Let the Old Make Way for the New

Studies in the Social and Cultural History
of Eastern European Jewry

Presented to Immanuel Etkes

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Volume II: Haskalah, Orthodoxy, and the Opposition to Hasidism

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"THE KINGDOM ON EARTH IS LIKE THE KINGDOM IN HEAVEN": ORTHODOX RESPONSES TO THE RISE OF JEWISH RADICALISM IN RUSSIA

David E. Fishman

Introduction

The years 1901 through 1904 saw the dramatic growth and intensification of political radicalism among Russian Jewry. While the Jewish socialist movement in Russia had been in existence for more than a decade, its primary focus during the 1890s had been the building of a Jewish workers' movement that engaged in union-organizing, strike-activity, and class consciousness-raising. Opposition to Tsarist autocracy, although a staple of Bundist ideology since the organization's pre-history, took a back-seat to the workers' immediate economic struggle. The Bund, like other Russian Social-Democratic movements, believed that the time was not ripe for direct confrontation with the regime.

But beginning in mid-1901, the Bund shifted most of its energies to political agitation and protest-action. This process was initiated by decisions taken at the Bund's Fourth Congress (May 24–28, 1901), and was spurred on by the spiraling course of events during the next two years: the lashing of Bundist May-Day demonstrators in Vilna in 1902, Hirsh Lekert's attempted assassination of Vilna Governor-General von Wahl and his subsequent hanging, the April 1903 pogrom in Kishinev, the September 1903 pogrom in Gomel, and so on. With the spread of anti-Tsarist fury and indignation among Russian Jews, Bundists were emboldened: During the two years between May 1901 and June 1903, Bundist organizations held forty-four political street-demonstrations and manifestations, and 260 public meetings (not including May 1st demonstrations and meetings). Seventy-two of those meetings drew between one hundred and five hundred people, and twelve drew crowds of more than one thousand. During the following

year, June 1903 to July 1904, the number of public meetings rose to 429. (In other words, 70% more political demonstrations took place in the one year between June 1903 and July 1904 than in the previous two-year period.)[1]

While most Russian Jews were not Bundists or socialists, a large part of Jewry from various backgrounds and orientations viewed the Bund's new combativeness vis-à-vis the Tsarist autocracy with sympathy and admiration. The young *Po'ale Zion* movement, which embraced radicalism and socialism in Russia alongside the building of a socialist homeland in the Land of Israel, grew by leaps and bounds during these few years. Even the prominent St. Petersburg lawyer and communal figure, Maxim Vinaver, a political liberal, offered to raise funds on the Bund's behalf when he met with a member of its Central Committee in late 1904, and asked him: "What do you want? We are all, in fact, Bundists."[2]

The following study deals with the reaction of the rabbinic establishment to this trend, a subject which has been neglected by historical scholarship. The rabbis were far from an inconsequential group in turn-of-the-century Russian Jewry. While they were no longer the uncontested leaders of their communities, the rabbis were respected by many, and had a devoted following which constituted a self-conscious Orthodoxy. The rabbis also had contacts and relationships with Russian municipal and police officials, which they could use to various effects. A range of options were open to rabbis as the process of political radicalization unfolded: to support it vocally, to support it quietly (like Vinaver) or tacitly, to stand aside and not address political issues, to pay lip-service to the authorities, or to actively support the authorities and the Tsarist regime. The decisions they made in

* This essay is dedicated to Immanuel Etkes, who opened up the world of Lithuanian rabbinic culture to me when I was a graduate student, nearly thirty years ago. His scholarship is an enduring model for me, and his humanity and friendship are sources of warmth.

1 See Henry Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia from Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, 1972), 49–50, 58, 147–9, 156–8. The figures are from pages 149, 238.

2 Tobias, op. cit., 242.

response to Jewish political radicalization had an impact on the course of events in their communities.[3]

Overall, the rabbinic reaction during these years ranged from the middle to conservative end of this spectrum. I have not found a single instance between 1901 and 1904 of a rabbi expressing support or sympathy for the revolutionary movement. I have yet to discover a rabbi who referred to the Tsarist regime as a "kingdom of evil" (*malkhut resha*), and who ascribed responsibility for the pogroms in Kishinev and Gomel to the Tsarist authorities. Nor do I know of any case, during those years, when a rabbi used his standing and influence to free local Bundists from arrest. Only later, during and after the revolution of 1905, does one find such instances. Only after the revolutionary movement, including the Bund, had proved itself to be a significant force in Russia, capable of overturning the political order, did some rabbis, albeit a small minority, express sympathy with it.

During the period under consideration, 1901 to 1904, many rabbis adopted a posture of aloofness from political affairs. This was nothing new. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the political representation of Russian Jewry had largely shifted to the hands of Maskilim and St. Petersburg magnates (Baron Horace Guenzburg), and most rabbis tacitly ceded this area of activity to the latter. The sphere of rabbinic activity narrowed to strictly religious affairs. When the interests of the Jewish religion needed to be protected, the rabbis turned to the St. Petersburg magnates to ask them to intercede. And because of the existence of a dual rabbinate in Russia, it was the Crown Rabbis (*kazyonnie ravinni*), not by the "Spiritual Rabbis" (*dukhovnie ravinni*), who acted as the Jewish communities' liaison with local authorities. With the growth of radical sentiments within the Jewish community, most rabbis preferred not to take a stand.

But a significant number of rabbis adopted an avowedly conservative

3 The discussion will be limited to the so-called "spiritual" rabbis (*dukhovnie ravinni*), and not to the Crown rabbis (*kazyonnie ravinni*), who were Imperial Russian state functionaries. The latter had much less prestige and influence in the Jewish community, and, by virtue of the fact that they were state officials, had no political options other than to support the autocracy.

political stance – condemning Jewish revolutionaries as sinners, and publicly proclaiming their own loyalty, and that of the Jewish community, to the Tsar. The radicals' modes of activity – public demonstrations, the distribution of illegal subversive literature, agitation against the regime, and the use of violence to redress grievances – were viewed by the rabbis as inimical to the Jewish tradition. Despite the fact that numerous classical sources expounded on the struggle of Moses against Egyptian slavery, the Macabees against religious persecution, and Rabbi Akiva against Roman domination, and despite the fact that Midrashic texts excoriated the deeds of the Roman Empire as a "kingdom of evil," those parts of the tradition were not deemed to be applicable to the present, to Tsarist Russia. The rabbis viewed political radicalism as utterly alien to Judaism. It was left to Zionists and Jewish Socialists to invoke those Biblical and rabbinic sources.[4]

A Preacher's Monarchism

Several themes of the Orthodox reaction to the Bund's political radicalism were first broached by the wandering preacher Simha Ha-Cohen Kahana, in his book *Magen ha-Talmud* (1901). Kahana was a popular preacher in Lithuania and Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century; his book opened with letters of praise by more than fifty of the most prominent rabbis of the day, beginning with R. Isaac Elhanan Spector and ending with R. Shmuel Mohilever.

At first glance, *Magen ha-Talmud* had nothing to do with politics. Its objective was to defend the Talmud against those who scoffed at its teachings, by reconciling Talmudic dicta with reason, science, and morality. But the book's loose literary structure – the citation of a Talmudic dictum followed by random observations on it – allowed Kahana to ramble freely. Already in his introduction, Kahana contended that devotion to the Talmud

4 For a discussion of traditional Jewish political quietism in Eastern Europe, see Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics* (New York and Oxford, 1989), 14–21.

was a guarantor of loyalty to the Tsar, because the Talmud taught that the monarch and God were equally sacred.

> Let us see if there is a single young man who studies the Torah and tradition, who thinks of attacking the sanctity of the king and Tsar, or of maliciously violating the laws of the government! They [the students of the Torah] believe in the Talmud, and the Talmud teaches that the sanctity and honor of the king is like the sanctity and honor of the Lord. [It teaches] that whoever raises a hand against the honor of the king and his government – whether in deeds, words, or even thoughts – is like someone who raises a hand against the honor of the Lord, and denies or doubts the existence of the first cause.[5]

Kahana noted that "there are, to our great pain and regret, a few people among our sons, who attended [secular] schools and abandoned the Talmud, violated and totally forsook our religion and Torah, that, woe!, have joined those who sin against the monarch's rule and his sanctity."[6] Political radicalism was found among those Jews who had left the path of Talmudic Judaism. Later on in the book, Kahana lashed out at the Socialist movement, which he portrayed as a frightening, and utterly destructive force in society.

