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The Opportunistic Nature of Soviet Jewish Policy

Boris N. Mironov

St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia

✉ mironov1942@yandex.ru

Abstract: The Jewish policy of the Soviet leadership was inconsistent, cautious, ambivalent, and it was based primarily on practical considerations and specific circumstances. Suspicious, distrustful or wary attitudes towards Jews on the part of non-Jews were widespread throughout the entire Soviet period. However, as a rule, this was not the result of official antisemitism, Russophobia or any ethnophobia in its pure form. Jews were discriminated against in the pre-war period, primarily due to the fierce struggle for political power at the top, and in the post-war period – due to the transition of a significant part of the Jewish diaspora into opposition to the Soviet regime and a continued desire to emigrate. Everyday anti-Semitism came into conflict with the philo-Semitic policies of the leadership; there was no consistency between the intensity of political repression and the extent of Jews' participation in government. In 1926–1935 (during the all-Union party-state campaign against anti-Semitism, aimed at protecting Jews), Jews were subjected to more repression than in 1948–1953 (during the all-Union party-state campaigns against cosmopolitans and nationalists, directed largely against Jews). At the same time, with the representation of Jews in power structures in 1920–1945 grew, and in 1948–1953 (the “dark years” of Soviet Jews), they remained statistically overrepresented in management and the elite. The author concludes that anti-Semitism was not a principle of Soviet national policy which was not fundamentally anti-Jewish but was fundamentally opportunistic; this policy did not exclude Jews from public life, or from the elite and management of society, but, on the contrary, it had the goal of effectively using the fruits of their human capital in the interests of the state.

Keywords: USSR, Jews in government, political repression, anti-cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist campaigns, anti-Semitism, xenophobia

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Конъюнктурная природа советской еврейской политики

Борис Николаевич Миронов

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Россия

✉ mironov1942@yandex.ru

Аннотация: Еврейская политика советского руководства была непоследовательной, осторожной, двойственной, исходила прежде всего из практических соображений и конкретных обстоятельств. Подозрительное, недоверчивое или настороженное отношение к евреям со стороны неевреев было распространено на протяжении всего советского периода. Но, как правило, это не явля-



лось антисемитизмом, русофобией или какой-либо этнофобией в чистом виде. Евреи попадали под дискриминацию в довоенное время, в первую очередь, по причине жесткой борьбы за власть в верхах, а в послевоенное время – вследствие перехода значительной части еврейской диаспоры в оппозицию к советскому режиму и стремления эмигрировать. Бытовой антисемитизм вступал в противоречие с филосемитской политикой руководства. Между интенсивностью политических репрессий и степенью участия евреев в управлении отсутствовала согласованность. В 1926–1935 гг. (во время всесоюзной партийно-государственной кампании против антисемитизма, направленной на защиту евреев) они подвергались репрессиям больше, чем в 1948–1953 гг. (во время всесоюзных партийно-государственных кампаний против космополитов и националистов, направленных в значительной степени против евреев). В то же время представительность евреев во властных структурах в 1920–1945 гг. росла, а в 1948–1953 гг., признанных «черными годами» советского еврейства, они оставались в управлении и элите сверхпредставленными. Автор приходит к выводу, что антисемитизм не являлся принципом советской национальной политики, которая была принципиально конъюнктурной и не исключала евреев из общественной жизни, из элиты и управления обществом, а, напротив, имела целью эффективно использовать их человеческий капитал в интересах государства.

Ключевые слова: СССР, евреи в управлении, политические репрессии, антикосмополитическая и антинационалистическая кампании, антисемитизм, ксенофобия

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Introduction

Relevance. The situation of Jewish citizens in the USSR is a topical issue in historiography. This is due to the exceptional importance of interethnic relations for the multinational state, on the one hand, and the great role of the Jewish ethnic group in Soviet history, on the other hand. Jews played an important role both in the formation of the Soviet Union and in its disintegration¹. In 1997, at a solemn ceremony dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Soviet Jews' struggle for the right to emigrate to Israel in 1957, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert thanked Soviet Jews for the collapse of the USSR:

These are not just boastful claims. The Soviet regime could not resist the courageous Jews fighting for their basic right to live in the country of their ancestors. The Soviet Jews were inspired to demand emigration to Israel by the “great victory of Israel” in the Six-Day War of 1967 against the Arab countries, which were supplied with the best Soviet weapons. It “led to a rise in national pride among Soviet Jews, whose national self-identification the totalitarian regime had unsuccessfully tried to eliminate... Numerous demonstrations of Jews in various countries, as well as protests declared by many governments in the West, exerted pressure on the Soviet regime and forced it to facilitate the process of getting emigration permits. <...> This facilitation proved to human rights activists and other opponents of the regime in the Soviet Union that even if it was impossible to defeat the system at this stage, it was possible to destabilize it and hasten its end. Thus, the struggle for emigration to Israel became a key element in the collapse of the Soviet regime².

Elaboration of the problem. In modern Russian historiography, apologetic works on Soviet national policy are no longer common; there prevail the studies that show the cyclical nature of discrimination against Jewish citizens: the periods of its reducing and

¹ B.N. Mironov, “Participation of the Jewish Ethnicity in the Governance of the USSR,” *Modern Russian History* 14, no. 2 (2024): 154–167.

² E. Olmert, *Soviet Jews destroyed the USSR*, accessed February 17, 2024, <https://oper.ru/news/read.php?t=1051610228>

exacerbating alternated; it is stated that there were also philo-Semitic periods³. Despite certain achievements of Russian Jewish studies in the post-Soviet period, anti-Semitism in the USSR has not been sufficiently studied⁴.

Purpose of the study. This article continues the study published in the RUDN Bulletin⁵. Based on the extensive statistical data on repressions, the article aims to consider in the comparative vein the Jewish policy of the USSR, the attitude of the authorities and the population towards the Jews, and the political campaigns that affected them.

Source base of the study. There has been collected significant amount of material, both published and archival, on the number and ethnic composition of convicted Soviet citizens, including for political reasons, for the period 1926–1953 (there is no information for an earlier period)⁶. Since among them the share of "political convicts" detained by the state security agencies accounted for about 60% of the total number of those arrested⁷, the statistics of those convicted reflect persecution for predominantly political reasons (from the point of view of the punitive agencies).

Research methods. To assess the level of repressiveness in relation to an ethnic group, there is usually used the percentage of this ethnic group in the total number of those repressed. However, this indicator, though important, is insufficient. In order to correctly assess the repressiveness, it is necessary to calculate the ratio between the percentage of Jews among those convicted and in the entire population of the country - we name it the repressiveness index. With regard to Jews, if the index is more than one, the Jews were repressed above the average level, if less than one - below the average level, and if the index is equal to one, then the Jews were subjected to repression like all other peoples on average. Based on the index, a more informative picture can be obtained.

