Jewish population of Moscow rose from around 15,000 in 1912 to 131,000 in 1926, by which time 90 per cent of the incomers were under fifty and a third in their twenties. On the eve of the Second World War the city’s Jewish population had grown to 250,000, 5 per cent of the total. In Leningrad the Jewish population grew from 35,000 in 1910 to 85,000 in 1926, and 201,500 in 1939, when Jews made up 6.3 per cent of the total. In that year there were 224,000 Jews in Kiev (26.5 per cent), 180,000 in Odessa (29.9 per cent), and 130,300 in Kharkiv (15.6 per cent). By now 86.9 per cent of all Soviet Jews lived in urban areas, about half of them in the eleven largest cities of the USSR. Jews often lived in adjacent areas—thus, in the late 1930s three-quarters of the Jews in Leningrad lived in the city’s seven central districts. As a result of this movement the proportion of the Jewish population living in the Russian Federation grew from 23 per cent in 1926 to over one-third in 1939. This migration into the towns was the result of a mass exodus from the shtetls of Ukraine and Belarus, which had been devastated by continuous warfare between 1914 and 1921. Most of those who participated in the wide-scale urbanization were attracted by the broader cultural and social horizons of the city.

In the 1920s the economic restructuring of the Jewish population proceeded relatively slowly. Many Jews profited from the economic liberalization of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and constituted a significant proportion of the ‘NEPmen’, the traders and speculators who were a feature of this period. In 1926 Jews made up 20 per cent of all private traders in the Soviet Union (66 per cent in Ukraine and 90 per cent in Belarus). They also made up 40 per cent of all Soviet artisans. Jews were well represented among the wealthiest of the NEPmen, making up a third of Moscow entrepreneurs holding the two highest categories of trading and industrial licences.

Perhaps out of fear of arousing antisemitism, the Bolshevik campaign against the NEPmen did not stress their Jewish character. They were, however, the targets of bitter attacks from a number of young leftist Jewish writers, another example of the deep generational conflict in the Soviet Jewish world.

Stalin’s ‘Great Turn’ was marked by a further attack on the dominant Jewish occupations of trading and artisany. Given the generational conflict within the Soviet Jewish world, it is not surprising that many of the OGPU (secret service) officials who

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were responsible after 1928 for the suppression of private industry were Jews, including the head of the ‘hard currency’ department, Mark Isaevich Gai (Shtokliand).  

With industrialization the movement of Jews into industry was encouraged and accelerated. It was also given the support of some Western Jewish organizations, in particular the Society for Artisan and Agricultural Labour among Jews in Russia (Obshchestvo dlya remeslennogo i zemledel’cheskogo truda sredi evreev v rossii, ORT), which had provided Jews with agricultural training since the 1880s and which after the revolution had moved its headquarters to Berlin, and the Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint), which gave financial assistance to vocational schools. The transformation of Jews into industrial workers was often celebrated in Yiddish literature. There was some authenticity in these propagandistic accounts. In 1931, 11.3 per cent of economically active Jews were metalworkers, while 1.4 per cent were miners. By 1939 nearly 30 per cent of economically active Jews were classed as industrial workers. 

The majority were, however, clerical workers or officials. Thus in 1939 40 per cent of Jewish breadwinners were employed as functionaries, while 364,000 were classed as members of the intelligentsia. Jews were particularly strongly represented among the ranks of managers and accountants, technicians, teachers, doctors, cultural workers, professors, agronomists, engineers, and architects. They played a role in the early decades of the Soviet Union similar to that played by Germans in the tsarist empire between the reforms of Peter the Great and the revolutions of 1917. In Lenin’s words: 

The fact that there were many Jewish members of the intelligentsia in the Russian cities was of great importance to the revolution. They put an end to the general sabotage that we were confronted with after the October Revolution . . . It was only thanks to this pool of a rational and literate labour force that we succeeded in taking over the state apparatus. 

These people were concentrated in the larger towns, particularly Moscow and Leningrad. In 1926, 50.1 per cent of Moscow Jews and 40.2 per cent of those in Leningrad were classed as white-collar workers, percentages that had increased by 1939 to 82.5 per cent in Moscow and 63.2 per cent in Leningrad. In Leningrad in 1939 Jews were well represented among professionals such as dentists and pharmacists. 

Moscow and Leningrad were also the centres of Soviet cultural life and the home of the key figures in the Soviet cultural elite. In this milieu Jews were also well represented. In addition, Jews had a significant presence on the editorial boards of leading newspapers and magazines, universities, hospital staffs, and among the Soviet officer corps.

The educational opportunities open to Jews also increased enormously as the regime did away with previous restrictions and saw the expansion of education as the key to the modernization and industrialization of the country. By 1939, 26.5 per cent of all Jews had a high school education (as compared to 7.8 per cent of the population of the Soviet Union as a whole and 8.1 per cent of Russians in the Russian Federation). The

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8 Slezkine, The Jewish Century, 221.
9 L. Zinger, Dos banayte folk:tsifern un faktn vegn di yidn in FSSR (Moscow, 1941) 49; Y. Kantor, Natsional'noe stroitel'stvov sredi evreev v SSSR (Moscow, 1934) 145.
10 Quoted in G. Kostyrchenko, Tainaya politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm (Moscow, 2001) 58.
11 Beizer, Evrei Leningrada 1917–1939, 121, 125; Freitag, ‘Nächstes Jahr in Moskau!’ , 124.
number of Jewish students in the two highest grades of high school was more than 3.5 times their proportion in the general population. Jews were also well represented among university students, whose total number increased from 167,000 to 888,000 between 1928 and 1939. The number of Jewish students increased between 1929 and 1939 from 22,518 to 98,216 (10.4 per cent of the total). In the latter year Jews made up 15.5 per cent of all Soviet citizens with higher education, and one-third of all Soviet Jews of college age (nineteen to twenty-four years old) were college students, as compared to 4–5 per cent in the Soviet Union as a whole. Jews were particularly well represented in metropolitan universities and those in capital cities, constituting 17.1 per cent of all university students in Moscow, 19 per cent in Leningrad, 24.6 per cent in Kharkiv, and 35.6 per cent in Kiev.12