> They are ready to attack and damage all of society, disrupt order, and raise their hand against the Lord and the king. How numerous are the wicked deeds of these idlers and champions of lawlessness ... Such a person's mind is filled with thoughts of rebellion and disorder. He raises the banner of strikes, and behold, there is broken glass, torn pillows, and spilled wine, followed by blows, injuries, and the spilling of blood.[7]

But Kahana expressed his confidence that the Tsar understood that the vast majority of Jews felt love and reverence for him, and that only a few "vain

5 Simha Ha-Cohen Kahana, *Magen ha-Talmud* (Warsaw, 5662/1901), 19. The passage is cited in Aba Lev, *Der klerikalizm in kamf kegn der arbeter bavegung* (Moscow, 1934), 13–14. While Lev's book is a vicious polemic against the rabbis' reactionary politics, it is based on research and provides authentic citations.

6 Kahana, loc.cit.

7 Ibid., 52.

and frivolous fellows have been swept up, with the current of the times, by this plague of humanity, the cursed of God who destroy the world."[8]

Kahana drew severe conclusions on how the Jewish community should deal with the revolutionaries in its midst. Since Jews were responsible for each other, "if such a person is obstinate [in his opposition to the monarch], the law is that he should be handed over to the government, so that it do with him as it pleases, to destroy these thorns and nettles." In another passage, Kahana advised his audience that if a Jew was prone toward cruelty, he should channel the expression of this tendency in a positive manner – by venting his cruelty against revolutionaries.[9] Kahana's words, presumably preached publicly in numerous communities, sanctioned informing on Jewish revolutionaries and engaging in violent acts against them.

The themes of Kahana's introduction to *Magen ha-Talmud* would repeat themselves in various subsequent rabbinic pronouncements on the movement: (a) rabbinic Judaism embraced the notion of the Divine right of kings, (b) Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was a benevolent and kind ruler, (c) religious Jews were devoted subjects of the Tsar, whereas political radicalism was found only among irreligious Jews who had received a secular education, (d) radical political ideas were found among a marginal and small group in the Jewish community, (e) Jewish revolutionaries should be punished by whatever means were available.

Kahana developed his conservative political views in several passages of *Magen ha-Talmud.* He argued, based on the model of King Solomon, that autocratic monarchy (*melekh moshel yehidi*) was the most desirable form of government, by far superior to the constitutional republic. In republics, anarchy prevailed, and the weakness of the state invited hostile neighbors to declare war. The state could not respond effectively to crises such as war, famine, and disease. "The king is tied down, and dependent on the view of the people, and can do nothing without the ministers and elders of the people, and must wait until the latter gather." Under autocracy, "the

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 57.

king knows that the fate of the people is in his hands; whatever he decrees will be done."[10]

For Jews in particular, Russian autocracy was preferable to constitutional rule. Under parliamentary regimes, anti-Semitic movements thrived and could not be prohibited. Where, he asked, was there more anti-Semitism than in the Austrian parliament? Or in free France, with its Dreyfus affair? In autocratic Russia, the Tsar protected the Jews – their life, property and dignity – against those enemies who sought to harm them. The princes of the house of Romanov were free of prejudices and superstitions regarding the Jews, whereas the "masses" (*hamon*) could easily be incited against the Jews by wicked people. Tsarist censorship assured that Russian newspapers did not publish anti-Semitic slander, as the free press did in other countries. Kahana concluded that the moderate restrictions on the Jews' rights in Russia were well worth the stability and security which the Tsar provided for them in return.[11]

Moreover, under constitutional regimes Jews had abandoned Judaism for European enlightenment, whereas in Tsarist Russia – a state which, according to Kahana, was based on religious values – the overwhelming majority of Jews remained loyal to their Judaism. The restrictions on Jews in the areas of education and residence served to keep them separate from the Gentile population. If Russian Jews were granted full rights, they would become religion-less, like the Jews in other countries. "Is it not the finger of God, that Providence instructed our kings and Tsars to diminish slightly from our rights, despite the fact that their hearts seek our well-being? ... We who believe in our religion and our mission, are grateful to our Tsar and our kingdom, whose laws protect our Torah and faith, for *it* is the true

10 Ibid., 120–1.

11 Ibid., 87, also 102, 52. Kahana argued that the restrictions on Jews in Russia were not severe. The territory open to Jewish residence was much larger than all of France and Germany combined, and the 5% quota on Jews in institutions of higher education was still much higher than the 3% proportion of Jews in the overall population of the Empire. *Kol Simha* (part 2 of *Magen ha-Talmud*) (Warsaw, 1902), 37.

freedom."[12] This line of argumentation is reminiscent of Shneur Zalman of Lyady's support for Tsar Alexander I against Napoleon in 1812: Emancipation was a threat, not an opportunity.[13] But the articulation of such ideas in 1900, after all European states other than Russia had adopted a parliamentary system and had legally emancipated their Jews, is noteworthy. It points to the tenacity of rabbinic religio-political conservatism.

Three Models: Monarchism, Obedience-As-Mitzvah, Pragmatic Quietism

Some major rabbinic figures are known to have shared Kahana's ardent pro-Tsarist patriotism, the most prominent being Rabbi Elijah Chaim Meisel of Lodz (1821–1912).[14] When Tsar Nicholas II issued a Manifest on February 26, 1903, which reaffirmed the tolerance of various religions in the Russian Empire, alongside the official state religion of Russian Orthodoxy, Meisel ordered that its text be read on the Sabbath in all of Lodz's synagogues, and that prayers be offered for the welfare of the kingdom, "with a sense of gratitude and blessing." (The same practice was followed in synagogues in Odessa and other cities.)[15] Meisel was involved in efforts to squelch Bundist activity in Lodz as early as 1901, and was accused by Bundists of instructing hasidic youths to spy on their activities and inform on them to the police. According to the Bundists, Meisel's campaign led to the arrest of close to one hundred individuals in early April 1901.[16]

12 *Magen ha-Talmud*, 87; similarly *Kol Simha*, 37.

13 See Simon Dubnow, *Toldot ha-Hasidut* (Tel Aviv, 1931), 338–9.

14 For a favorable portrait of Rabbi Meisel, see Joseph Friedenson (ed.), *Pinkes Lodzh* (New York, 2005), 108–14. On his virulent anti-Zionism and efforts to exclude Zionist preachers from Lodz, see Joseph Salmon, *Dat ve-Tsiyonut: Immutim Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1990), passim; and Isaac Nissenbaum, *'Aley Heldi* (Jerusalem, 1969), 133–4, 145–7.

15 *Ha-Peles*, Iyyar 5663 [April–May 1903], 508. The text of the Manifest, which deals mainly with economic matters, was printed in *Mahzike ha-Dat* (Lemberg), March 20, 1903.

16 Jacob S. Hertz, *Di geshikhte fun bund in lodzh* (New York, 1958), 71, and the

Similarly, the communal Maggid (preacher) of Bialystok is reported to have given a sermon in February 1902, in which he declared that the Tsar was "a kind and gracious king," and to which the audience responded with hissing, whistling, and disruption of the sermon. The Maggid reported the incident to the police, and in subsequent weeks, policemen were stationed at the synagogue.[17]

A second category of rabbis did not embrace fervent Tsarist patriotism or monarchism as a political ideology, but took a passively loyalist position: obedience to the ruler was a religious duty. Rabbi Jehiel Mikha'el Epstein of Novaredok (1829–1908) made statements and rulings to this effect in his halakhic code, *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, a work which enjoyed tremendous authority and popularity in the early twentieth century.[18] Epstein opened his code with a special introduction called *Kevod Melekh* ("The Honor of the King"), on the obligation to "be submissive to the king, and lovingly fulfill his commands." He marshaled a panoply of rabbinic dicta to this effect, beginning with the statement that "the kingdom on earth is like the kingdom in heaven" (Berakhot 58a), which he interpreted to mean that both earthly and celestial rulers were owed total obedience and reverence. He cited the dictum that "the Holy One blessed be He forswore Israel not to rebel against the kingdom" (a modified citation of Ketubot 111a), and commented: "these words mean that even rebellion in one's heart is forbidden; one must not think ill of the king and his ministers." Epstein concluded the introduction to his code with the prayer "Long live our king the Tsar, may his glory be elevated, Alexander III, his wife, their son the viceroy, and the entire exalted royal family. May the Lord command His grace to His anointed one, our

sources cited there. Meisel was also reported to have arranged the secret police-burial of a Bundist beaten to death in prison in May 1901, and to have pressured the deceased's family not to protest his killing. Ibid., 85–8.