Opportunistic nature of Jewish policy

The Jewish policy of the Soviet state was inconsistent and contradictory; it was not fundamentally *anti-Jewish*, but rather *opportunistic*. Jews were discriminated against in the pre-war period, primarily because of the fierce struggle for power at the highest level, and in the post-war period – as a result of a significant part of the Jewish diaspora going over to the opposition to the Soviet regime and the desire to emigrate. After the emergence of the State of Israel in 1948 and the victories it achieved, Soviet Jews gradually turned from the most loyal, as they had been in the pre-war period, into the most oppositional citizens of the USSR.

The political opportunism of the Jewish policy is clearly visible in the dynamics of the ethnic composition of those repressed in 1926–1953 (Table 1; Figure).

³ An example of this approach can be found in numerous studies by G.V. Kostyrchenko, the leading Russian expert on the history of anti-Semitism in the USSR, in particular in his monograph *Stalin's Secret Policy: Power and Anti-Semitism* (Moscow: Istoria Publ., 2001).

⁴ See the historiography of the issue: B.N. Mironov, "Everyday Anti-Semitism in the USSR," *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 23, no. 2 (2024): 216–231.

⁵ B.N. Mironov, "Everyday Anti-Semitism in the USSR."

⁶ O.B. Mozokhin, *Repressii v tsifrakh i dokumentakh. Deiatel'nost' organov VCHK – OGPU – NKVD – MGB (1918–1953 gg.)* [Repressions in figures and documents. Activities of the Cheka – OGPU – NKVD – MGB (1918–1953)] (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole Publ., 2018); The number of people arrested from January 1, 1936, to July 1, 1938 by nationality. From the report of the 1st special department of the NKVD of the USSR "On the number of people arrested and convicted by the NKVD of the USSR from October 1, 1936 to July 1, 1938": Central Archives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (CA FSS RF), f. 3, op. 5, <https://istmat.org/node/14956>

⁷ O.B. Mozokhin, *Repressii v tsifrakh i dokumentakh*, 44–45. In ethnical terms, there were repressed more than 30 nationalities; the framework of the article allows us to analyze only Jews and Russians.

Table 1

Share of Russians and Jews among those arrested by the NKVD in 1926–1953

Year	Total number	Russians			Jews		
		Number of people	Percentage share	Repressiveness Index	Number of people	Percentage share	Repressiveness Index
1926	62817	32 534	45,5	0,86	11896	16,7	9,16
1927	76983	60 875	69,1	1,28	8942	10,1	5,54
1928	111 879	83 463	56,0	1,02	11681	7,8	4,28
1929	207 212	122 496	55,7	0,99	8696	4,0	2,20
1930	378 539	247 946	62,1	1,09	8079	2,0	1,10
1932	499 249	275 641	56,7	0,98	22111	4,5	2,47
1936–1938*	1435614	657 799	45,8	0,76	305421	21,3	11,95
1939	145 407	13 613	44,5	0,76	2969	9,7	5,46
1940	203 806	30 554	32,8	0,56	23538	25,2	15,75
1941	160 882	70 101	59,7	1,05	4617	3,9	2,79
1942	238 631	120 837	65,9	1,18	3344	1,8	1,38
1943	178 973	88 915	66,3	1,21	1602	1,2	1,00
1944	122 112	30 870	33,1	0,61	1138	1,2	1,09
1945	142 640	29 707	28,9	0,54	714	0,7	0,70
1946	117 025	29 069	35,2	0,65	806	1,0	1,00
1947	93 740	16 709	28,5	0,53	451	0,8	0,80
1948	81 818	16 664	27,1	0,50	956	1,6	1,60
1949	80 277	19 475	31,3	0,58	1979	3,2	2,91
1950	65 749	14 478	27,9	0,51	1232	2,4	2,18
1951	54 814	11 885	29,6	0,54	1079	2,7	2,45
1952	21 686	4 212	29,2	0,54	352	2,4	2,18
1953	16 495	2 941	30,9	0,57	405	4,3	3,91
Average		62 999	43,6	0,79	5552	5,1	3,33

Note: *01.01.1936–01.07.1938.

Source: O.B. Mozokhin, *Repressii v tsifrah i dokumentakh*, 104, 110, 125, 139, 146, 161, 2016, 215, 223, 230–231, 239, 248, 259, 267–268, 278–279, 292, 306, 319, 332, 343, 353; *Tragedy of Soviet villages. Collectivization and dispossession. 1927–1939* (for 1931, 1933–1935, information without specifying nationality); Number of people arrested from January 1, 1936 to July 1, 1938 by nationality. From the report of the 1st special department of the NKVD of the USSR "On the number of people arrested and convicted by the NKVD of the USSR from October 1, 1936 to July 1, 1938." (CA FSS RF, f. 3, op. 5, d. 572, l. 36–43, 46–48, 55, 69.

Table 1 contains data by year on the number and percentage of Russians and Jews arrested by the NKVD in 1926–1953 (no data are available for earlier periods). These data were analyzed using the repressiveness index with regard to Jews and Russians. The calculations showed that among those arrested in 1926–1932, the percentage of Jews exceeded their share in the population by 4.2 times, in 1936–1938 – by 11.9 times, in 1946–1953 – by 1.8 times. On the contrary, the proportion of Russians among those repressed in 1926–1932 was equal to their percentage in the population, and in all subsequent years was lower (even during the years of the Great Terror it was 1.25 times lower than the

average). On the whole for 1926–1953 among the repressed, the proportion of Jews exceeded their proportion in the population by 9.2 times, and among Russians, the percentage of repressed people was equal to their percentage in the population⁸. This indicates a *chronically increased repressiveness of the authorities against the Jews*. They were punished to a greater extent than Russians and other ethnic groups both before and after the war, despite the fact that from 1917 to 1939 their role in the governing bodies at the republican and all-Union level increased, and the state policy towards them can be considered philo-Semitic. The arrests were often due to denunciations. It is not so important who wrote them (colleagues, neighbors, relatives, acquaintances) and for what reasons (settling of scores, revenge, competition, envy, desire to take possession of an apartment). Another thing is important: behind the large numbers of repressed people, there was most likely ill will towards the Jews on the part of other ethnic groups, i.e. everyday anti-Semitism.

