State-sponsored Anti-Semitism in the Post War USSR.

Studies and Perspectives of Research

by Antonella Salomoni

Abstract

This essay offers a review of recent international historiography on "State anti-Semitism" in the USSR after WWII. After emphasizing the difficulties of reintegration of the Jewish population in the aftermath of conflict, the essay covers the different stages of anti-Jewish policies and focuses on the transition to a new phase in relations between Soviet Jews and Soviet state, coinciding with the struggle against "cosmopolitism" and the start of a more explicit anti-Semitic hate campaign. The author reconstructs the repression of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the invention of the "Doctors' Plot", and finally recalls the debate about the alleged preparation of a mass deportation of Soviet Jews. Promising research perspectives for the future are indicated in local case studies that would clarify the validity of "collective psychosis" which affects the Jewish community in the postwar era, as well as offer more information on the existence of a plan to mobilize the population on the basis of Judeophobia.

For a long time the Holocaust in the German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union has been the most neglected aspect of the annihilation of European Jewry. At least three elements engendered this delay in research by affecting the process of source collecting: first, the forty-year embargo on the huge documentation that the Red Army took from the Germans during and at the end of the hostilities, as well as on the relevant material produced by the military enquiry commissions on war crimes during the ascertainment of responsibilities; second, the ideologically-based refusal of Communism to consider the Shoah as a distinctive event of extermination, thus to assess the history of Jewish victims separately from the other victims of Nazism; third, the impossibility for the surviving community to collect a body of sources on experiences lived by Jews, since – as stated by the Soviet Union – the project of extermination afflicted all the peoples of the USSR, not merely a single nationality.

After the war no special publication in the Soviet Union focused on the extermination of Jews during the conflict. By and large the subject was ignored in the monographs on the Second World War and basically neglected in the collections of sources, as well as this it found almost no place in schoolbooks and traditional inventories. The only great work of documentation in the Soviet era occurred during the war,
when a Black Book was compiled in real time in order to record a sizeable selection of witnesses to the genocide. It is known that the volume was stopped by censorship in 1947, at the time of the disestablishment of the Jewish Antifascist Committee (EAK), which had promoted the work, and the beginning of the most acute stage of the campaign against the so-called ‘nationalism’, ‘cosmopolitism’ and ‘Zionism’ of the Soviet Jewry. That is the reason why the integral publication of this collection in 1993 was perceived as a turning point in research. It is almost needless to stress the importance of the liberalisation of access to certain archives – with the related acquisition of an amount of unpublished material – for historical research. It was all the more important, as many scholars believed that documents taken by the security forces in late 1948 had been destroyed. Among the most important works published in the last twenty years, one should remember – beyond the Black Book mentioned above – The Unknown Black Book, which collects material not present in the former volume because it mainly centred on the issue of collaborationism; some anthologies of reports, witnesses and letters that shed light on the EAK history and repression; a selection from proceedings of the secret trial from 8 May to 18 July 1952 against the top members of the EAK, who were sentenced to death by judgment of the Supreme Tribunal’s Military College on 12 August 1952.


These early important collections of material, being for the most part unpublished, were instrumental in a sizeable widening of our knowledge of the functioning and consequences of the shoah in the occupied Soviet territories\(^5\). Among several other contemporary investigations, one should remember the works by Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko, the scholar who gave the greatest contribution to a thorough and systematic scientific analysis of ‘state anti-Semitism’ in the Soviet Union, especially in the post-war period. Thanks to his works not only does it seem currently possible to outline the main stages of the disestablishment of Jewish cultural organisations and associative network, as well as the purge in state institutions and the actual – if not legal – discrimination in the workplace; his works also serve to assess effectively the scope of repressions in quantitative terms and to interpret the specific political code employed in view of the internal control and social mobilisation.\(^6\) Kostyrchenko himself has produced a fundamental collection of archive sources that allows us to follow step by step the development of Soviet anti-Semitism from 1938 to Stalin’s death. Set in great chronological periods, the collection offers – among others – invaluable material on Mikhoels’ murder and the liquidation of EAK, the destruction of Jewish literature and the purges in the scientific and industrial sector, the fight against ‘cosmopolitism’ and ‘international Zionism’, the orchestration of legal enquiries and criminal trials – including the indictment of Maria Veitsman (sister of Chaim Weizmann, first Israeli president) and the denunciation of the ‘Doctor’s Plot’.