17 Jacob S. Hertz et. al. (eds.), *Di geshikhte fun bund* (New York, 1960), vol. 1, 331, citing *Posledniia izvestiia* (London), April 10, 1902.

18 On Rabbi Jehiel Mikha'el Epstein, see Meir Bar-Ilan, *Fun volozhin biz yeshushalayim: epizodn* (New York, 1933), passim. The first edition of *Arukh ha-Shulhan* appeared in Warsaw, in installments, between 1884 and 1907.

king, the Tsar, may his glory be elevated; and may he reign for lengthy days, Amen and Amen."[19]

While Esptein's loyalist introduction to *Arukh ha-Shulhan* might be considered lip-service to the Tsar, written in order to facilitate his book's passage through state censorship,[20] he expressed the same ideas in the body of his code, in the section on the laws of Torah-study. Considering whether it was permissible to study secular books, Epstein ruled that the study of such books was permitted, if it was done casually rather than systematically, and if the books were not works of outright heresy. On the latter, he added a statement not found in any earlier halakhic codes:

> Some of them [the forbidden heretical books] also rebel against the earthly kingdom in their hearts. But those who study Talmud, codes, and kabbalah do not do such a thing. The latter remain submissive toward the earthly kingdom with all their hearts and with an eager soul, for we have been commanded to do so by our sages in many places. For King Solomon said: "Fear the Lord, my son, and the king" [Proverbs 24:21]. By this he meant, that whoever fears the Lord will also fear the king.[21]

The message of Epstein's ruling was clear: It was forbidden for a God-fearing person to contemplate rebelling against the earthly kingdom. Revolutionary pamphlets were to be considered a form of heretical literature. Loyalty to the state was a religious commandment. The verse from Proverbs cited by Epstein became the most common proof-text used at the turn of the twentieth century to support the religious duty to obey the Tsar.

A third rabbinic response to Jewish political radicalism was to consider obedience to the Tsar more a practical imperative than a religious one.

19 "Kevod Melekh," in *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, *Hoshen Mishpat* (vol. 7 in the Jerusalem 1987 edition), 1–2. "Hoshen Mishpat" was the first published volume of Epstein's code, and appeared in 1884, during the reign of Alexander III.

20 See Dmitry Elyashevich, *Pravitelstvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat v rossii 1797–1917* (St. Petersburg/Jerusalem, 1999), esp. 307–8, 345–7, 376–82.

21 Jehiel Mikha'el Epstein, *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, Yoreh Deah 246:16. The first edition of this portion of the *Arukh ha-Shulhan* was published in Warsaw in 1898.

According to this line of thinking, the activity of Jewish revolutionaries endangered the entire Jewish community. Such a position was taken by Rabbi Eliezer Rabinowicz of Minsk (1859–1924).[22] When local Bundists staged a daring anti-Tsarist demonstration on May 19, 1902, disrupting a public celebration of Nicholas II's birthday in the municipal theater, Rabinowicz issued a proclamation (*kol kore*) against their act, which was hung in all local synagogues. Unlike Kahana and the Maggid of Bialystok, Rabinowicz did not praise the Tsar for his kindnesses. While he referred briefly to the religious obligation for Jews to pray for the welfare of the kingdom, this was not his main point, as it was for Epstein. His primary argument was that Jews were a weak and vulnerable people, and as such, they should refrain from involvement in politics. Prudence required that Jews be politically quiescent.

> How can we Jews, who are compared to a little worm – tola'at ya'akov [Is. 41:41] – dare to meddle in such things? ... How can we pursue such an arrogant path and meddle in politics? Consider well, Jewish children! Consider what you are doing! God knows what kind of things you may bring upon our unfortunate nation, upon yourselves and your families. ... We hope that you will reconsider, and not endanger the happiness of our entire nation, or your own fate, and the fate of your parents and families.[23]

Thus, one can detect three strands in the conservative political stance adopted by rabbis: fervent monarchism, political obedience as a religious obligation, and pragmatic quietism. Many rabbis combined two or all three of these approaches in their pronouncements.

22 Rabinowicz was one of the founders of *Knesset Yisrael*, the first organization of Orthodox Jews in Russia, in 1907, and of the Orthodox political party *Akhdut Yisrael* in 1917. See Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, *Igrot Rabi Hayyim Ozer* (Bney Brak, 2000), vol. 1, 244, 327, 368; vol. 2, 9, 131, 141.

23 Jacob S. Hertz, *Hirsh Lekert* (New York, 1952), 68.

Religious Zionist Reticence

In March 1902, the founding conference of Mizrachi, the religious Zionist movement, was held in Vilna, under the leadership of Rabbi Jacob Isaac Reines of Lida. Mizrachi's by-laws were adopted at the conference, stressing the movement's openness to non-observant Jews, and its brotherly love for Jews who disagreed with them. The by-laws opened with the statement that both "Orthodox Zionists" and "Moderate Zionists" – those who were not Orthodox Jews themselves but who supported the spread of Zionism among religious Jews – were eligible to become members of Mizrachi. The movement would "show respect toward our opponents, and instill peace and brotherhood among the various parties [in Jewry]." But the tone shifted in the by-laws' third point, which excluded one category of Jews from the movement: "Those who meddle with rebels [*ha-mit'arvim im shonim*] will not be accepted as members of our organization."[24]

The term *mit'arvim im shonim* was taken from the same verse in Proverbs (24:21) cited, in part, by R. Jehiel Mikha'el Epstein in *Arukh ha-Shulhan*: "ירא־את יהוה בני ומלך, עם שונים אל תתערב". The word *shonim* was taken by nineteenth- and twentieth-century rabbis to mean those who sought to change the political system, and who did not fear the king; in other words, radicals and revolutionaries.

Mizrachi's explicit rejection of Jewish radicals (but not of other secular Jews) in its by-laws is striking. No other Zionist organization felt the need to take such a step. Certainly, the exigencies of time and place played a major role: Mizrachi was founded in Vilna in the midst of the upswing in anti-Tsarist agitation among Russian Jews, and this trend was strongest in the Lithuanian provinces, the birthplace and base of the Bund. The issue of Jewish anti-Tsarist radicalism was therefore very much on the Jewish public agenda at the time. Moreover, the legal and political status of the Zionist movement in Russia was uncertain at the time of Mizrachi's founding. Zionist organizations were not actively persecuted by the authorities, but

24 See the text of the by-laws in P. Churgin and A.L. Gelman (eds.), *Mizrachi: Kovetz Yovel* (New York, 1936), 38.

neither were they officially recognized as legal. Zionist activists were nervous about the regime's attitude toward them, and were eager not to antagonize the authorities. As Mizrachi's founding conference was the first public Zionist meeting in the Russian Empire in several years (since the Warsaw Conference in 1898), it was prudent to state that the organization would have nothing to do with revolutionaries.

Moreover, Mizrachi's arch-rivals in the Zionist movement, the Democratic Faction led by Leon Motzkin and Chaim Weitzman, had expressed sympathies toward the Jewish labor movement and a desire to draw Zionism closer to the workers and the masses. Motzkin and Weitzman used the rhetoric of liberation and struggle, which was drawn from socialist and nationalist movements in the Russian Empire. Mizrachi, in turn, sought to distance itself from the Democratic Faction by proclaiming that it would not countenance radical sympathies.[25]

Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines, the founder and leader of Mizrachi, distanced the Zionist movement from Jewish radicalism in his book *Or Hadash 'al Tziyon,* published in the same year as the Mizrachi conference, 1902. The book's overall thrust was apologetic: to prove to learned Orthodox Jews that Zionism did not conflict with any of Judaism's teachings or tenets, and that the movement engaged in performing the *mitzvot* of rescuing Jewish lives and settling the Land of Israel. According to Reines, Zionist leaders such as Theodor Herzl were penitents, who had returned to the Jewish people and to the performance of certain *mitzvot*, though not to full-fledged religious observance. To highlight the point that Zionism was not the enemy of Orthodox Judaism, Reines drew a contrast between it and the radical trend in Jewry. Radicalism, not Zionism, was quintessentially anti-religious.