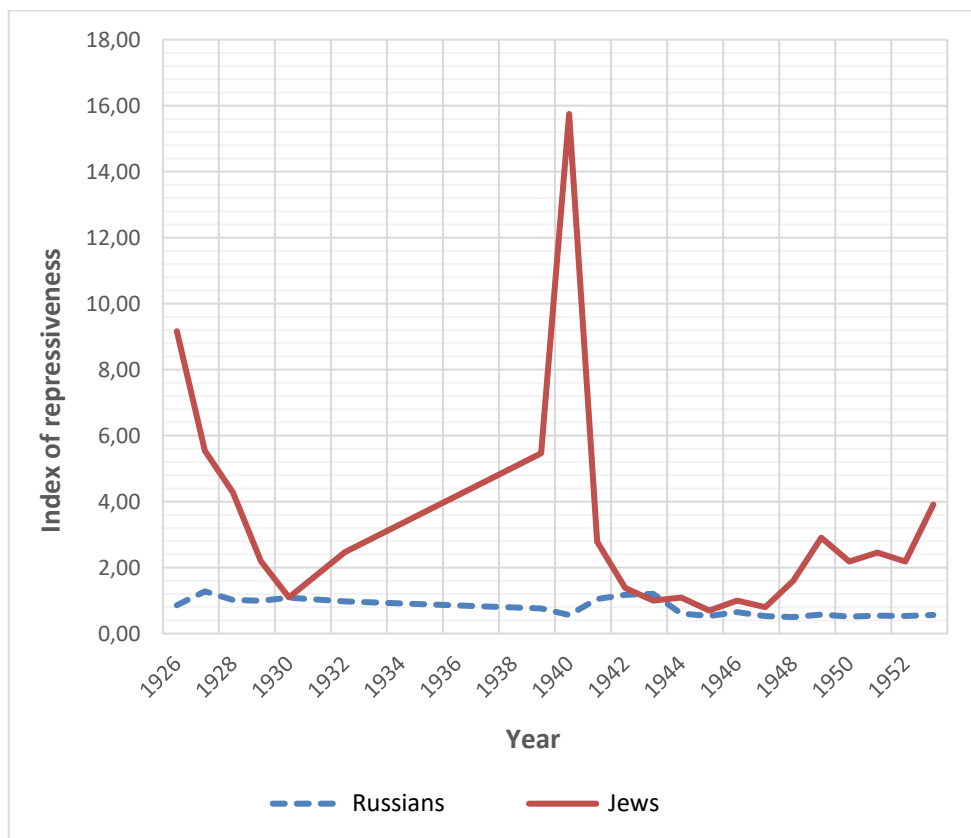


Figure. Index of ethno-political repressiveness of Russians and Jews in 1926–1953

Note: The graph is based on the indicators in Table 1.

The dynamics of the repressiveness index shows that sharp increases in the persecution of Jews occurred in the years when there was an intensification of the struggle of groups in the party and state leadership for power between the supporters of J.V. Stalin and their opponents, whose leaders were outstanding Jewish figures (L. Trotsky, G. Zino-

⁸ The assumption that the purges affected Jews more severely (than Russians and other ethnic groups) due to their large number in the governing bodies is not confirmed by the available data. In 1926 the percentage of repressed Jews was 4.6 times higher than their share among the executives, in 1939 – 2.5 times higher, in 1952 – 1.85 times higher, while the percentage of repressed Russians was, on the contrary, 1.2 times lower.

viev, L. Kamenev, G. Sokolnikova, K. Radek, M. Lashevich, etc.). In 1926–1927, this struggle was waged against the “united opposition” (the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc), in 1928 – against the “right-wing opposition,” in 1936 – against the “Anti-Soviet united Trotskyite-Zinovievite center.” But Stalin fought them not as Jews, but as his political competitors in the struggle for power, passing it off as a principled struggle against ideological opponents. Similarly, old Bolsheviks and veteran revolutionaries also posed a threat to Stalin's supporters as potential rivals.

Judging by the number of those repressed, the large-scale purge of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) actually lasted until the beginning of the war and was called the “Great Terror” (1936–1940); it was aimed against Stalin's competitors and old Bolsheviks, whom he considered to be potential rivals. Stalin purged the state party apparatus and security structures, in which Jews played an important role, and therefore they suffered (if we focus on the repressiveness index) 12 times more than other ethnic groups! It should be noted again that this struggle was not waged because of anti-Semitism and the Jewish origin of the competitors, but because they prevented the General Secretary from quickly renewing the apparatus at the expense of their supporters, less capable and competent, but loyal and reliable. For example, in 1936 in the OGPU leadership, Jews accounted for 34 percent, and by 1939 it had decreased to 6 percent. As of January 1, 1938, in the NKVD as a whole, Jews headed more than 50 percent of the main structural divisions of the central apparatus, and by January 1, 1939 – only 6%⁹. Despite the fact that Jews in fact turned out to be the most affected, Russian and foreign researchers (G. Kostyrchenko, R. Medvedev, E. Radzinsky, D. Veidlinger, D. Priestland and others)¹⁰ unanimously claim that the purges were not specifically aimed at Jews as an ethnic group, and therefore were not anti-Semitic. Jews were targeted because there were many of them in the public authorities. The regulation of the ethnic composition of personnel got a systematic, routine character in the late 1940s, after the proclamation of the independence of the State of Israel in 1948, its victory in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and its accession to the UN in 1949¹¹. G. Kostyrchenko rightly associates the anti-Jewish orientation of personnel policy in 1948–1953 with the aggravation of Soviet-American contradictions caused by the fact that Zionism and the State of Israel were viewed by Stalin as a “striking force of the US imperialism” against the USSR¹².

The political campaigns that are recognized in historiography as anti-Semitic were not in fact specifically or exclusively anti-Jewish. They were conceived as multi-purpose events, and Jews were assigned the role of a whipping boy, a distraction, a cover or a provocation, and most importantly, the campaigns served as a means of fighting for power and influence, a way to redirect the discontent of the broad masses of the population, which arose as a result of the difficult situation in the country, from the real culprits, usually the ruling class, to Jews, thus removing guilt and responsibility from themselves. I.A. Bunin and M.A. Gorky recalled this ancient “scapegoat mechanism” during the Civil War:

“The ‘leftists’ blame all the ‘excesses’ of the revolution on the old regime, the Black Hundreds on the Jews,” Bunin wrote in his diary in 1918–1920. “But the people are not to blame! And the people

⁹ G.V. Kostyrchenko, *Stalin's Secret Policy: Power and Anti-Semitism* (Moscow: Istoria Publ., 2001), 210–211.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 209–218; E. Radzinsky, *Stalin* (Moscow: Vagrius Publ., 1997); R. Medvedev, *Let history judge: The origins and consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 562–563; D. Priestland, *The red flag: A history of Communism* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 282; J. Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish culture on the soviet stage* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 10–11.

¹¹ G.V. Kostyrchenko, *Stalin's Secret Policy*, 559.

¹² *Ibid.*, 694.

will subsequently blame everything on someone else – on their neighbor and Jew: ‘It was Jews who tempted us into all this...’¹³

“Jews will be made the culprit of all the troubles of Russian life not for the first time,” Gorky declared in 1919, “they have more than once been the scapegoat for our sins; they have already paid with their property and life for helping us in our striving for freedom.”¹⁴

In 1926–1934, the country's leadership conducted a *broad and successful propaganda campaign against anti-Semitism*. Officially, it was aimed at overcoming hostility and envy towards Jews and explaining the reasons for the special, privileged place of Jews in Soviet society. In addition, the campaign was part of the policy of indigenization, the development of internationalism, but above all, it was a means of the struggle for power between Stalin's supporters and the opposition (see below for more details). The campaign actually led to a decrease in anti-Semitic sentiments, as evidenced by almost all authors of memoirs about the life of the intelligentsia in the 1930s¹⁵.