Interruption, which had been rare before 1917 and usually required conversion to Christianity, now became much more frequent, and was discussed in literature, as in Moshe Kulbak’s Zelmenyanar. By 1926, 21 per cent of Jewish marriages in the Russian Federation were exogenous, and the following year the figure in Ukraine was 11.1 per cent. By 1936 the percentage had increased to 42.3 per cent in the Russian Federation, to 15.3 per cent in Ukraine, and to 12.6 per cent in Belarus.13 Many senior Jewish figures in the Bolshevik leadership, including Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Sverdlov, were married to Russian women, while non-Jews married to Jews in this group included Bukharin, Dzierżyński, Kirov, Lunacharsky, Molotov, Rykov, and Voroshilov.

Linguistic assimilation proceeded rapidly. In 1926, 25 per cent of those of ‘Jewish nationality’ gave Russian as their mother tongue, a figure which by 1939 had risen to 54 per cent. New migrants to the cities made little effort to pass on their Yiddish language or their religious practices to their children, believing that this would only impede their advancement. Although attracted by Russian culture, many of these children identified themselves as Soviet. According to Fanya Laskina, an elderly member of the intelligentsia who was interviewed in 2003 and 2004, ‘We did not want to think of ourselves as Jews. Nor did we want to be Russians, though we lived in Russia and were steeped in its culture. We thought of ourselves as Soviet citizens.’14

Those Jews who emerged from the Soviet universities in the late 1920s and 1930s constituted a generation devoted both to the ideals of the revolution and to Russian culture as embodied in the traditions of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. In the words of one of them, Mikhail Baitalsky, while ‘we all prepared ourselves to be agitation and propaganda officials’, at the same time ‘we inherited the moral ideals of all the generations of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia: its nonconformity, its love of truth, its moral sense’.15 David Samoilov attempts to make a distinction between these two aspects of this generation, claiming that within it ‘there were both the Jewish members of the intelligentsia, or at least the material out of which the intelligentsia would be made, and the many-thousand-strong detachments of red commissars and Party

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13 Ibid.
functionaries, dehumanized, raised by the wave, intoxicated by power’. However, this is very much a judgement *ex post facto*, reflecting the political situation of the 1970s and 1980s.

Jews played a large role in developing Soviet popular culture. They wrote many of the popular songs that were part of the social mobilization that accompanied the Five Year Plans. When classical music again became part of the Soviet canon in the 1930s, the bulk of its performers were Jews, such as David Oistrakh and Emil Gilels.17

One result of Russification was that Jewish generational conflict now became even more acute. This is how in 1925 Eduard Bagritsky, the Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) poet, described his break with his family:

Their love?
But what about their lice-eaten braids,
Their crooked, jutting-out collar bones,
Their pimples, their herring-smeared mouths,
The curve of their horselike necks.
My parents?
But growing old in twilight,
Hunchbacked and gnarled, like savage beasts
The rusty Jews keep shaking in my face
Their hairy fists…
‘You outcast! Pick up your miserable suitcase,
You’re cursed and scorned!
Get out!’
I’m leaving my old bed behind:
‘Should I leave?’
I will!
Good riddance!
I don’t care! 18

People like Bagritsky were actively involved in the social transformations that came with the revolution. As elsewhere in Europe, Jews identified with a new social order that had abolished the discrimination under which they had previously suffered and made possible their integration into the new society. This is strikingly reflected in the names some Soviet Jews gave their children, among them Feliks (after the founder of the Soviet secret police), Melib (Marx–Engels–Liebknecht), Vil (Vladimir Ilich Lenin), Marlen (Marx–Lenin), Lenina, and Ninel (‘Lenin’ backwards).

One of the more vexed questions in Soviet Jewish history is the question of how many Jews were members of the Communist Party and the ruling bureaucracy. As we have seen, the worsening situation of the Jews from 1881 had led to their significant involvement in all parts of the revolutionary movement. At the turn of the century they

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made up nearly 30 per cent of political prisoners; the figure for Social Revolutionaries was 15–19 per cent, while around 30 per cent of the participants at the Second Conference of Russian Social Democrats held in exile in London in November 1903 were of Jewish origin. Few of these were Bolsheviks. Before the revolution Jews represented about 1,000 of 23,000 members of the Bolsheviks (in 1917 the Bund had 33,000 members).

At the same time a number of the most prominent Bolsheviks were of Jewish origin, although they would have denied any connection with the Jewish world. Among them were Trotsky himself, while during the civil war the Bolshevik leaders closest to Lenin were Grigori Zinoviev (Ovsei-Gersh Aronovich Radomyslsky), chairman of the Petrograd soviet; Lev Kamenev (Rosenfeld), chairman of the Moscow soviet and head of the Comintern and subsequently Lenin’s deputy at the Sovnarkom (Council of People’s Commissars) and the Soviet Truda i Oboroni (Council of Labour and Defence); Yakov Sverdlov, chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and thus de facto head of state of the Russian Federation from the Bolshevik Revolution until his death in March 1919; and Lazar Kaganovich, first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine between 1925 and 1928 and in the 1930s one of Stalin’s closest associates.