> Secularism and piety are the two ends of the spectrum, and in between there are many different levels ... If we wish to single out the extremists among the secular, there is no doubt that the reformers and revolutionary inciters [*ha-metaknim ve-ha-mesitim*] are the true extremists. And they are, after all,

25 On the Democratic Faction (or Party), see David Vital, *Zionism: The Formative Years* (Oxford, 1982), 190–8.

> the chief opponents of the Zionist movement ... Let us recall that at the time of the fourth Zionist congress in London in 1900, they issued a harsh attack on Zionism, and disseminated pamphlets defaming Zionism.
>
> Similarly the nihilists [*ba'aley shitat ha-'efes*], who are a rot on the house of Judah, desecrate everything that is holy, and deny all holy and lofty articles of faith. But they, too, are among the greatest opponents of the Zionist idea, and their objective is to banish it from the face of the earth.[26]

In fact, wrote Reines, one of the virtues of the Zionist movement was that it had countered the influence of radicalism in Jewish society. The spread of Zionism had made it more difficult for the Bund to recruit new members. Zionism served as a bulwark against the flight from Judaism among Russian Jewish youth as they joined the Russian revolutionary movement. The competition between the two movements had even had a moderating influence on Jewish radicals. Originally they consisted of young people who "abandoned Judaism and were ashamed of their people and origin," but lately the radicals had "begun to take pride in their origin." This development among the Bundists was to Zionism's credit.[27]

Reines used Jewish radicalism as a bogyman which spelled the greatest danger to the Jewish religion, in order to cast Zionism in a more favorable light, as a movement which preserved Jewish identity. Unlike Rabbis Kahana, Epstein, and Rabinowicz, Reines's critique of Jewish radicalism was religious-cultural, not political. As arch-secularists, the radicals caused much harm to Judaism. He did not address the Jewish socialists' political objectives and methods, or the obligations of Russian Jews toward the Russian state.

In the Shadow of Kishinev

The Kishinev pogrom of April 1903 heightened the political antagonism between Bundists and rabbis. The Bund laid responsibility for the slaughter

26 Isaac Jacob Reines, *Or Hadash 'al Tziyon* (Vilna, 1902), 255. For Bundist attacks on Zionism in conjunction with the Fourth Zionist Congress, see Tobias, *The Jewish Bund*, 128.

27 Reines, *Or Hadash*, 255.

in Kishinev at the doorstep of the Tsarist regime, and called for political protest and armed self-defense against pogromists and the police. "The pogrom in Kishinev is the work of the government, the police and the gendarmes," declared the underground Bundist newpaper, *Di arbeter-shtime*.[28] A large part of Russian Jewry concurred, but most rabbis did not share this diagnosis. They reacted to the pogrom first of all on a religious plane, proclaiming a fast day and ordering the recitation of the Psalms. Some of them saw the pogrom as Divine punishment for the violation of the Sabbath and other religious sins. In Kiev, Odessa, and Poltava, rabbis mounted a campaign for Jewish shop-keepers to keep their stores closed on the Sabbath in the aftermath of the pogrom.[29]

Politically, the rabbis tended to view the events in Kishinev through a much narrower lens. The pogrom was perpetrated by local inciters (some of whom held official positions); the Imperial authorities in St. Petersburg were blameless and would come to the Jews' protection. If anything imperiled the Jews, it was Bundist agitation, which threatened to antagonize the Tsarist regime – the only force capable of protecting the Jews – against Russian Jewry as a whole.

The Orthodox, anti-Zionist journal *Ha-Peles*, edited by Rabbi Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowich of Poltava, expressed its confidence in the authorities' promises to restore order.[30] It noted with satisfaction that Minister of Interior Vyachislav von Plehve had told a Jewish delegation from Kishinev that the authorities would not permit further pogroms, and that Finance Minister Sergei Witte had promised financial aid for Jewish businesses ruined in Kishinev. At the same time, *Ha-Peles* condemned retaliatory attacks on the pogromists. When a young *Po'ale Zion* member named Pinchas Dashevsky attempted to assassinate the instigator of the Kishinev pogom, Pavolaki Krushevan, on June 3, 1903, the Orthodox journal opined: "May God save us from such benefactors, who wish to avenge our blood in

28 Jacob S. Hertz et al. (eds.), *Di geshikhte fun bund* (New York, 1962), vol. 2, 60.

29 *Ha-Peles*, Sivan 5663, 569; Tamuz 5663, 634.

30 On Rabinowich, see Yosef Salmon, "Rabbi Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowich of Poltava: Harbinger of Orthodoxy in Imperial Russia," *Shvut* 11 [27] (2002–3): 27–39.

all the ways which are forbidden by the law of the holy Torah, particularly through bloodshed, God forbid, which is one of the severest sins."[31]

Most rabbis believed that in such a sensitive and uncertain time, anti-Tsarist agitation by the Bund put the entire Jewish community at risk. Accordingly, they went in a diametrically opposite direction from much of Jewish public opinion, and launched a public campaign against the Bund. *Ha-Peles* reported a few months after Kishinev:

> The religious rabbis in Poltava and in other cities of our land, such as Vilna and Grodna, have given public speeches and issued written appeals in Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish, alerting our brethren to the great duty incumbent upon every Jew to submit to the laws of the Tsar, may his glory be uplifted. The appeals urge everyone to watch closely over their youth, lest the latter fall, God forbid, into the snare of the destroyers and annihilators. They should be loyal sons to their Father in heaven and to their king on earth, with all their hearts and souls. In Warsaw, certain rabbis have begun to give sermons on this matter even during the week-days.[32]

The public appeal issued by the Vilna rabbis in June 1903 is an instructive example. In a tri-lingual broadsheet in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian, posted on public thoroughfares and at the entrances to synagogues, it urged Jews not to follow those "agitators" who seek "to destroy the civil peace and our lawful system of government." It offered a litany of Biblical and Rabbinic citations in support of the view that "the Children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have been commanded ... to punctiliously observe the laws and statutes of the government under whose protection we dwell, and to accept the rule of the government willingly and wholeheartedly."[33]

The appeal of the Vilna rabbis espoused not only the obedience-as-commandment theme, but also expressed a religious monarchism

31 *Ha-Peles*, Av 5663, 700–01.

32 *Ha-Peles*, Tishre 5664, 64.

33 Eli Lederhendler, "The Vilna Rabbis' Anti-Socialist Appeal, June 1903," *Shvut* 15 (1992): xxxiii–xl. An expanded version of this article appears in Lederhendler's book, *Jewish Responses to Modernity: New Voices in America and Eastern Europe* (New York, 1994), 67–76.

reminiscent of Simha Kahana's. "How great is God's favor in bestowing majesty upon kings and ministers. Terrestrial government photographically reproduces or reflects heavenly government." The appeal offered sycophantic praise of Nicholas II and his regime: "He who does not appreciate all the good that the ruler performs for all his subjects, every hour of every day, is surely guilty of ingratitude ... This applies, above all, to our own monarch, our lord the Emperor, his majesty NIKOLAI ALEKSANDROVICH, a gracious and compassionate ruler who seeks the welfare of all his people." It concluded by wishing Nicholas a long life, health, and success in all his endeavors.

Of course, unlike other sources we have examined so far, the appeal of the Vilna rabbis was not directed at an internal Jewish audience alone. As a placard posted with an accompanying Russian text, it was also intended for Tsarist officials in Vilna, to demonstrate to them the loyalty of the local Jewish communal leadership. Accordingly, its authors may have chosen to stress the Divine right of kings, and to praise Nicholas' benevolence, for tactical reasons – to cast the Jewish community in a favorable light among Russian officials. It may well be that the Vilna rabbis' underlying motive was pragmatic quietism – to protect the community by urging it to stay out of politics – and that their Monarchist rhetoric was merely a ploy, intended for Gentile consumption.