The fight against cosmopolitanism was a mass political campaign conducted in the USSR in 1948–1953; it was aimed against skeptical and pro-Western sentiments among the Soviet intelligentsia, which were considered “anti-patriotic,” and Jews were chosen as a whipping boy – their victimization was a long-standing European tradition. The campaign was accompanied by accusing Soviet Jews of “rootless cosmopolitanism,” hostility to the patriotic feelings of Soviet citizens, as well as dismissals from work and arrests. However, it is hardly correct to reduce it exclusively to anti-Semitism. It was combined with the fight for Russian and Soviet priorities in science and technology, criticism of a number of scientific fields (genetics, cybernetics, ecology, sociology, political science, psychoanalysis), administrative measures against persons suspected of cosmopolitanism and “servility towards the West,” regardless of their nationality. Based on the content analysis of publications in 56 all-Union Soviet periodicals for 1948–1953, it can be concluded that among the representatives of the intelligentsia accused of cosmopolitanism, Jews predominated (71%), but the proportion of representatives of other peoples was also considerable – 29%¹⁶, as indicated by the author of the calculations and other researchers¹⁷. It is significant that the campaign was given scope by the initiative from below. Out of fear, career motives or anti-Jewish motives, many people supported the campaign, wrote denunciations and participated in organizing the persecution of its victims¹⁸.

Whereas the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in its anti-Semitic aspect had as its object primarily the assimilated part of Soviet Jews, then the fight against “bourgeois nationalism” that unfolded simultaneously with it in anti-Jewish direction was oriented towards the bearers of traditional Jewish (Yiddish) culture and national self-awareness. The central point of the campaign was the repression of Zionists, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the “Doctors' Plot.” Bourgeois Jewish nationalists were viewed as agents, real

¹³ I.A. Bunin, *Okaiannye dni* [Cursed Days] (Moscow: Soviet Writer Publ., 1990), 96.

¹⁴ M. Gorky, *O evreyakh* [About the Jews], accessed October 9, 2023, https://www.litres.ru/static/or4/view/or.html?baseurl=/download_book/22118778/26119100/&art=22118778&user=1112382998&uilang=ru&catalit2&track_reading

¹⁵ Yu.L. Slezkin, *Era Merkurii* [Age of Mercury] (Moscow: AST Publ., 2022), 325; S.M. Schwartz, *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soiuze* [Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union] (New York: A.P. Chekhov Publishing House Publ., 1952), 107–108

¹⁶ B. Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (London; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 155–160; G.V. Kostyrchenko, *Stalin's Secret Policy*, 349–350.

¹⁷ G. Struve, *Soviet Russian Literature 1917–1950* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1951), 344; W. Vickery, “Zhdanovism: 1946–1953,” in *Literature and revolution in Soviet Russia, 1917–62: A symposium. Conference on Soviet Literature 1917–1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 17–18.

¹⁸ K. Azadovsky, and B. Egorov, “Kosmopolity [Cosmopolitans],” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 2 (1999): 86–135.

or *potential*, of Western intelligence services, who, together with world Jews, were conducting intelligence, separatist and other subversive work against the USSR. “Cosmopolitans” were not accused of attempting to undermine Soviet statehood, because their activities were within the framework of the Soviet cultural and intellectual sphere¹⁹.

The fight against “bourgeois nationalism” was also *directed not only against Jewish, but against all nationalism, including Russian one* (as understood by Soviet ideologists), which in 1946–1953 indeed once again became a pressing problem. In essence, there continued the pre-war campaign against the leaders of the national republics accused of “national deviationism.”²⁰ After the war, in the annexed western territories, the former political elites, in word and deed, launched a struggle for independence and restoration of the pre-war regime relying on Ukrainian, Belarusian, Latvian and Estonian nationalists²¹. As victims of the “scathing rebuke,” the authorities also chose Jews who could not defend themselves due to their dispersed settlement and small numbers.

Paradoxically, Jewish citizens were not the ones who suffered the most during the political campaigns of 1946–1953. Among all those convicted by the state security bodies, there were 7,260 of them (1.4%), Russians – 115,433 (21.7%), and other nationalities – 408,911 (76.9%)²². Ukrainians, Belarusians, Germans, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians suffered more. The scale of repressions against Jews in 1946–1953 was 7 times lower than in 1926–1940 – the average annual number of those convicted in 1926–1940 was 5,222 people, in 1946–1953 – 726 people.

In addition, the anti-cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist campaigns did not lead to the complete supplanting of Jews from the administration. This suggests that the country's leadership did not set such a goal, although it had the ability not only to repress, but even to deport Jews, which was the subject of persistent rumors throughout the country. From 1945 to 1952, the share of the Jewish ethnic group in all government agencies decreased from 2.96 to 1.12%, but largely due to the reduction in the number of Jews. From 1939 to 1952 the percentage of Jews among executives decreased from 2.96 to 1.12, or 2.6 times, and in the population decreased from 1.78 to 0.80²³, or 2.2 times. That is, the Holocaust accounts for about 85% ($2.2:2.6 \times 100$) of the reduction of the role of Jews in governance, and the decrease in their representativeness – 15% (100–85). From 1945 to 1953 the representativeness index (the ratio of the ethnic group's share in government agencies to its share in the population) of Jews in all government agencies fell from 3.70 to 1.40, or 2.6 times, but *Jews still remained overrepresented* in government agencies up to 1989 (Table 2).

The losses of Jews in some spheres of government varied. Whereas at the beginning of 1945 they held 12.9% of the leading positions in the central apparatus of the ministries and departments of the USSR and the RSFSR, then by January 1, 1952 their share had dropped to 3.9%, among the management personnel of enterprises and construction sites – from 11.2% to 4.6%, research institutes, design bureaus and design organizations – from 10.8% to 2.9%, in the central press – from 26% to 5.4%, in universities and Com-

¹⁹ G.V. Kostyrchenko, *Stalin's Secret Policy*, 336–337.

²⁰ I.I. Groshev, *Borba partii protiv natsionalizma* [The Party's Struggle Against Nationalism] (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1974), 3–127; G.K. Zhvania, *O tak nazyvaemom 'natsional-uklonizme'* [On the so-called ‘national deviationism’] (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo Publ., 1990), 3–93.

²¹ N.I. Vladimirtsev, and A.I. Kokurin, eds. *NKVD – MVD SSSR v borbe s banditizmom i voozuzhenym natsionalisticheskim podpoliem na Zapadnoi Ukraine, v Zapadnoi Belorussii i Pribaltike (1939–1956): sbornik dokumentov* [NKVD – MVD of the USSR in the fight against banditry and armed nationalist underground in Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and the Baltics (1939–1956): collection of documents] (Moscow: United Editorial Board of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia Publ., 2008), 3–7.

²² O.B. Mozokhin, *Repressii v tsifrah i dokumentakh*, 44–45.