In the first years after 1917, the role of Jews in the party was still quite small. In 1922 the great majority of members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were ethnic Russians (72 per cent) compared to the Jewish percentage of 5.21, which fell to 4.34 in 1927, or around 50,000. Throughout the 1920s Jews made up 6 per cent of the Executive Committee, the Central Committee, and the Presidium of the Executive Committee. At this time the highest rate of overrepresentation among an ethnic minority was among the Latvian communists, who moved as a group to Soviet Russia after the defeat of the revolution in Latvia.

However, although the percentage of Jews in the party was relatively small, and not much higher than the Jewish proportion of the population, Bolshevik Jews were highly visible, partly because Jews in positions of authority had been so unusual in Russia, and partly because of their prominence in certain areas. In April 1917 ten out of the twenty-four members of the governing bureau of the Petrograd soviet were Jews, while at the Bolshevik Central Committee meeting of 23 October 1917, which took the decision to launch an armed insurrection, five out of the twelve members present were Jews (not all of whom were in favour). The All-Russian Central Executive Committee elected at the Second Congress of Soviets, which ratified the Bolshevik takeover and established the Council of People’s Commissars with Lenin as chairman, included sixty-two Bolsheviks (out of 101 members). Among them were twenty-three Jews, twenty Russians, five Ukrainians, five Poles, four Balts, three Georgians, and two Armenians.

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Between 1919 and 1921 Jews constituted about a quarter of the members of the party’s central committee and also held an important share of the leading positions in the cities of Moscow and Petrograd.

Jews also played a significant role in the Cheka, the secret police which maintained the new regime. The overall percentage of Jews in the organization was quite low: 3.7 per cent of the Moscow apparatus, 4.3 per cent of Cheka commissars, 8.6 per cent of senior (‘responsible’) officials in 1918, and 9.1 per cent of all members of provincial Cheka offices in 1920. Most members of the Cheka were Russians, and, as in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a key role at this stage was played by Latvians, who constituted 35.6 per cent of the Moscow Cheka apparatus, 52.7 per cent of all Cheka senior officials, and 54.3 per cent of all Cheka commissars. But even in the Cheka, Bolsheviks of Jewish origin combined ideological commitment with literacy in ways that set them apart and propelled them upward. In 1918, 65.5 per cent of all Jewish Cheka employees were ‘responsible officials’ and some held more senior positions. In 1918 they made up 19.1 per cent of all investigators in the central office and half (six out of twelve) of those in the department for ‘combating counter-revolution’. In 1923, when the OGPU replaced the Cheka, Jews constituted half (four out of eight) of the members of its collegium and 15.5 per cent of its ‘leading’ officials. Jews were also involved with two of the most symbolic acts of terror during the civil war, the murder of Nicholas II and his family and the massacre at the end of the civil war of thousands of refugees and prisoners of war left behind in the Crimea after the evacuation of the White armies, which was carried out under instructions from the Hungarian communist Béla Kun, at this time the chairman of the Crimean Revolutionary Committee, and R. S. Zemliachka (Rozaliia Zalkind), the head of the Crimean Party Committee.

Jews became more important in the security apparatus in the period of collectivization and the first Five Year Plan. In July 1934 Genrikh Yagoda was appointed people’s commissar for internal affairs, with control over the regular as well as secret police, and when later that year the OGPU was transformed into the NKVD, people classed as Jews under paragraph 5 of the internal passport law made up thirty-seven out of the ninety-six ‘leading cadres’ of the organization, as against thirty Russians, seven Latvians, five Ukrainians, four Poles, three Georgians, three Belarusians, two Germans, and five others. They headed a number of key NKVD departments between them that were responsible for the worker–peasant militia (the police), labour camps, counter-intelligence, surveillance, and economic sabotage. When Stalin replaced Yagoda in September 1936, he appointed another Jew, the more zealous Nikolai Yezhov. In January 1937 the 111 top NKVD officials included 42 Jews, 35 Russians, 8 Latvians, and 26 others. Of the twenty NKVD directorates, twelve (including state security, police, labour camps, and resettlement) were headed by officers identified as ethnic Jews. Of the ten departments of the Main Directorate for State Security, the most sensitive of all NKVD

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agencies, seven (protection of government officials, counter-intelligence, secret political, special (surveillance in the army), foreign intelligence, records, and prisons) were headed by Jews. The prominence of Jews in the security apparatus may well have reflected a deliberate decision by Stalin to use them in these unpopular roles in order to deflect hostility from himself and the Soviet state.

However, by now the role of the Jews in the NKVD was coming to an end and Yezhov’s replacement by Beria, a Georgian like Stalin himself, was followed by a diminution in Jews in leadership positions. In the years 1934-1941 the number of cadre leaders grew gradually from 96 in 182. According to the calculations of Petrov and Skorkin, on 10 July 1934, when the OGPU was incorporated into the Main Administration of State Security (Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) into a unified NKVD, Jews held 38.5 per cent of these posts, Russians 31.2 per cent, and Latvians 7.3 per cent. On 26 February 1941, when the security section of the NKVD was split off into a separate body, the NKGB, Jews made up only 5.5 per cent and Russians 64.8 per cent of its personnel; Ukrainians (15.4 per cent) and Georgians (6.6 per cent) overtook the Jews. In the organization as a whole this change can be documented to the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939: on 1 September 1938 Jews still constituted 21.3 per cent of the management cadre, but as of 1 July 1939, they were only 3.9 per cent. This development may reflect Stalin’s increasing interest in making an arrangement with Hitler.

The rapid social advancement of Jews and the role they played in the new regime aroused considerable resentment something which alarmed the party. It monitored the strength of antisemitism and took action against those advocating it. This sometimes took violent form, as in March 1925, when seven Russian nationalists were shot for advocating the toppling of the ‘Communist Jewish’ regime and the deportation of all Soviet Jews to Palestine, among other charges.