Deliberations of the Kraków Rabbinical Congress

An international congress of rabbis, held in Kraków in August 1903, was the first known instance when the question of Jewish involvement in the revolutionary movement in Russia was publicly discussed among rabbis. The congress had been convened in order to issue a collective oath denying and condemning the blood-libel, as well as to consult on matters of mutual concern, and consider establishing a world rabbinic body. Of the fifty rabbis who attended, ten were from the territory of the Russian Empire.[34]

34 See the published minutes of the congress, *Pirtey-Kol ha-Masa ve-ha-Matan Shel ha-Kongres ha-Rabani ha-Rishon*, (Kraków, 1903 [issued as a special

In advance of the meeting, its initiator, the Ashkenazi rabbi of Cairo, Egypt, R. Aharon Mendl Hakohen of Cairo, received letters from numerous rabbis suggesting items for inclusion in the congress agenda. A few letters from the Russian Empire suggested that the congress address the growing "plague" of Jewish political radicalism. (Several more referred to the threat of Zionism, and of secularization in general.) Rabbi Moshe Nachum Jerusalimski of Kielce, in Russian Poland, placed the issue at the top of his list. The congress needed to respond to the growth of the secret society called "Akhdus" – the popularly-used Hebrew-Yiddish appellation for the Bund – whose goal, he wrote, was "to destroy the system of our exalted government." Bringing together the familiar themes of monarchism, submissiveness as mitzvah, and pragmatic quietism, Jerusalimski cited the "severe oath which the Lord foreswore Israel, that they be submissive to the government of the land where they dwell" (paraphrasing the dictum in the Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111a). The dictum that Israel was forsworn "not to rebel against the nations," was by then a staple of Orthodox anti-Zionist rhetoric; it was now mobilized for the battle against the revolutionary movement. Both forms of political activism were considered to be equally inimical to Judaism.

Jerusalimski proposed that the "Akhdus people" be excommunicated by the rabbinic congress, and that Jews be prohibited from having any dealings with them, "until they repent to the Lord, the God of Israel, and to our exalted government."[35] But voices such as Jerusalimski's were rare among the pre-conference correspondents. The vast majority of correspondents, and later of participants, were from the Habsburg Empire, where the revolutionary movement was not a pertinent issue. Accordingly, Cohen and the organizing committee did not place the topic of the Bund and Jewish radicalism on the congress agenda. Nonetheless, it was raised as an

supplement to *Ha-Peles*]), the series of articles by Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowich of Poltava, "Ha-Knisiyah ha-Rabanit bi-Kraków," *Ha-Peles*, published between 1903 and 1905, and Aharon Mendl Hakohen, *Knesset ha-Gedolah*, part 2, (Cairo, 1904); On the congress, see the article by Gershon Bacon in this volume.

35 Hakohen, *Knesset ha-Gedolah*, part 2, book 8, 19b. For a similar proposal, submitted by Rabbi Hillel Lubschitz of Lublin, see ibid., 11b.

emergency item at the beginning of the meeting's first day of deliberations by Rabbi Gavriel Ze'ev Margolioth of Grodna.

Margolioth explained that the growth in the number of young Jewish revolutionaries posed a mortal danger to the Russian Jewish community, because the Jews as a whole were held responsible for their actions. Margolioth, like Jerusalimski before him, urged the congress to decide "to exclude such sinners and rebels from the congregation of Israel." Other rabbis in attendance objected, noting the halakhic rule that "one does not punish unless one forewarns" (Sanhedrin 56b), and Margolioth agreed that the actual act of excommunication should be deferred for one year. During the course of the year, he proposed that the congress send out preachers to warn Jews against engaging in revolutionary activity, and urging young Jewish revolutionaries to repent. If the latter did not cease and desist after a year of warning, they would be excluded from the congregation of Israel, and, according to Margolioth, would no longer be considered Jews. The Jewish community as a whole could not be held responsible for their deeds, since it would have formally severed its association with the revolutionaries.[36]

Rabbi Judah Leib Tsirelson of Prilucki and Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowich of Poltava objected to the proposal, first on halakhic grounds. The Sages of the Talmud did not permit the exclusion of any born Jew from the Jewish people; even apostates were still considered halakhically Jewish. Moreover, Tsirelson pointed out, such action would be totally ineffectual. "These lawless people" (as he called the revolutionaries) were not afraid of arrest, prison, and hard labor in Siberian exile. Certainly the threat of a rabbinic edict against them would not deter them. Rabinowich cautioned that it was beyond the rabbis' ability to combat the Jewish revolutionary movement. An overt campaign against them would not only accomplish nothing – it would provoke the revolutionaries, and might put the rabbis themselves in danger. Prudence, in light of the realities on the ground, required a more cautious approach.

Tsirelson and Rabinowich proposed that the congress issue a statement declaring that the Torah condemned political criminals and rebels against all

36 Rabinowich, "Ha-Knisiyah ha-Rabanit," *Ha-Peles,* Tishre 5665, 48–9, and similarly in Hakohen, *Knesset ha-Gedolah*, part 2, book 8, 57b.

kingdoms, wherever they may be, without making any particular reference to Russia or to Jewish revolutionaries in Russia. This, they said, would be nothing more than a statement of fact, followed by an appeal to Jews to follow the law of the Torah.[37]

Only one voice at the congress questioned whether Jewish revolutionary activity in Russia aught to be condemned: Rabbi Jonathan Benjamin Horowitz of Alsokubin, Hungary, noted that socialist parties were fully legal in the Habsburg empire, but were banned in Russia. He suggested that Russian socialists had certain legitimate grievances, and asked: "If one of the officials distorts justice and acts to harm me, am I obligated to suffer in silence? Am I forbidden to challenge him, let alone to do something for the sake of my relief?" To this, Rabinowich of Poltava replied: According to the Torah, the law and political system of each individual country was supreme. If a country's laws did not allow for the actions of an official to be challenged or appealed, then one had to suffer the injustice in silence. One could not resort to force or violence, even if the perpetrated injustice was self-evident. The rule of law was supreme and protests would open the gates to anarchy. Only God in heaven and the Monarch on earth had the right to punish an abusive official. According to the Torah, said Rabinowich, no one had the right to raise a hand against an official who abused his office, or to take revenge against him (a reference to the attacks on von Wahl of Vilna and Krushevan of Kishinev): "Not only the king himself, but also his officials, and 'even the superintendent of a well', are appointed by God" (quoting the Talmud, Baba Bathra 91b).

Rabinowich stressed that the Torah did not specify which political system should be adopted by states, but it commanded Jews to obey their laws, whatever they were. The Habsburg Empire had a constitutional regime which allowed socialist parties to criticize the regime and its officials. Accordingly, Habsburg Jews could avail themselves of their political rights, and participate in socialist parties. But the Russian Empire was an autocracy, which did not permit the existence of such parties. Socialists in

37 Rabinowich, "Ha-Knisiyah ha-Rabanit," 49–50.

the Habsburg Empire were legal dissenters, but in Russia they were political criminals, and were condemned as such by Torah-law.

Rabinowich raised R. Jehiel Mikha'el Epstein's obedience-as-Mitzvah approach to the level of a full-blown political ideology. As he commented to a journalist at the Congress, "I am not afraid of being prosecuted [by Russian officials]. I am afraid only of God. The Lord has commanded us to be loyal to the king, whom He gave of His glory, and to the king's laws and statutes. The law of the land is law, and God is one in both Austria and Russia, in heaven and on earth."[38]

After some discussion, the congress decided to adopt Rabinowich and Tsirelson's measured proposal, rather than Margolioth's militant approach or Hurwitz's liberal viewpoint. The congress issued a declaration:

> It is a great and severe prohibition according to the Torah for any person of the Jewish seed to lift his hand against or disrespect the state (*malkhut*), and to aid the criminals and rebels who oppose the laws and political system under which we dwell ... And by the power of the Holy Torah, the assembled rabbis protest fiercely against all who violate this prohibition.[39]

The declaration was drafted by a committee which included R. Zalman Preyger, one of the rabbis of Kishinev – the city where the infamous pogrom had taken place only four months earlier.[40]

38 Rabinowich, "Ha-Knisiyah ha-Rabanit," *ibid.*, 50–1.

39 *Pirtey-Kol*, 12. The Grodna Bundist newspaper *Flugbletl* published the text of a Yiddish proclamation which it claimed was issued by the rabbinic congress in Kraków. But the congress organizers themselves made no reference to the issuance of such a proclamation. The Bundist newspaper seems to have misattributed the authorship of the proclamation. Based on its style and rhetoric in attacking "anarchism, nihilism and socialism," it seems to have been composed by Rabbi Gavriel Ze'ev Margolioth of Grodna. See the text in Lev, *Der klerikalizm*, 40–1, and note the observation by Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowich that Margolioth did not distinguish between the words democracy, socialism, nihilism and anarchism, in Rabinowich, "Ha-Knisiyah ha-Rabanit," 49.