²³ The data on the number of Jews in 1952 were extrapolated based on the 1959 census, when their share in the actual population was 1.09%, and in the employed population – 1.04%.

munist Party schools – from 10.9% to 3.1%²⁴. In the above-mentioned spheres, despite the reduction of their role, Jews remained overrepresented. But *in the highest party apparatus and in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, for the first time, they became underrepresented*. Among the secretaries of regional and territorial committees and the Central Committee of the Union republics, their share decreased from 1.3% to 0.1%²⁵, among the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (from 1937–1946 to 1950–1954) – from 4.1% to 0.60%²⁶. Their representativeness index fell in the apparatus from 1.63 to 0.13 and in the Supreme Soviet – from 2.32 to 0.75²⁷. It should be emphasized that the reduction of the role of Jews in governance was the manifestation of the policy of leveling the political statuses of the USSR peoples. Such leveling often seemed to be a manifestation of anti-Semitism, despite the fact that the representativeness of Jews in the bodies of republican and all-Union governance was always higher than their share in the population. It is significant that the reduction of the role of Russians in the power structures, or the equalization of the status of Russians with non-Russians was not considered by Jews and by other ethnic groups as discrimination against Russians, even if their participation in governance was below the democratic norm.

Table 2

Representativeness index of Russians and Jews in the government agencies of the Russian Empire in 1897 and the USSR in 1926–1989

Ethnic group	1897	1926	1939	1945	1952	1959	1979	1989
Russians	1,43	1,17	1,16	1,14	1,07	1,06
Jews	0,17	2,00	2,17	3,70	1,40	1,78	1,39	1,13
Non-Russians	0,61	0,79	0,85	0,84	0,91	0,93
All ethnic groups	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00

Source: The table is based on material published in the article B.N. Mironov, “Participation of the Jewish Ethnicity in the Governance of the USSR,” *Modern Russian History* 14, no. 2 (2024): 346–376.

Thus, there was a paradoxical situation: during the campaign against anti-Semitism in 1926–1935 aimed at protecting Jews they were subjected to more repression than during the campaigns against cosmopolitans and nationalists in 1948–1953, which were aimed to a significant extent at Jews. At the same time, before the war (with philo-Semitic policies from above and anti-Jewish sentiments from below), the representativeness of Jews in power structures grew, and in the years considered as the “black years” of Soviet Jews, 1948–1953, they remained overrepresented in governance and the elite. Everyday anti-Semitism was in conflict with the philo-Semitic policy of the leadership, and there was no correlation between the intensity of political repression and participation in governance, which testifies to the opportunistic, rather than anti-Semitic nature of Jewish policy.

On the negative attitude towards Jews in society

There was a negative attitude towards Jews in Russian society from the time of their entry into the Russian state. Before the 1917 revolution, ordinary people called them enemies of Christ and the Orthodox, and considered Christ, the Holy Mother and all the

²⁴ G.V. Kostyrchenko, *Stalin’s Secret Policy*, 514–515.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ V. Konstantinov, *Evreiskoe naselenie byvshego SSSR v XX veke* [Jewish population of the former USSR in the XX century] (Jerusalem: Lira Publ., 2007), 250.

²⁷ B.N. Mironov, “Everyday Anti-Semitism in the USSR.”

apostles, as Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) notes, to be Russian. “Tell a peasant: do not curse Jews, because the Holy Mother and all the apostles were Jews. What will he answer? “It is not true,” he will say, “they lived when Jews were Russian.”²⁸ Jews were prohibited from entering the Russian state by Ivan the Terrible, but this prohibition was not strictly observed. Under Peter I, Jewish specialists were officially allowed to come, and some were even invited to serve in Russia. However, Elizabeth of Russia changed the Jewish policy. In 1742, the pious empress issued a decree ordering to deport abroad

from both Great Russian and Little Russian towns, villages and hamlets, all Jews, no matter what their rank was, with all their property and not to allow them into Russia in the future, except for those who wished to accept the Christian faith²⁹.

The advisers tried to persuade the Empress to let the Jews stay in Russia or at least not to prohibit Jewish merchants from entering the country, since they brought enormous profits to the state treasury. But she remained adamant: “I do not wish to get any profit from the enemies of Christ.”³⁰ One might think that this was a pure PR stunt. Under law any edict signed by the czar was read out by priests in all churches, and it was to be expected that this edict would present the Empress to the people as a pious, virtuous and uncompromising defender of Orthodoxy. However, Elizabeth of Russia was in fact deeply convinced that she was doing a godly deed, and the vast majority of Russian Orthodox Christians thought the same way until 1917. In 1915, M. Gorky published a questionnaire devoted to the Jewish question, which received many responses from all over Russia. Most correspondents revealed anti-Jewish attitudes, explaining them by the fact that

the innate, cruel, consistent egoism of Jews everywhere prevails over good-natured, uncultured, trusting Russian peasants, who are “in their embryonic development, in their childhood period.”³¹

Such ideas apparently served as fertile ground for persistent negative attitude towards Jews in the USSR³².

The outbreak of everyday anti-Semitism in the USSR in the 1920s and the campaign against it help us understand the causes of the crisis. In the first half of the 1920s, there was a rise in antipathy towards Jews in Soviet society. Opposition politicians and scholars expelled from Soviet Russia in 1922 paid close attention to it. According to their observations, anti-Jewish sentiments affected “the broadest strata of the population” (E.D. Kuskova). “Judeophobia in modern Russia is everywhere” (S.S. Maslov), in the middle classes of towns, among workers, students, members of the Communist Party and Komsomol, as well as in everyday life (S.M. Schwartz)³³. Its manifestations were gaining strength

²⁸ A. Khrapovitsky, *Prayer of the Russian Soul* (Moscow: Sretensky Monastery Publ., 2006), 120–136.

²⁹ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Sobranie pervoe* [Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire. First collection]. Vol. 11, 1740–1743, № 8673, edict signed by the czar of December 2, 1742 (St. Petersburg: II Department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery Publ., 1830), 727–728.

³⁰ The number of Jews deported from Russia during the reign of Elizabeth of Russia is estimated at between 142 and 35,000. Elizabeth of Russia's decree remained unfulfilled or poorly fulfilled, like previous similar ones. See: A.I. Solzhenitsyn, part 1 of *Dvesti let vmeste*, 27–30.

³¹ M. Gorky, *Iz literaturnogo nasledii: Gorkii i evreiskii vopros* [From the literary heritage: Gorky and the Jewish question] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Center for the Study and Documentation of East European Jewry Publ., 1986), 190–202. A small number of Marxist correspondents admired the Jews for their strength and iconoclasm, for what they had done for the coming of the modern age.

³² Yu.L. Slezkin, *Era Merkurii*, 435–436; V. Zaslavsky, and R.J. Brym, *Soviet Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (London: Springer, 1983), 106–107.