The party also undertook a campaign against antisemitism. In August 1926 the Central Committee’s Agitprop organized a special meeting on the subject, and in December 1927 Stalin told delegates at the Fifteenth Party Congress that ‘This evil has to be combated with utmost ruthlessness, comrades.’ In January 1931 he proclaimed that ‘antisemitism is an extreme form of racial chauvinism, the most dangerous vestige of cannibalism’. In the years to 1932 fifty-six books were produced attacking antisemitism, while articles on the topic appeared frequently in the newspapers. The campaign then ceased, and it may be that hostility to Jews decreased in intensity. On the other hand, it may be that it festered but we do not know about it because the security forces were monitoring other ‘enemy’ manifestations. It is also possible that Stalin no longer wished to pursue this policy.

Some Bolsheviks called for Jews to be placed in less prominent positions to rectify the popular belief that the revolution was controlled by Jews, although the

23 Kokurin and Petrov (eds.), Lubyanka, 17–18, 105–6; Petrov and Skorkin (eds.), Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934–1941, 105; P. Sudoplatov, Razvedka i Kremli: Zapiski nezhelatel'nogo svidetelya (Moscow, 1997).
26 Stalin, Sochineniya, xiii. 28; Kostyrchenko, Tainaya politika Stalina, 100–11.
removal of Jews only assumed a significant scale in the late 1930s. Trotsky refused the post of commissar of internal affairs because he was unwilling, as he put it, ‘to provide our enemies with the additional weapon of my Jewishness’. At the Politburo meeting of 18 April 1919, he pointed out that Latvians and Jews constitute a vast percentage of those employed in Cheka frontal zone units, Executive Committees in front zones and the rear, and in Soviet establishments at the centre; that the percentage of them at the front itself is a comparatively small one; that strong chauvinist agitation on this subject is being carried on among the Red Army men and finding a certain response there; and that, in [his] opinion, a reallocation of party personnel is essential to achieve a more even distribution of party workers of all nationalities between the front and the rear. 27

Some Bolsheviks also attempted to explain why Jews seemed so prominent. Lunacharsky pointed to the major role people of Jewish origin had played in the revolution and the fact that Jews were largely urban:
The Jews played such an outstanding role in our revolutionary movement that, when the revolution triumphed and established a state, a significant number of Jews entered the institutions of the state. They earned this right with their loyal and selfless service to the revolution . . .

Moreover, the Jewish proletarian population is predominantly urban and advanced. Naturally, as our country grew and all manner of chains were removed, this population rose in certain proportions to more or less leading positions. 28

Increasingly, as Stalin established his dominance, the ‘Jewish question’ became a taboo topic. This can be seen in the treatment of Lenin’s Jewish grandfather, Aleksandr Dmitrievich Blank, born Srul (Israel), the son of Moshko Itskovich Blank, in the shtetl of Starokonstantinov in Volhynia. In 1924, when his background first came to light, it was decided to keep it secret, a decision that was maintained in spite of Lenin’s widow twice asking Stalin, in 1932 and again in 1934, to reconsider on the grounds of the importance, in combating antisemitism, of this confirmation of the ‘exceptional ability of the Semitic tribe’ and of ‘the extraordinarily beneficial influence of its blood on the offspring of mixed marriages’. 29

The purge that Stalin initiated in early 1936 had many aspects, but one important element was an attack on the party leadership. Since Jews were clearly a significant element in this elite, they suffered significantly in this part of the purge. They certainly produced many of the memoirs that have given us such a moving and vivid picture of what it was like for those who believed deeply in the system for it to turn on them and treat them in the most brutal manner. 30 At the same time, most of the victims of this

28 A. Lunacharsky, Ob antisemitizme, 5–6.
29 N. Kirillova and V. Shepelev (eds.), ‘Vy . . . raspyradilis’ molchat’ . . . absolyutno’, Otechestvennye arkhivy, no. 3 (1992), 76–83; see also Petrovsky-Shtern, Lenin’s Jewish Question (New Haven, 2010).
purge, as of earlier purges, were peasants, and members of non-territorial nationalities, such as Poles, Germans, and Koreans, also suffered disproportionately. Some of those involved in the attempt to create a Jewish non-territorial socialist nation were purged and, on occasion, executed. However the actions against Yiddish cultural activities, though brutal, were less far-reaching than those against other non-territorial minorities.

The rapid social advancement that a significant part of Soviet Jewry experienced between 1921 and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union was the consequence of two separate phenomena. On the one hand, the mass emigration that followed the revolution and civil war as well as the ambitious plans of the Bolsheviks for the modernization and industrialization of the country created a huge gap in skilled personnel, which Jews, among others, were well placed to fill. At the same time, as in western Europe in the nineteenth century, above all in France, Jews identified strongly with the state, which had abolished the disabilities under which they had suffered and which offered them the opportunity to rise as high as their talents allowed.

By the eve of the Second World War the economic situation of the Jews of the Soviet Union had been largely transformed. The improvement is noted by Benjamin Pinkus:

> To sum up, the economic situation of the Jews at the end of the 1930s was considerably better than in the 1920s. They occupied influential positions both in the economy and in institutions of higher learning, research, art and culture, that is to say, in the socio-economic elite of the Soviet Union. The level of education among the Jews, with 72 per cent literacy, already the highest among the Soviet nationalities in 1929 (apart from the Latvians who constituted a small minority in the Soviet Union), had risen still further by 1939. The proportion of the working population, which included women—a sign of modernization—rose among the Jews from about 40 per cent in 1926 to 47 per cent in 1939. The social structure we have outlined, with a stratum of 40 per cent of functionaries and intelligentsia and a high percentage of Jewish students, is proof that by the end of the 1930s the Jewish population had become an advanced modern society.  