40 Rabinowich, loc. cit, 52; Hakohen, *Knesset ha-Gedolah*, part 2, 57b.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Path

In June 1903, in the aftermath of the Kishinev pogrom, Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn (1860–1920), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was asked in a letter from one of his followers why he was silent about "public affairs," a veiled allusion to the pogrom. Schneersohn responded that when it came to the material, this-worldly, plight of Jewry, there were only two things one could do: raise funds for those Jews who were suffering, and intercede with the authorities to ask them to protect the Jewish community. The former, fund-raising for the victims, was already being done by others, and the latter, political intercession, had now become impossible. "There is no opening [*pithon peh*] at this time, when the young people engage in deeds which must not be done. Without a doubt, this is the reason why the government is not taking care of us. It is hard to ask for protection at a time when such deeds are being done." In other words, Schneersohn believed that the actions of Jewish revolutionary youth had antagonized the Tsarist authorities, thereby leaving the Jewish community exposed, without state-protection. Traditional means of political intercession were consequently no longer effective.

Schneersohn believed that Russian Jewry's political problems were the product of Jewish radicalism, and that the means to correct them was to bring Jews back to traditional norms of behavior – both religious and political. If Jews would return to religion, they would not be revolutionaries. He therefore continued, in the above-mentioned letter: "Now is an appropriate time to ask for an [official] permit to convene a gathering on the strengthening of religion, because religious libertinism leads to other libertinism. And whoever accepts the yoke of the kingdom of heaven will also accept the yoke of the kingdom on earth."[41] Irreligiosity led to political radicalism, and Jewish political radicalism provoked the anti-Jewish backlash among Tsarist officialdom.

A few months later, writing to his brother Zalman Aaron, Schneersohn

41 Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, *Iggerot Kodesh*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1982), 304–5, dated Rosh Hodesh Tamuz [June 26] 1903.

proposed that a delegation of Orthodox Jews present this very perspective to the Tsarist regime. He suggested that a group of prominent, wealthy Jews from the Pale of Settlement be selected, who should seek to have an audience with the Minister of the Interior, Vyacheslav Von Plehve in St. Petersburg. The delegation should explain to Plehve that the Jews in general were not to blame for the acts of Jewish revolutionaries. "We are loyal servants of our king, may his glory abound, and we regret the terrible deeds of the young people. But what are we to do? They are withered limbs from our body, who have almost no connection to us whatsoever, and who do not obey our words." The delegation should ask for compassion toward the millions of Jews who were not to blame for the deeds of the revolutionaries.[42]

Such a meeting between Plehve and a Jewish delegation took place a half year later, in February 1904, when a group headed by Baron Horace Guenzburg met with the minister. Even before the meeting, Schneersohn was dismayed that the delegation was headed by Guenzburg, an advocate of Russian-Jewish acculturation, who was the titular head of the Society for the Dissemination of Enlightenment among the Jews in Russia (*Hevrat Mefitse Haskalah*). He wanted Orthodox Jews to convey his message. The meeting itself was a disaster. Plehve berated the Jewish representatives for the high level of participation by Jewish youth in the revolutionary movement. He accused Jewry at home and abroad of waging a war against the Tsarist regime, and ruled out any alleviation of the Jews' legal status. The meeting's low point came when Plehve threatened that events like those in Kishinev could happen again. He then cut short the meeting without allowing the delegation to make a presentation.[43]

When Schneersohn was informed of the meeting, and of Plehve's words, by Rabbi Isaiah Berlin, a member of the delegation, he reacted:

> Who can be sure that they won't do so, God forbid? And this is truly terrifying. And in fact, who is to blame for this situation if not the

42 *Iggerot Kodesh*, vol. 3 (Brooklyn, 1986), 5, dated the 5th of Marheshvan, 5664 [October 25, 1903].

43 See the written summary of Plehve's statement by Rabbi Isaiah Berlin [of Riga], in *Iggerot Kodesh*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, 1986), 35–7.

> university-educated ones [*ha-melumadim*], who follow a wild and corrupt path. Now, secular studies [*ha-limudiot*] and Zionism are no longer a spiritual question; they are a material question, literally a question of life [and death].[44]

This passage needs to be parsed closely. Why did Schneersohn shift the topic from Plehve's threat of further pogroms to the spread of secular studies and Zionism? Because Schneersohn believed that the spread of secular studies, and the entrance of young Jews into Russian universities, had caused the wave of radicalism among the youth, and brought Jewry into a full confrontation with the regime, with potentially disastrous consequences. He lamented bitterly that Baron Guenzburg would, even now, not see his error in supporting the spread of secular studies among the Jews. "And what will Baron Guenzburg say now, after these words, about the university-educated ones? ... I have no doubt that Baron Guenzburg will not repent from his path, and prevent the spread of secular studies."[45]

Schneersohn's causal logic was as follows: secular studies lead to irreligiosity, which leads to political radicalism, which leads in turn to a backlash of pogroms and state anti-Semitism. This logic disregarded the differences between the various modern political trends in Russian Jewry. Baron Guenzburg, a political conservative who supported the Tsarist regime, but lobbied for a more benevolent policy toward the Jews, was in Schneersohn's eyes responsible for the growth of the Bund and Jewish radicalism, because he actively supported the dissemination of secular education through the *Hevrat Mefitse Haskalah*. Schneersohn mentioned secular studies and Zionism in one breath, because Zionism was also a form of Jewish irreligiosity and political assertiveness, which resulted from secular education. The difference between Zionism and radicalism was only in their *degree* of rebellion against the existing political order. It did not matter to Schneersohn that the Zionist movement was opposed to Jewish revolutionary activity in Russia. From his perspective, Bundism and

44 *Iggerot Kodesh*, vol. 1, 313, dated the 21st of Adar, 5664 [March 8, 1904].
45 *Iggerot Kodesh*, vol. 1, 313–14.

Zionism were both manifestations of the same basic malady. There was only one difference: Jewish radicalism posed the more immediate threat to the life and physical safety of Russian Jewry.

Schneersohn's private letters to his followers offered no praise of the Tsar. In his 1904 letter to Rabbi Isaiah Berlin, Schneersohn expressed his fear that Plehve and his subordinates would make good on the veiled threat that further pogroms like Kishinev could take place ("Who can be sure that they won't do so, God forbid? And this is truly terrifying"). Schneersohn's obedience toward the regime was based on prudence, on his judgment of political realities and possibilities, and his evaluation of the Jewish collective interest. He harbored no feelings of gratitude (let alone affection) toward the Tsarist regime. He was an ardent advocate of political quietism.

Confrontations on the Local Level

After Kishinev, clashes between rabbis and their followers on the one hand, and Bundists on the other hand, became more intense and frequent. The rhetoric of the verbal attacks grew shriller, as certain rabbis called on Jews to denounce Jewish revolutionaries to the authorities. Some rabbis participated directly in hounding Bundists and arranging their arrest.

In Lodz, R. Elijah Chaim Meisel, who was well-known for his antipathy toward the Bund, began to use more assertive methods against the movement. Bundists complained that he was responsible for organizing spies and informers among the hasidic youth. "The dark, ignorant hasidic world has brought forth voluntary, unpaid spies [for the Tsarist police]. The latter are ready to inform on the *treyf*-eating '*akhdus* people' for the sake of the fear of heaven."[46]

In June 1903, the Bund in Lodz staged its first major street demonstration in the city, which resulted in a sustained battle with Cossacks and police.

46 Hertz et al. (eds.), *Di geshikhte fun bund*, vol. 2, 41, based on *Di arbeter shtime*, no. 34, August 1903; and similarly Lev, *Der klerikalizm* (above, n. 6), 29, based on *Di arbeter shtime*, no. 31, 1902.