³³ E.D. Kuskova, “Kto oni i kak byt’? [Who are they and what to do?],” *Evreiskaia Tribuna*, October 19, 1922; S.S. Maslov, *Rossiia posle chetyrekh let revoliutsii* [Russia after four years of revolution] (Paris: Russian Printing Publ., 1922), 41; S.M. Schwartz, *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soiuze* [Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union] (New York: A.P. Chekhov Publishing House Publ., 1952), 7, 17, 25, 29, 39.

and sometimes there were serious excesses – like the pogrom of Jewish shops organized by pre-conscripts of Mogilev in 1928. In 1927 academician V. I. Vernadsky in a letter to his Cadet Party comrade I. I. Petrunkevich wrote:

Moscow is in some places like Berdichev; the strength of Jews is terrifying – and anti-Semitism (in communist circles as well) is growing uncontrollably.³⁴

At first, this phenomenon was hushed up in the Soviet media. But in 1926 it took on such proportions that it became dangerous to ignore it. According to a note from Agit-prop submitted to the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in August 1926, hostile elements were instilling into the working masses the idea that “the Soviet government indulges the Jews,” it is a “Jewish government,” because of Jews unemployment and housing shortages had increased, there was a shortage of places at universities, and retail prices and speculation were rising. “Without meeting any resistance, the anti-Semitic wave threatens to arise in the very near future as a serious political issue,” the Information Bulletin noted³⁵. That same year, the country’s leadership launched a broad propaganda campaign against anti-Semitism, which became part of the policy of “indigenization” and “internationalism.” The campaign was aimed at overcoming hostility and envy towards Jews and explaining the reasons for the special place of Jews in Soviet society. It was explained orally and in writing that anti-Semitism was a relic of the tsarist regime, brought to towns by backward peasants, which was incompatible with either Soviet morality or internationalism. The large role of Jews in public organizations was explained by their high level of culture and their inherent organizational skills, sense of solidarity, determination, readiness to make sacrifices for the common good, activity, and initiative. These valuable qualities, necessary for guiding revolutionary and social activities, were developed in them as a result of the difficult life under the old regime and in the course of the struggle against it. Propagandists and agitators explained that these advantages of Jews were temporary; all non-Jewish workers would soon possess the listed qualities thanks to the growth of education and active participation in economic and social life³⁶.

The campaign ran until 1934, when anti-Semitism clearly faded, reaching its “lowest point in all the years of Soviet power.”³⁷ The campaign played a role in weakening the anti-Jewish sentiment. Its success was explained by two factors. Firstly, by 1934, Stalin’s supporters had won a complete victory over their rivals and eliminated Jews who claimed the highest power in the country; the opposition was routed, its leaders were imprisoned, executed, exiled or they emigrated from the country. Secondly, in the 1930s, the socio-economic situation in the country changed, collectivization took place, attaching peasants to collective farms and allowing the state to solve the food problem in towns at the expense of collective farmers. Under the influence of rapid industrialization in the USSR, it was possible to minimize unemployment and eliminate Jewish nepmen who irritated the

³⁴ *Pis'mo V.I. Vernadskogo I.I. Petrunkevichu ot 14 iyunya 1927* [V.I. Vernadsky’s Letter to I.I. Petrunkevich dated June 14, 1927],” *Novyy mir*, no. 12 (1989): 219.

³⁵ N. Teptsov, “Monarkhiia pogibla, a antisemitizm ostalsia (dokumenty Informatsionnogo otdela OGPU 1920-kh gg.) [The monarchy perished, but anti-Semitism remained (documents of the Information Department of the OGPU of the 1920s)],” in *Neizvestnaia Rossiia XX vek: Arkhivy. Pisma. Menuary* [Unknown Russia XX century: Archives. Letters. Memoirs] (Moscow: Istoricheskoe nasledie Publ., 1993), 324–358.

³⁶ Yu. Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR* [Jews and Anti-Semitism in the USSR] (Moscow: State Publ.; Leningrad: State Publ., 1929), 115, 131, 260, 262–265; Yu.L. Slezkin, *Era Merkuriia*, 321–326; S.M. Schwartz, 1) *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soiuze* [Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union] (New York: A.P. Chekhov Publishing House Publ., 1952), 13–68, 69–109; 2) *Jews in the Soviet Union since the beginning of World War II (1939–1965)* (New York: American Jewish Labor Committee Publ., 1966), 3–12.

³⁷ S.M. Schwartz, *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soiuze*, 107–108.

population. Most Soviet historians explained the paroxysm of anti-Jewish sentiment in the 1920s in precisely this way.

However, there is another point of view, according to which the growth of anti-Semitic sentiment in society was provoked by the significant role of Jews in government agencies, the support of the latter by the country's leadership, which defended them and relied on them to a large extent. In wide circles, Soviet power began to be identified with Jews and called “Jewish.” In 1924, an attentive observer noted the following:

Now Jews are everywhere and at every level of power. Russian people see them at the head of Moscow, at the head of the capital on the Neva, and at the head of the Red Army, the most perfect mechanism of self-destruction. They see that St. Vladimir Avenue now bears the glorious name of Nakhimson <...> Russian people see Jews as both a judge and an executioner; they meet Jews everywhere, not communists, but those who are as dispossessed as they are but who nevertheless work for the Soviet power <...> It is not surprising that comparing the past with the present, Russian people are convinced that the current power is Jewish³⁸.

The philo-Semitic policy caused mass discontent among the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian populations, aroused envy among ordinary functionaries of other nationalities, and contributed to the growth of everyday anti-Semitism. In the jokes circulating among the intelligentsia, the Central Executive Committee stood for “zehn Juden Kommando” (“a detachment of ten Jews” (German))³⁹, and people deciphered the USSR – as “Srul, Srul, Srul and one Russian, and he is behind everyone else.”⁴⁰

Indeed, after the 1917 Revolution there began a mass migration of Jews from the pale of settlement to cities. Yu. Larin, an expert on the situation of Jews in the USSR in the 1920s, wrote in 1929 as follows:

At that time, the Jewish intelligentsia willingly went into service for the victorious revolution, in whole masses, [seeing] access to previously closed state service⁴¹.

Due to the significant emigration of pre-revolutionary civil servants, there was an urgent need for literate civil servants⁴². In 1921, the Political Directorate of the Red Army sent out a proclamation to military units explaining why there were many Jews in the state apparatus:

When the Russian proletariat needed its own intelligentsia and semi-intelligentsia, administrative and technical workers, it is not surprising that opposition-minded Jews met it halfway... The Jews' holding administrative posts in the new Russia is a completely natural and historically inevitable thing⁴³.

Jewish citizens were engaged in the most prestigious and profitable spheres of employment, where before the revolution the access for them was closed or difficult; they supplanted Russians and quickly made a career, which met resistance from the Russian population, primarily the intelligentsia, students and civil servants. It can be assumed that unemployment and tough competition forced many people to change their loyal attitude towards Jews. The discontent of millions of unemployed, needy, impoverished and unset-

³⁸ I.M. Bikerman, “Rossiia i russkoe evreistvo [Russia and Russian Jewry],” in *Rossiia i evrei. Sbornik pervyi* (Berlin: Osnova Publ., 1924), 22–23.

³⁹ I.L. Solonevich, “Rossiia, revoliutsiia i evreistvo [Russia, Revolution and Jewry],” in *Belaia imperiia. Statii 1936–1940* (Moscow: Moskva Publ., 1997), 192.