The new economic security, which contrasts strikingly with the situation of Jews in Poland and Lithuania, was bought at a heavy price. By 1939 very little was left of the attempt to create a Jewish national identity on the Soviet model based on the Yiddish language. Indeed, the ambitious attempt of the Jewish sections to create a secular Soviet Yiddish nation was probably always chimerical and fell victim both to its internal contradictions and to the greatly increased political control of the 1930s. It could not win over traditional Jews and failed to take into account the desire for social advance of many Jews which led to their movement to large towns and the adoption of the Russian language. The hope that this could be achieved on a territorial base in northern Crimea had clearly failed, while Birobidzhan was not proving attractive to Jewish settlement. In addition by the late 1930s the institutions of Yiddish higher learning established in the

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1920s had almost all been dissolved or ceased to function. Yiddish schools largely ceased to operate from 1938. All forms of independent Jewish activity, whether religious or cultural, had been suppressed and contact with the outside Jewish world had largely been ended and number of Yiddish writers had been executed, while others had been sent to labour camps.

Moreover the Soviet regime from its inception, and particularly after Stalin established his dominance, employed terror on an enormous scale as part of its revolutionary goals of totally transforming society. Periodically it also turned on its own adherents. Jewish communists thus suffered disproportionately in the purges of 1936–8 and remained highly vulnerable even when these were brought to an end. In addition, as the regime became more national and stressed its Russian character and the primary role of Russians as ‘first among equals’ of the Soviet nations, resentment at the prominent position which Jewish cadres had achieved in the party and which Jews as a whole had obtained in Soviet society was bound to grow. This was illustrated by the fall of the brutal murderer Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD, and his associates on the one hand, and on the other, by the replacement of the foreign minister, Maxim Litvinov, and other Jewish diplomats on the eve of the conclusion of the German–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Litvinov’s successor, Vyacheslav Molotov, was specifically instructed by Stalin to ‘get rid of the Jews’ in the Commissariat of External Affairs. Hitler at this time told his associates that, in a conversation with Ribbentrop, Stalin had claimed that he was only waiting for the emergence of a sufficiently large stratum of local intelligentsia before removing Jews from the Soviet elite. The situation was not altered by the incorporation of the former eastern Poland (western Belarus and western Ukraine), the Baltic states, northern Bukovina, and Bessarabia into the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940. This was the situation in which the Jews of the Soviet Union found themselves on the eve of the ordeal of the Nazi occupation and its attendant horrors.

These developments exacerbated by Stalin’s growing suspicion of Jews. In particular, he became obsessed, as relations with the West deteriorated, by the close links which the leadership of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee had established with the Jews outside the Soviet Union, especially in the United States and the enthusiastic support given by Soviet Jews for the emergence of the state of Israel. As in other purges, Stalin acted on several levels, taking action both against those who were prominent in Soviet Yiddish culture and against the larger group of acculturated and Sovietized Jews who still held prominent positions in the Soviet bureaucracy and in cultural life. The tragic denouement is well-known, culminating in the notorious ‘Doctors’ plot’, so there is no need to rehearse them here.

In Poland after 1944, the regime found it even more difficult to find reliable cadres and sought them among the small surviving Jewish community. Most of the over 300,000 Polish Jews who survived the war (primarily in the Soviet Union) soon left the country. Among the remainder (between 70,000 and 80,000 in 1951), polonization proceeded rapidly and the communist regime for all its faults was widely seen as bringing a better future and as the only genuine protector of the Jews.

One of the most disputed issues in the historiography of this period is the role played by communists of Jewish origin in the new regime. The war had certainly

32 *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier, 1941–2, 1941–2*, ed. Henry Picker (Bonn, 1951) 119.
strengthened the perceived identification of Jews with communism. In their hope that the new regime would remedy the defects of the Second Republic, Jewish supporters of the new order were at one with a significant part of the Polish intelligentsia. In addition, in the civil war conditions of post-war Poland the Jewish community could expect protection only from the new communist-dominated authorities.

Communists of Jewish origin played a significant, though not dominant, role in the new regime. In the political apparatus they included Jakub Berman, Roman Zambrowski, who had been one of the principal creators of the communist-dominated Polish army in the USSR, and Hilary Minc, a key economic planner. Jews also played a key role in the cultural policy of the new regime, among them Jerzy Borejsza, the founder of the journal Odrodzenie and chief executive of the Czytelnik publishing house, until he was dismissed from all his positions in 1949.

However, antisemitism was also not absent from the PPR itself. Official government policy was to defend the Jews and to foster their economic rehabilitation, but within the party some factions were much less sympathetic to the difficult plight of the Jews. During the war Polish communist politics had been highly factionalized. The disputes revolved around three separate but related issues: Who should have priority in determining communist strategy, the underground activists in Poland or the party leadership in Moscow? How far would the new communist Poland be able to pursue its ‘own road to socialism’? And how far was it possible to pursue the Moscow strategy of a broad ‘national front’ made up of all anti-fascist forces in the country? By 1947 the communists were establishing a Soviet-style regime and banning all independent political forces, and in 1948 the leading national communist Władysław Gomułka was forced out of office. Jewish communists were mostly to be found among the group that had been in Moscow during the war and in the groups that were suspicious of the ‘Polish road to socialism’. Many of them soon repented of their flirtation with Stalinism and became among the most ardent supporters of democratization in the period of the thaw that brought Gomułka back to power in October 1956. However, at this time their position in the party aroused considerable resentment, which was to surface in 1956 and still more in 1968.