Bundists accused Rabbi Meisel of instructing the police, in advance of their announced march, on how to distinguish between socialist demonstrators and other Jewish pedestrians: If a man wore *tsitsis*, he was not a socialist. If a woman wore an apron and ear-rings, she was not a socialist. The gendarmes reportedly checked arrested males for *tsitsis* before flogging them. On the Sabbath after the demonstration, Meisel gave a sermon against the revolutionaries under police protection.[47]

Meisel was not a lone instance. A rabbi in Berdichev named Liberberg, declared at a public gathering that "it is our duty to come to the aid of those who are searching for the rebels." The rabbi of Suvalk gave a sermon in September 1903, urging pious Jews to keep an eye on the activities of young workers, and report revolutionaries to the police.[48]

Similarly, in Miedzyrzec (Lublin Province), Rabbi Hayyim Zak issued a notice which was hung in all local synagogues instructing Jews to inform on revolutionaries to the gendarmes. He announced that he had established a society called *Mahzike Ha-Dat* in order to combat those young people who taught others to "abandon the path of the Torah and Judaism, and to go against the government." Whereas "they [the revolutionaries] pursue the entire Jewish people and desecrate the name of God in public," the *Mahzike Ha-Dat* society would "pay attention everywhere, and when it discovers such gatherings or meetings by young men and women, it will announce them to the gendarmes. It is incumbent upon every individual who knows where such gatherings take place to report them to the rabbi." Based on the information he accumulated, the rabbi of Miedzyrzec ordered employers to dismiss those workers who were rebels.[49] Thus, Zak combated Bundists

47 Hertz, *Di geshikhte fun bund in lodzh* (above, n. 17), 71–2, 87, 91–2. See also 101, 106 on Meisel as a supporter of Jewish manufacturers against striking Jewish workers, as well as Lev, *Der klerikalizm*, 18–19.

48 Lev, *Der klerikalizm*, 33, citing *Materialn un dokumentn* (London, 1903); Hertz et. al. (eds.), *Di geshikhte fun bund*, vol. 2, 13–14, based on *posledniia izvestiia*, no. 151, October 31, 1903.

49 *Di geshikhte fun bund*, vol. 1, 338, citing the *Forverts* (New York), December 3, 1903. The full text of the notice and additional information is provided by Lev, *Der klerikalizm*, 42–3, based on *Arbeter shtime*, no. 35.

both through police-measures (informing) and economic measures (dismissal from work).

A Bundist report from Odessa in June 1903 spoke bitterly of an alliance of rabbis with the police and gendarmes:

> They are all screaming that the socialists are to blame for the events in Kishinev ... Fiery sermons against the socialists have poured forth from the pulpits. Parents are advised to watch their children closely, and make sure that they do not join the rebels. They say that it is a holy duty to inform on one's own children who belong to the socialists. These sermons have, without a doubt, had an impact. A shoe-maker recently informed on his daughter, and she was imprisoned as a socialist. The pulpit has in recent times had a terrible influence on the Jewish masses.[50]

In Mariampol (Suvalk Province), when the police discovered a large transport of revolutionary literature and arrested two local Jewish coachmen, the town's rabbi took to the *bimah* the following Sabbath to condemn the "evil ones," who besmirched the reputation of Jews in the eyes of the government. He urged his community to remain loyal to the laws of the land. According to a report in the Bundist press, the sermon backfired, and many pious Jews were offended by its pro-Tsarist thrust. The Bundists of Mariampol responded by hanging a broadsheet outside local synagogues and houses of study on the eve of the following Sabbath, in which they called the rabbi "one of the vilest servants of the Russian tyrant."[51]

While all of the above reports of rabbis calling upon Jews to inform on Bundists, and to assist in their arrest, come to us from the Bundist press, they should not be dismissed as fabricated. The rabbinic proclamation from Miedzyrzec, printed by the Bundists, is stylistically authentic, with the linguistic signs and textual citations characteristic of other rabbinic pronouncements. I have found the original of one such anti-revolutionary

50 Lev, *Der klerikalizm*, 34–5, citing *Materialn un dokumentn*.

51 *Di geshikhte fun bund*, vol. 2, 12, based on *Posledniia izvestiiia*, no. 127, May 15, 1903.

proclamation in the YIVO archives, and it matches the text published by the Bundist press word for word.[52]

The Bundist charge that R. Elijah Chaim Meisel of Lodz actively collaborated with the Tsarist gendarmes against them is entirely plausible, though it still needs to be corroborated by documents from the police and *Okhrana* (political police). Rabbis such as Meisel were convinced that the Bundists' agitation threatened the life and safety of the Jewish community. They perceived their own counter-measures as protecting Jews against a backlash of popular and state-sanctioned violence. In all likelihood, Meisel shared that view of Rabbi Zak of Miedzyrzec, that the Bundists "pursue the entire Jewish people." The attribution of the halakhic status of *rodef*, "pursuer," meaning persecutor, to Jewish revolutionaries meant that it was permissible to kill them in order to save lives (as stated in Sanhedrin 72b). Thus, informing on Bundists to the police, and assisting in their arrest, was a mild response to their activities, compared to killing them, as was permitted by Jewish law, according to Zak's, and presumably Meisel's understanding.

Non-Confrontational Stances

Most rabbis refrained from publicly inciting their communities against Bundists, and from informing on them to the authorities. The Bundists themselves did not complain about such acts occurring in more than a half-dozen places, Lodz being the most prominent. In the town of Novaredok (Novogrudok), on the other hand, R. Jehiel Michael Epstein personally knew who the leaders of the local Bund cell were. Not only did he not reveal their identities to the police, but he communicated with their head, Kaplanitski, on at least one occasion: Epstein sent his *shammash* to Kaplanitski in the dark of night in late April, 1904, to inquire whether the Bund would object if *heders*

52 This is a placard from Zhitomir, written by the local Crown rabbi, printed in Lev, *Der klerikalizm*, 33. The original is in the Bund Archives, YIVO Institute, RG 1400, file mg 7–30. [See also file mg 2–517.]

and *Talmud Torahs* remained open on the May 1 holiday. Kaplanitski sent word back to the rabbi that his party had no objection.[53]

The greatest rabbinic authority in Russia during this period, R. Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (Brest-Litovsk), was studiously silent about the rise of Jewish political radicalism. Soloveitchik penned a number of letters condemning Zionism, but he did not issue any statements on the Bund. One can only guess why he remained aloof from the issue.[54]

Some rabbis stood aside from direct confrontation because they were afraid of Bundist reprisals. One anonymous rabbi writing in *Ha-Peles* wistfully applied to the Bundists the Mishnaic phrase regarding women, children, and the handicapped, that "it is inadvisable to clash with them" (Baba Kama, chapter 8, Mishna 4). The Mishnah stated regarding members of the above categories: "He who wounds them is liable; but if they wound others, they are exempt." The rabbi implied that, because of their popularity in the court of public opinion, Bundists were able to lash out at their adversaries with impunity, and any rabbi who clashed with them was bound to lose. They were, said the rabbi, making a less flattering allusion, the "wild beasts" prophesied in the book of Deuteronomy. It was safer to clash with the Zionists than with them.[55]

Instead of directly combating the Bundists, many rabbis chose to engage in demonstrations of Tsarist loyalism in order to publicly dissociate

53 H. Kaplan and Y. Maslov, "Der bund in novaredok," *Pinkas novaredok* (Tel Aviv, 1963), 52–3.

54 During the Russian revolution of 1905, Soloveitchik intervened to save the life of a local Bundist who was condemned to death. And when local Orthodox Jews gave him, during the revolution, the names his Talmudic students who had become active in the Bund, Soloveitchik reprimanded them for the sin of "informing" (*mesirah*). In 1909, Soloveitchik refused to sign a telegram of greeting to Nicholas II by the participants in a conference of Russian rabbis, stating, "Why does one need to send a telegram to an evil king?" All of these incidents are from 1905 or later, when rabbinic views on the revolutionary movement became diversified. On them, see A. Litvin, "Rebe khayim soloveytshik," in *Yidishe neshomes* (Lithuania, New York, 1917), vol. 2, 5–7; M. Lipson, *Di velt dertseylt* (New York, 1928), vol. 1, 302; Eliezer Shteinman (ed.), *Enytsiklopediah shel Galuyot: Brisk de-Lita* (Jerusalem–Tel Aviv, 1953), 146.