⁴⁰ M. Beizer, *Evrei Leningrada. 1917–1939: Natsionalnaia zhizn i sovetizatsiia* [The Jews of Leningrad. 1917–1939: National Life and Sovietization] (Moscow: Bridges of Culture Publ.; Jerusalem: Gesharim Publ., 1999), 104.

⁴¹ Yu. Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR* [Jews and Anti-Semitism in the USSR] (Moscow: State Publ.; Leningrad: State Publ., 1929), 73.

⁴² B. Mirsky, “Chernaia sotnia [Black Hundreds],” *Evreiskaia Tribuna*, February 1, 1924.

⁴³ A.I. Solzhenitsyn, part 2 of *Dvesti let vmeste*, 227.

tled people who found themselves in a difficult situation led to anti-Semitism, when Jews once again became “scapegoats.”⁴⁴

The anti-Jewish sentiments were fueled by the measures of the Soviet authorities, in which communists of Jewish origin played a significant role: the requisition of church valuables in 1922; a wave of renaming cities and streets in large cities in honor of Jewish revolutionaries (for example, Yekaterinburg – to Sverdlovsk, Elizavetgrad – to Zinovyevsk, Pavlovsk – to Slutsk, Gatchina – to Trotsk, etc.); the anti-religious movement⁴⁵, headed by E. Yaroslavsky, etc. The fight against the opposition, especially the “united opposition” (1926), which included many outstanding Jewish politicians, also contributed to the escalation of anti-Semitic sentiments among communists and Komsomol members, who believed that J. Stalin was seeking to free the country from Jewish domination.

According to L.D. Trotsky, between 1923 and 1926, Stalin and his supporters encouraged the development of anti-Jewish sentiments, and then took advantage of this in the fight against the opposition. At first, the “playing on the strings of anti-Semitism” was cautious and “of a hidden nature.” But in 1926, the persecution of the opposition took on an openly anti-Semitic character – agitators said of its supporters: “Jews are rebelling.” From the second half of 1927, the slogan “Beat the opposition” often took the form of the old slogan “Beat Jews, save Russia.” According to Trotsky,

Stalin was forced to make a statement: “We are fighting against Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev not because they are Jews, but because they are oppositionists,” etc.⁴⁶

Trotsky understood these words unambiguously:

It was perfectly clear to every politically minded person that this deliberately ambiguous declaration, directed against the excesses of anti-Semitism, at the same time quite deliberately nourished them. Do not forget that the leaders of the opposition are Jews. This was the meaning of Stalin's statement published in the Soviet journal⁴⁷.

The high competitiveness of Jews also explains the unfriendly attitude towards them on the part of other ethnic groups. S. N. Bulgakov believed that “anti-Semitism is sublimated envy of Jews and competition with them,”⁴⁸ and A. M. Gorky claimed that anti-Semites do not like Jews only because “they are better, more dexterous, more hard-working than them.”⁴⁹ In 1926, at the 1st Congress of the Society for Settling Toiling Jews on the Land, M. I. Kalinin not only explained the wave of anti-Semitism by socio-economic competition, especially among the intelligentsia, but also called on Jews not to move to large cities, since they would be completely assimilated there⁵⁰. A good example of such competition is the campaign of the 1920s on the resettlement of Jews to Crimea and southern Ukraine to involve them in agricultural work, which gave rise to rumors that

⁴⁴ This mechanism was carefully studied by French social anthropologist René Girard in his book *Kozel otpushcheniia* [The Scapegoat] (St. Petersburg: Ivan Limbakh Publ., 2010).

⁴⁵ In 1925, E.M. Yaroslavsky, the head of anti-religious propaganda in the USSR founded the League of Militant Atheists, but Orthodoxy was not a prejudice for the majority of the population, which caused discontent: B.N. Mironov, “Narod-bogonosets ili narod-ateist? [A God-bearing people or an atheist people?],” *Rodina*, no. 3 (2001): 52–58.

⁴⁶ This statement was not found in Stalin's collected works.

⁴⁷ L.D. Trotsky, “Thermidor and Anti-Semitism,” *The New Internationalist*, May, 1941, accessed July 27, 2023, <https://1917.com/XML/dApYGuRf1Nk2286oLVRdfVvJ8CE>

⁴⁸ S.N. Bulgakov, archpriest, *Khristianstvo i evreiskii vopros* [Christianity and the Jewish Question] (Paris: YMCA-press Publ., 1991), C. 83, 84, 117, 137, 140.

⁴⁹ M. Gorky, *Nesvoievremennye mysli: Zametki o revoliutsii i kulture* [Untimely Thoughts: Notes on Revolution and Culture] (Petrograd: Culture and Freedom Publ., 1918), 115.

⁵⁰ *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi S'ezd Sovetov v Moskve. Stenograficheskii otchet* [The First All-Union Congress of Soviets in Moscow. Verbatim report] (Moscow: VTSIK Publ., 1927), 66–67.

Jews were given the best plots of land, and caused protests from the Ukrainian and Russian peasantry. Thanks to their education, business acumen, organizational and entrepreneurial skills, Soviet Jews actually became a *privileged ethno-social group*: they were overrepresented in power, had higher incomes and socio-professional status compared to the entire population, which caused discontent and envy.

A.I. Solzhenitsyn explained anti-Semitism by the “incomplete interest” of Jews in the country of residence⁵¹, agreeing with famous Jewish historian S.L. Lurye, who saw one of the main sources of anti-Semitism in the fact that “a Jew living in a country belongs not only to this country - and therefore his feelings are inevitably divided.”⁵²

The authorities' distrust of Jews was often explained by their negative attitude toward the regime and active participation in the opposition movement. In the second half of the XIX – early XX century, Jews were the most disloyal of all the peoples of the Russian Empire. In 1903 S.Yu. Witte claimed that Jews accounted for 50% of revolutionaries. According to N. N. Sukhotin, commander of the Siberian Military District, as of January 1, 1905, of the 4,526 political persons under surveillance in all of Siberia, Jews accounted for 37%, Russians – 41.9%, Poles – 13.8%, Caucasian peoples – 3.2%, the Baltic peoples – 1.9%, and others – 2.2%⁵³. Hence the government's anti-Jewish policy. In the 1920–1930s, Jews became citizens who were exclusively loyal to the regime, and the policy was philo-Semitic. In the post-war period, especially in the last third of the XX century, many Jewish intellectuals went into overt or covert opposition, and accordingly Jewish policy also changed its vector. According to Canadian historians V. Zaslavsky and R.J. Brim:

In the 1920s, Jews were seen as exceptionally loyal to the regime; in the 1970s, another convenient myth emerged – that Jews were inherently politically unreliable. Both contained elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy⁵⁴.

Yu.L. Slezkine agrees with them:

In the post-war Soviet Union, Jews were not just an analogue of the opposition intelligentsia – they were the core of the opposition intelligentsia⁵⁵.