Jews were also viewed as playing a key role in the security apparatus of the new regime. Certainly, there were a number of Jews in leading positions in the security apparatus, including Anatol Fejgin, the head of the notorious Tenth Department of the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, MBP), which was responsible for the surveillance of all members of the PZPR, and his deputy Józef Światło. At the same time, there was a strong tendency to categorize as Jews anyone of whom one disapproved. Thus, in his account of his tenure as American ambassador in Poland, Arthur Bliss Lane, writing presumably under the influence of his Polish contacts, described Stanisław Radkiewicz the (non-Jewish) minister of public security, as ‘a good-looking man, apparently of Russian Semitic origin, with carefully combed oily black hair, a keen mobile aesthetic face’. 33

Our understanding of the situation in Poland (as of that in the Soviet Union) has been transformed by the opening of the archives, which give a much fuller picture both of the role of Jews in the Polish security apparatus in the immediate post-war years and of

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33 A. Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed* (Indianapolis, 1948) 165.
the process by which they were purged from it after the death of Stalin.\textsuperscript{34} On 20 October 1945 Nikolay Selivanovsky, the chief Soviet adviser at the MBP, sent a report to Lavrenty Beria, head of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus. In it he claimed that Jews made up 18.7 per cent of the Ministry’s workforce and held half of the managerial positions. In certain sections, he asserted, the presence of Jews was even greater: in Department 1 (counter-intelligence) they constituted 27 per cent of the staff and occupied all managerial positions, and in the Press Control Department they constituted ‘up to 50 per cent’.\textsuperscript{35} This may have reflected what Beria and Stalin, now purging Jews in the Soviet Union, wanted to hear. The source of Selivanovsky’s figures is unclear; possibly the numbers were exaggerated by members of the Polish security establishment, who hoped to obtain Soviet support for reducing the number of Jews in the MBP.

Lower figures for the number of Jews are given in a note written by Bierut on 25 November 1945, based on information provided by Radkiewicz, which is more reliable. According to Bierut, Jews made up 1.7 per cent of the total workforce of the MBP (438 out of 25,600) and held about 13 per cent of the ‘managerial positions’ (sixty-seven out of 500).\textsuperscript{36} The difference between the two sets of figures may also be due to the fact that the Selivanovsky report relates to the Ministry alone, whereas Bierut’s note relates to the entire apparatus, including regional offices, in which there was a very high turnover at the lower levels.\textsuperscript{37}

On the basis of an investigation of the official account of the central office of the Security Services produced by department C of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1978, the historian Andrzej Paczkowski carried out an analysis of the ethnic background of those officials who in the period 1944–56 occupied the position of section head or higher in the headquarters of the security establishment (originally the Department, then the Ministry of Public Security, and subsequently the Committee for Public Security). It does not include those who occupied managerial positions, even at the highest level, in regional offices but who never reached high office at the centre. Of the 447 individuals in the survey, the nationality of 131 (29.6 per cent) was listed as Jewish. In 1944 and 1945 Jews represented 24.7 per cent of the total, half the number given in Selivanovsky’s report. The percentage of Jews in the head office remained more or less constant at around 30 per cent, with the exception of the years 1944 and 1945, when it was somewhat lower.

We have less information about the role of Jews in local administration. A study of the province of Lublin found that on 1 February 1946, of 1,122 functionaries of the

\textsuperscript{34} There is a growing Polish literature on this topic, but with the exception of L. Piłat, ‘Struktura organizacyjna i działalność Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Lublinie 1944–1945’, \textit{Studia Rzeszowskie}, 6 (1999), 77–92 and Szwagrzyk ‘Żydzi w kierownictwie UB Stereotyp czy rzeczywistość?’, \textit{Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej}, 11 (2005), 37–42.’, the issue of Jews in the security apparatus is only tangentially discussed.


Secret Police (Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa, UB) at all levels, 19 were of Jewish nationality (1.7 per cent). Fourteen occupied higher positions and worked in the Provincial Administration of Public Security (Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego). 38

What is clear is that, in the period 1944–56, in Paczkowski’s words, ‘Jews were over-represented, occupied higher rather than lower positions, and that the higher the level, the greater their proportion’. 39 Of course these were communists and internationalists far from any involvement in Jewish life. They entered the security service at a time in which the struggle to impose communism was particularly intense and when loyalty to the system was the overriding criterion both of the Polish communist leadership and of their Soviet overlords. Thus of the 447 higher officials at the head office, 21 per cent had been members of the KPP; 35.1 per cent of those who gave their nationality as Jewish had been members of the KPP, clearly a major factor in their recruitment.

After 1956 Jews were to be largely purged from the security apparatus. Even in the period between 1944 and 1955 their role had aroused opposition among ‘native’ communists who felt that it increased their own unpopularity in Polish society and barred their path to high office. After describing the percentage of Jews in the security apparatus, Selivanovskiy observed that ‘the situation arouses serious dissatisfaction among Poles, who speak of [the Jews] lording it over them’. 40 In August 1948 Mieczysław Moczar, later to be head of the Partisan Faction in the PZPR, was accused of antisemitism for claiming that the number of ‘Jewish comrades’ in the security apparatus was too high. 41 Gomułka cited the ‘attitude towards Jewish comrades’, the preferential treatment they were receiving, as one of the reasons why he had rejected Stalin’s proposal that he become a member of the Politburo that was being formed in the PZPR. 42 During the anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 Gomułka was to claim that opposition to him began when he tried to change the leadership of the MBP.