55 *Ha-Peles*, Shevat 5664, 257.

themselves and their followers from radicalism. Rabbi Gavriel Ze'ev Margolioth of Grodna, despite his fighting words regarding excommunication at the rabbinic congress in Kraków, chose a more conventional path upon his return home from the congress. On August 31, 1903, he and his colleagues in Grodna issued a proclamation in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian, which offered obsequious praise of Tsar Nicholas II:

> Whose eyes are so blind, and whose heart is so hardened, that he does not see or acknowledge the great mission and honor bestowed by the Lord upon His Majesty, who was selected by God, in His glory, as ruler and Tsar over millions of people? Such a person is ungrateful and frivolous, and does not appreciate the significance of the Tsar's protection of his subjects ... A sensible and honest person is grateful from the depths of his heart to His Majesty, for his charitable and just protection of his people, and particularly to our exalted protector, our Tsar and Father [*batiushka*], who displays kindness toward all his subjects, his majesty Emperor NIKOLAI ALEKSANDROVICH ... Let us pray to the Lord our God for the health and prosperity of our august monarch, and for the entire august royal family of the Tsar. May the Lord bless his Imperial Highness and the Imperial family with long life, and may all his endeavors be crowned with success![56]

According to a local Bundist who forwarded this proclamation to the party's leadership, Margolioth's proclamation had the opposite of its intended effect. "It is imbued with such a slave-like, groveling spirit, that not only the younger generation, but also the middle-aged, and part of the older generation, reacted to it with scorn and contempt. The proclamation has served as a useful piece of agitation-literature on our behalf."[57]

Rabbi Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowich, the editor of *Ha-Peles*, publicly demonstrated his patriotism by publishing a Russian-language pamphlet in honor of the Tsar in 1904, called *Velikoe znachenie monarkha* – "The Great Significance of the Monarch" – and dedicated all proceeds from its sale to

56 Bund Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, RG 1400, file mg 7–30. [See also file mg 2–517.]

57 Hand-written note on the verso side of the proclamation.

the Russian Red Cross, to aid wounded soldiers in the war against Japan. Rabinowich reported proudly that Minister of the Interior Plehve presented the pamphlet to Tsar Nicholas II on May 13, 1904, and that the latter had received it "with acknowledgement, pleasure and gracefulness."[58]

Rabbis also led public ceremonies welcoming visiting Tsarist officials to their city or town. When the Governor-General of the Vilna Province, Piotr Dmitrevich Sviatopolsk-Mirskii, visited the town of Radun on March 9, 1904, he was welcomed by the community leaders, headed by the town's rabbi, R. Israel Meir Ha-Cohen, "the Chafetz Chaim" (1838–1933), who presented him with the traditional welcoming-gift of bread and salt. The Governor-General then proceeded to the Radun synagogue, where he received two Torah scrolls as gifts. The cantor led the synagogue-choir in the singing of chapters from the Psalms, followed by the Imperial Russian anthem "God Save the Tsar" (*Bozhe tsarya khrani*) and cries of "Hurrah" in honor of the monarch.[59]

Synagogue prayers for the Imperial family were offered up more ostentatiously than they had been in the past. When the Tsarina gave birth to a son, Prince Alexei, on July 30, 1904, synagogues throughout the Pale of Settlement recited prayers "from the depths of their hearts for the welfare of the Tsar, Tsarina, and their son the viceroy, may their glory be uplifted, and for the welfare of their entire glorious and exalted family."[60]

Rabbis saw such demonstrations of loyalism as a counter-weight to Bundist agitation, and as an effective method to convey to the regime that most Jews did not support the revolutionary movement.

Conclusion

During the course of a few short years, the public display of loyalty toward the Tsarist regime, and condemnation of the Bund, became established

58 See the advertisement in *Ha-Peles*, Iyyar 5664, 513; news item in *Ha-Peles*, Sivan 5664, 573. Rabinowich also composed a special prayer for Russia's victory in the war against Japan, to be recited in all synagogues. See *Ha-Peles*, Nisan 5664.

59 *Ha-Peles*, Iyyar 5664, 512.

60 *Ha-Peles*, Elul 5664, 749.

features of Russian-Jewish Orthodoxy. The motives for adopting this posture varied: some rabbis were ideological – even theological – monarchists; others believed that loyalty to the state was a religious duty; still others believed that the profession of loyalty and gratitude toward the Tsar was prudent *realpolitik* for the vulnerable Jewish minority. Within Orthodox circles, there arose activist, combative groups which worked with the gendarmes and *okhrana*, in spying on Bundists and informing on them. Overall, rabbis, and their followers were the most politically reliable segment of the Jewish population, seen from the perspective of Tsarist officialdom.

But the rabbis paid dearly for their political choice, in terms of their popularity and authority within the Russian Jewish community. Many traditional Jews were offended by their rabbis' siding with the regime in the face of state anti-Semitism. The spreading alienation of Jewish youth from the Jewish religion was exacerbated by the fact that its representatives were so closely identified with the Tsarist regime. Many already-secular Bundists began to engage in vocal anti-rabbinic propaganda, and embrace a more strident form of secularism.

While the activist rabbis felt that their actions were saving Russian Jewry from catastrophe, and a hard-core of Orthodox followers concurred with their view, their broader base of support within Russian Jewry shriveled up before their very eyes.

Appendix*

(a) Proclamation of the Minsk Rabbi, R. Eliezer Rabinowicz, May 1902

כל השומע תצילנה שתי אזניו!

עס שוידערט די לייב הערנדיק די שרעקלעכע געשיכטע וואָס איז געווען אין טעאַטער! ווי קומען מיר, יידן, וואָס זיצנען געגליכן צו איין וועלט – תולעת יעקבֿ – קריכן אין אַזעלכע זאַכן! ווי קומען מיר, וואָס על־פי־הדעת ועל־פי־השכל זיצנען מחויבֿ תמיד מתפלל זיין בשלומה של מלכות, און ווען ניט זי וואָלט מען אונדז שוין לאַנג אינגעשלונגען לעבעדיקערהייט, אַריינגיין אין אַזעלכע הויכע דרכים און זיך מישן אין פּאָליטיקע! אָ, זעט זיך אַרום, יידישע קינדער! באַטראַכט גוט וואָס איר טוט! גאָט ווייס, צו וואָס איר קענט ברענגען אונדזער אומגליקלעכע נאַציע, זיך אַליין, און אײַערע סעמעסטוועס! מיט איין זאַך פֿלעגט אונדזער יידישע אומה שטאָלצירן – אַז עס איז ניטאָ בײַ איר קיין מורדים במלכות... און יעצט ווילט איר אַרונטערנעמען די מעלה אויך. מיר האָפֿן, דאָס איר וועט דאָס אַלץ גוט באַקלערן, און איר וועט ניט ווען ריזיקירן מיט דעם גליק פֿון אונדזער גאַנצער נאַציע, מיט אײַערן אייגענעם שיקזאַל, און מיט דעם שיקזאַל פֿון אײַערע עלטערן און פֿון אײַערע סעמעסטוועס. ולהשומע יונעם!

(b) Proclamation of the Miedzyrzec Rabbi, R. Hayyim Zak, September 1903

הודעה מהרב דפֿה.

מען איז מודיע לאנשי עיר דפֿה, אַזוי ווי כנשמע איז דאָ הרבה מקומות בה, וואָס קומען זיך צוזאַמען בחורים, איבערהויפּט בשבת קודש ובבוקר בשעת הפילה. אין יעדער אָרט איז דאָ אַ בחור וואָס האָט כמה תלמידים, וואָס ער לערנט זיי ווי אַזוי אַראָצוגיין מדרך התורה והיהדות, און גיין אַנטקעגן ראַוויטעלסטוואָ, וואָס דערמיט זיצנען זיי רודף דעם גאַנצן כלל־ישׂראל, און מחלל שם שמים בפרהסיה, ד' ירחם – דרום איז מען מודיע, אַז עס איז איצט נתיסד געוואָרן. חברת הנקראים בשם מחזיקי הדת, אנשים אשר יראת ה' נגע בלבם, ולרב אבדק"ק בראשם... און די חבֿרה וועלן אַרומגיין אַכטונג געבן אין אַלע ערטער. אַז מע וועט געפֿינען אַזעלכע אסיפֿות אָדער פֿאַרזאַמלונגען פֿון בחורים און בתולות, וועט מען דאָס זאַיאַוועון דעם זשאַנדאַרמסקין. גם די בע"ב, וואָס עס געפֿינען זיך בײַ זיי אַזעלכע אסיפֿות, וועלן האָבן אַ גרויסן אומשטאַנד. גם איז מוטל אויף יעדן מענטשן וואָס ווייס, ווו די אסיפֿות געפֿינען זיך, זאָל מען קומען מעלדן להרבֿ דפֿה. ולהשומע יונעם.

* The Yiddish spelling of these rabbinic proclamations has been modernized.