The Jewish ethnic group in the Soviet Union was *de facto in a privileged position*: it had a high ethnopolitical and the highest socio-professional status, the highest education and the highest income among other ethnic groups⁵⁶. Despite this, Jews were not satisfied with their situation. Yu. L. Slezkine, former Soviet Jew, who became a famous American historian, competently and, in our opinion, correctly explains this paradoxical situation by *relative deprivation*:

In the twilight of Tsarist Russia, Jews were better off than many other groups of the population in a number of economic and cultural respects, but they were more radical than everyone else, judging their situation in terms of the strictest meritocracy (rather than in comparison with Lamaists or peasants), considering themselves capable of rising to the very top (and having very good grounds for this), and assuming that official policy toward them was ethically untenable. <...> In the twilight of the Soviet empire, Jews were not more oppressed than the rest of the population, but they felt more

⁵¹ A.I. Solzhenitsyn, part 2 of *Dvesti let vmeste...*, 380–381.

⁵² S.L. Lurye, *Antisemitizm v drevnem mire* [Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World] (Tel Aviv: Sova Publ., 1976), 77.

⁵³ “From the history of the fight against the revolution in 1905,” *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 32 (1929): 229.

⁵⁴ Yu.L. Slezkin, *Era Merkurii*, 438–439; V. Zaslavsky, and R.J. Brym, *Soviet Jewish Emigration*, 109.

⁵⁵ Yu.L. Slezkin, *Era Merkurii*, 437.

⁵⁶ V. Konstantinov, *Evreiskoe naselenie*, 298; B.N. Mironov, “The Ethnic Status of the Jewish People in the Soviet Union,” *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History* 69, no. 3 (2024): 774–800, <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu02.2024.314>

humiliated for several reasons: “the scale of Jewish success and the danger of losing the status were incomparably greater.” There was veiled state discrimination and open mass anti-Semitism, which fed on traditional Russian hostility to rational thinking, order, logic, prudence, and “the desire of some newly minted technocrats from among the native population to get rid of their more successful competitors.” In other words, Soviet Jews were undervalued and could not fully realize their potential because “the officially proclaimed principles of meritocracy and equality were not properly observed.”⁵⁷

Suspicious, distrustful or wary attitudes towards Jews on the part of goys were widespread throughout the Soviet period (as were Jews towards Russians⁵⁸). But, as a rule, this was not anti-Semitism, Russophobia or any kind of ethnophobia in its pure form. Stalin fought Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and other prominent oppositionists not as Jews, but as his rivals, and if Japanese, Chukchi or Ethiopians had been in their place, he would have fought them in exactly the same way. Such an idea has been repeatedly expressed in literature. According to E. Pain, Stalin's policy equally “presupposed the possibility of repression against any ethnopolitical group, including Russian nationalists.”⁵⁹ Ya. Kedmi, a Moscow emigrant who knew Soviet realities well and was the head of the “Nativ” service (1992–1999), which coordinated the struggle of Jews in the post-Soviet space for repatriation and emigration to Israel, noted in his memoirs:

Stalin's regime was anti-Semitic to the same extent as it was anti-German, anti-Chechen, anti-Tatar, etc. And it was also anti-Russian, because it destroyed and exiled the Russian peasantry. And those repressed in the Leningrad affair were accused of attempting to create a Communist Party of the RSFSR⁶⁰.

G.S. Batygin and I.F. Devyatko rightly emphasized the importance of group interests and intra-party struggle in the Jewish question:

The Jewish question arose not so much as a result of Stalin's inherent anti-Semitism, but as a result of the desire of Jewish public figures to achieve independent political and geopolitical goals within the party-state nomenklatura. The Jewish question was to a significant extent not a Jewish question, but a nomenklatura question <...> There was an intense struggle between interest groups in the hierarchical system of power for a place under the sun of socialism⁶¹.

The existence of anti-Semitism was also facilitated by socio-economic envy, competition, civilizational specificity (mentality, culture, religion, system of values and norms of behavior, national character), as well as the need that arises from time to time in any society to have a whipping boy or a scapegoat in times of crisis in order to redirect collective discontent to him.

Conclusion

Thus, anti-Semitism in the USSR was not a principle of national policy, which was in fact fundamentally opportunistic. As A.I. Solzhenitsyn wrote, “the policy of the Soviet government towards Jews was inconsistent, cautious, prudent, and ambivalent.”⁶² Jews were discriminated against in the pre-war period, primarily because of the fierce struggle for power at the top, and in the post-war period – as a result of the transition of a

⁵⁷ Yu.L. Slezkin, *Era Merkuria*, 436.

⁵⁸ A.I. Solzhenitsyn, part 2 of *Dvesti let vmeste...*, 435–436.

⁵⁹ E.A. Pain, “The Historical Weakening of Anti-Semitism in Russia and its Short-Term Actualization in the Discourse of Modern Russian Nationalists,” *Bulletin of Liberal Arts University* 12, no. 2 (2024): 131–147, <https://doi.org/10.35853/vestnik.gu.2024.12-2.08>

⁶⁰ Ya.I. Kedmi, *Hopeless wars: memoirs* (Moscow: EKSMO Publ., 2012), <http://www.rulit.me/books/beznadezhnye-voyny-read-283883-23.html>

⁶¹ G.S. Batygin, and I.F. Deviatko, “Evreiskii vopros: khronika sorokovykh godov [The Jewish Question: Chronicle of the Forties],” *Vestnik RAN* 63, no. 1 (1993): 61–72; *Ibid.*, no. 2 (1993): 151.

⁶² A.I. Solzhenitsyn, part 2 of *Dvesti let vmeste...*, 426–427.

significant part of the Jewish diaspora to the opposition to the Soviet regime and the desire to emigrate. The opportunistic nature of anti-Semitism is vividly demonstrated by the fact that everyday anti-Semitism was in conflict with the philo-Semitic policy of the leadership, and that there was no coordination between the intensity of political repression against Jews and their participation in government. During the anti-Semitism campaign in 1926–1935 aimed at protecting Jews they were subjected to greater repression than during the campaigns against cosmopolitans and nationalists in 1948–1953, which were aimed to a significant extent against Jewish citizens. At the same time, before the war (with a philo-Semitic policy from above and anti-Jewish sentiments from below), the representativeness of Jews in power structures increased, and in the period considered to be “black years” of Soviet Jews, 1948–1953, they remained overrepresented in government and the elite.

The anti-Jewish sentiments among the population and the ruling class did not exclude Jews from public life, the elite, and the management of society. Throughout the Soviet period, the country's leadership effectively used the human capital of the Jewish diaspora in the interests of the state.

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Информация об авторе / Information about the author

Борис Николаевич Миронов, доктор исторических наук, профессор кафедры источниковедения истории России, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет; 199034, Россия Санкт-Петербург, Менделеевская линия, 5; mironov1942@yandex.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8559-0019>; SPIN: 7919-3929.

Boris Nikolaevich Mironov, Dr. Habil. History, Professor of the Department of Source Studies of Russian History, St Petersburg State University; 5, Mendeleevskaya Line Str., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russia; mironov1942@yandex.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8559-0019>; SPIN: 7919-3929.