Why was it that Jews were allowed to hold a considerable number of important posts in the security apparatus in Poland when they had already been removed from such positions in the Soviet Union and at a time when Stalin was engaged in the destruction of the Soviet Yiddish cultural establishment and in a full-scale purge of ‘Jewish cosmopolitans’? The Soviets were certainly aware of the significance of Jews in the Polish communist elite. On 10 July 1949 Viktor Lebedev, the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, sent a letter to Moscow addressed, among others, to Stalin, Molotov, and Beria. He warned them of the presence of ‘agents of the pre-war intelligence and counter-

38 Piłat, ‘Struktura organizacyjna i działalność Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Lublinie 1944–1945’, 88. It is not impossible that a similar composition could be found in all of the other provinces; Paczkowski, ‘Jews in the Polish Security Apparatus’, 458.
39 For this analysis, see Paczkowski, ‘Jews in the Polish Security Apparatus’, 457. The two-volume account ‘Slużba Bezpieczeństwa Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1944–1978: Centrała’, was published with an introduction by Mirosław Piotrowski as Ludzie bezpieki w walce z narodem i Kościołem: Służba Bezpieczeństwa w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej w latach 1944–1978: Centrała (Lublin, 1999) 39–48. The calculations under discussion were conducted by Jarosław Pawlak within the framework of a research project under Paczkowski’s direction entitled ‘Institutions of a Totalitarian State: Poland 1944–1956’.
40 Cariewskaja et al. (eds.), Teczka specjalna J. W. Stalina, 422.
42 Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh rossiiskikh arkhivov 1944–1953, (Moscow, 1997) i. 940–1.
intelligence services’ at the highest levels of the Polish party and hinted that the minister of public security, Radkiewicz, was ‘a nationalist’ and that his wife was ‘a passionately anti-Soviet person’. At the same time, he claimed that Minc, Berman, and Zambrowski, who a year earlier, with the assistance of the Kremlin, had unseated Gomułka for ‘Polish nationalism’, were themselves guilty of ‘Jewish nationalism’. Moreover, he continued, in the MBP, ‘beginning with the vice-ministers through the department directors, there is not a single Pole. They are all Jews.’

Perhaps considering ‘Polish nationalism’ in the party as a more serious problem for the Kremlin, he counselled that ‘the time has not yet come for a decisive resolution to the question of the battle with Jewish nationalism in the Polish party. We can only think about a gradual preparation for such a resolution.’ The general situation in Poland was worsening, which ‘affects in particular the apparatus of the Ministry of Public Security . . . restoring the leadership of the MBP to health would be an important step on the road to restoring the situation in the leadership of the Polish party’. 44

Some changes were now introduced. A new, impeccably ‘Aryan’ deputy minister, Wacław Lewikowski, a long-time Comintern official, was appointed to the MBP, and a senior Jewish functionary, Józef Rożański, was removed from the group investigating Gomułka. In February–March 1950 the Secretariat of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee, which was to become the highest and most important decision-making body in Poland in the last years of Stalin’s life, was established. Of the top communist officials who were of Jewish origin only Zambrowski was a member; both Berman and Minc were excluded. The key figures under Bierut were now Edward Ochab, Zenon Nowak, and Franciszek Mazur—all of whom were non-Jews. Reporting to Stalin on the discussion about the establishment of this body, Lebedev argued that Bierut ‘should free himself from the “confusion” in which he finds himself, draw two or three Polish comrades close, and rely on them more boldly’. 45 There were those in the party who wished to take advantage of the new situation. On 12 April 1950 the head of the secret espionage section in Warsaw of the Soviet news agency TASS reported to Stalin (with copies to Molotov and Malenkov) on the composition of the personnel of the new Secretariat. Relying on the opinions of Stefan Matuszewski, a leading member of the PZPR Central Committee, and Wacław Wolski, another hard-line communist, who were frequent guests at the Soviet embassy in Warsaw, he observed that ‘many Jewish workers in the Central Committee consider it [the composition of the new body] an attack directed against Jewish party workers’, but according to Matuszewski, ‘it was enthusiastically supported by the entire party’. Wolski was more sceptical, believing that there was still a ‘Jewish clique’ in the party, which ‘hindered the advancement of Poles’. 46

Bierut seems to have decided, perhaps with Soviet encouragement, that to remove large numbers of Jews from the party apparatus at this stage would be too destabilizing. As a consequence, the antisemitic purge within the UB focused almost exclusively on functionaries of the intelligence service headed by its long-time chief, Wacław Komar. The core of the leadership of the MBP thus remained unchanged. At the same time, there

44 Ibid. 47.
45 Ibid. 74.
46 Ibid. 76.
are clear indications that Stalin was considering a purge of Jews in top-ranking positions in the PZPR. After the Slánský trial, Wanda Wasilewska, who had played a key role in the wartime leadership of the PPR, travelled from Kiev to Warsaw to warn Berman of Stalin’s plans to eliminate him.47

In fact, until 1956 none of the major changes in the MBP involved the large-scale removal of Jews. In 1948–9 purges had removed the supporters of the rightist-nationalist deviation, including Moczar and Grzegorz Korzyński. Two Jews lost their positions after the death of Stalin, Anatol Fejgin (for not preventing Świątło’s defection in December 1953) and Różański (for ‘violating people’s law and order’). However, it was only after 1956, with the return of Gomułka, that a wide-ranging purge occurred. Until this date the party leadership seems to have felt that the Jews had to be tolerated because ‘Polish nationalism’ was a greater danger.

At root, the presence of communists of Jewish origin in significant positions in the security apparatus has to be seen as a consequence of Stalin’s deep distrust of the Poles. It took place at the same time as the purge of Yiddish cultural activists in the Soviet Union and the wider campaign against ‘cosmopolitanism’, which was essentially an attack on Russified Jews within the new Soviet intelligentsia. The retention of Jews in these positions in Poland was clearly intended by Stalin to be a temporary expedient until a larger group of reliable local communists could be trained. Resentment in the party against the position of Jewish communists and Jews in general surfaced in the crisis which brought Gomułka to power, and, still more in that of 1968.

Conclusion
Clearly most problems are aroused by those who took an active part in the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Poland (and also elsewhere, although that is not the topic of my presentation today). Some have claimed that those who became communists had totally severed their links with the Jewish world. In a speech in 1917, Simon Dubnov observed:

…many demagogues came from among us, who joined the heroes of the street and the prophets of power grabbing. They use Russian pseudonyms because they are ashamed of their Jewish origin (Trotsky, Zinoviev etc.), but maybe it is their Jewish name which is not genuine, because they have no roots to bind themselves to our people.48

There is some truth in these observations. However, such people are perhaps representative of the category identified by Isaac Deutscher as ‘non-Jewish Jews’ and their role in the early history of Soviet Russia and of communist Poland is undeniable. Certainly the messianism of the Bolsheviks struck a chord with many Jews as did the slogans of the communist political religion, such as ‘God is us’, ‘the proletariat is the

chosen people which will fulfill its mission and complete history’ and ‘the destitute proletariat was nothing--it will be everything’. In addition, Jews attracted to revolutionary socialism because of their belief that this would make possible integration, because of Jewish poverty.

For anti-semites, the equation of Jew and Bolshevik merely added to the armoury of their arguments. There were, however, those who raised seriously the question of why the Jews had played so large a role in the revolution and whether Jews as a whole had some responsibility for those of their number who were implicated in its many excesses and crimes. One of them was the monarchist and Russian nationalist editor of Kievlanin, Vassili Shulgin. In his book Why We Do Not Like You published in Paris in 1927, he put it bluntly, not eschewing antisemitic commonplaces:

We do not like the fact that you took too prominent a part in the revolution, which turned out to be the greatest lie and fraud. We do not like the fact that you became the backbone and core of the Communist Party. We do not like the fact that, with your discipline and solidarity, your persistence and will, you have consolidated and strengthened for years to come the maddest and bloodiest enterprise that humanity has known since the day of creation. We do not like the fact that this experiment was carried out in order to implement the teachings of a Jew, Karl Marx. We do not like the fact that this whole terrible thing was done on the Russian back and that it has cost us Russians, all of us together and each one of us separately, unutterable losses. We do not like the fact that you, Jews, a relatively small group within the Russian population, participated in this vile deed out of out proportion to your numbers.

What the Jews as a collective needed to do was to repudiate the revolutionaries acting in their name. If they did not, they could not hold Russians responsible for the pogroms they suffered. Russians would be bound to respond:

Fine, in that case we did not stage the pogroms, either, and don’t have anything to do with those few who did: Petlyura’s men, the Ossetians, and assorted riffraff along with them. We don’t have any influence over them. Personally, we did not engage in any pogroms, we tried to prevent pogroms…So if the Jews, all of them, do not plead guilty to the social revolution, then the Russians, all of them, will plead not guilty to the Jewish pogroms...

His views were echoed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in the second volume of his Dvesti let vmesce (1795-1995) (Two Hundred Year Together). In it he calls on Jews, on the analogy of what has taken place in Germany since the end of Nazism to accept ‘moral responsibility’ for those among their co-religionists who ‘took part in the iron Bolshevik leadership and, even more so, in the ideological guidance of a huge country down a

49 This issue is well discussed in Zsusza Hetényi, In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860-1940) (Budapest, 2008),171-3 and M. Löwy, ‘Messianisme juif et utopies libertaires en Europe centrale (1905-1923), Archives des Sciences sociales des religions 51/1 (1981), 5-47.

50 Vassili V. Shul’gin, ‘Chto nam vikh ne rjavitsia...’ Ob Antisemitizme v Rossii (Reprint Moscow, 1992), 34-35 (italics in the original).

51 Ibid., 141-42.
false path’. They should ‘repent’ for their role in the ‘Cheka executions, the drowning of the barges with the condemned in the White and Caspian Seas, collectivization, Ukrainian famine--in all the vile acts of the Soviet regime.”

What is clear is that the crude application of the concept of collective responsibility to so diverse and political unorganized a group as the Jews of the Tsarist Empire does not facilitate the understanding of complex historical events. Rather one should seek to understand the reasons why a section of the Jewish community was attracted to Bolshevism and manifested this allegiance sometimes in violent forms and, in the larger context, the complex nature of Jewish acculturation and integration within the Soviet revolutionary state and in post-1944 Poland.

How is one to evaluate the role of Jews in revolutionary socialist regimes? Vassili Grossman in *Forever Flows* saw this as the result of the *longue durée* of Jewish history:

> Whence had that powerful flame of fanaticism flared within him, this son of a sad, sly shopkeeper from the shetel of Fastov, this student in the commercial school who had read the books of the ‘Golden Library’ and of Louis-Henri Boussenard? Neither he nor his father had any reason to store up within their hearts that hatred of capitalism which was fed in dark coal mines, in smoky factories.

> Who had given him a fighter’s soul? Was it the example of Zhelyabov and Kalyayev, or the wisdom of the Communist Manifesto, or the suffering of the impoverished people right beside him?

> Or was it that the smouldering coals were buried deep within his thousand-year inheritance, ready to burst into flame--to do battle with Caesar’s Roman soldiers, to confront the bonfires of the Spanish inquisition, to join in the starving frenzy of the Talmudists, to emerge in the shetel organization for self-defense during the pogroms?

> Was it the age-old chain of abuses, the anguish of the Babylonian captivity, the humiliations of the ghetto, or the misery of the Pale of Settlement that had produced and forged that unquenchable thirst that was scorching the soul of the Bolshevik Lev Mekler?

Others were less apologetic. Unlike some other former Jewish communists, the Polish-Jewish poet Stanisław Wygodzki, who emigrated to Israel in 1968, remained true to the ideal of communism while rejecting the practice. In an interview with *Polityka* in 1990 characteristically entitled ‘I served an evil cause’, he stated:

> You want to know whether I still believe in something that was once called Communism. I believe that one should not live from exploitation, that one should not oppress anyone, that one should not subjugate a foreign land and that one should not do anything that takes away from people their humanity. This is what communism means to me and in such a communism I still believe today.”

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