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\(^7\) Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm v SSR. Ot nachala do kul’mnatsii 1938-1953 [State Antisemitism in the USSR: from the Beginning to the Culmination 1938-1953], ed. Gennadii V. Kostyrchenko (Moskva: MFD - Materik, 2005).
Victims vs. perpetrators: basic anti-Semitism

One of the most urgent and difficult problems facing the Soviet rulers after the liberation was that of ‘national reconciliation’. During the war every effort had been made to minimise the existence of a ‘Jewish question’, most of all because of the fear of the possible success of German propaganda against ‘Judo-Bolshevism’. Indeed, the Nazis had strongly put the ‘Jewish’ image of the Soviet power at the centre of their political communication with occupied populations. In the new phase of ‘pacification’, however, the watering down of German crimes was outside the need to conceal the actual scope of connivance between different nationalities and the Third Reich. Collaboration apparently had become rooted in anti-Judaism and anti-bolshevism, showing how brittle the idea of Soviet ‘motherland’ and ‘fraternity’ among people actually was.

In the post-war period, throughout Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism was frequently accompanied by collective violence. The Polish situation is well known, with the emblematic example of the disorders in the city of Kielce (4 July 1946), which caused the death of more than forty Jews out of roughly 200 survivors of Nazi extermination. Similar pogroms occurred in several Polish cities and towns: Białystok, Krakow, Lublin, Łódź, Rzeszów, Warsaw and many others. According to tentative assessments (these events were recorded in very selective ways and the authorities did not make any effort to collect and systematically preserve), 327 Polish Jews died in the 130 episodes which occurred in 102 different places in the period between September 1944 – September 1946. Some sources indicate 189 murders from March to August 1945 and 351 victims between November 1944 and December 1945.

The picture for the Soviet territory is much more fragmentary, still it is reasonably safe to say that between 1943 and 1946 – especially in the Ukraine – episodes of violence against the Jews rose significantly in the areas once under German occupation. The documents recovered in the last few years show that the Soviet authorities soon became aware of the vitality and strength of anti-Semitism at the heart of population. For example, the reports of the security bodies of the Socialist Republic

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of Ukraine began to inform the leadership of the Communist Party as early as from summer 1944, covering the racially-tinted incidents occurring in most major cities – actions that were taking on ever increasingly the semblance of a pogrom. One of the most serious of such episodes took place in Kiev on 4-7 September 1945. It has never been officially acknowledged and sufficiently precise information has begun to accrue just lately. A second period of violence occurred in 1948-1953, this time embedded in a specific anti-Jewish campaign and the repressions set out by the Stalinist regime; this period of violence allowed the return of abuses and the revitalisation of stereotypes of anti-Jewish flavour.

Nowadays we can check rather extensively the point of view of the surviving Jews, either missing or re-evacuated, who were returning – or, at least, trying to return – to their just liberated cities, towns and villages. Here they are welcomed with open resentment: subjects to discriminations and administrative abuses, only with the utmost difficulty did they succeed in affirming their property rights – if they did not became targets of anti-Semitic violence. Time and again a new trauma is added to the upheaval caused by physical brutalities and the loss of their families, i.e. living along with the persecutors or – much more often – their accomplices and informers. Several letters witness the difficulty of living side by side with those who had denounced and sacked their Jewish neighbours; the indignation at seeing people responsible for persecutions and mass murders going around freely, often even armed as they were called “to defend the motherland”; the delusion in learning that those who had enjoyed directive roles under the German occupation were still holding the same position or other important administrative offices. The result is a widespread feeling that, as expressed by a denouncing letter written by an inhabitant of the region of Rivne (Ukraine) in February 1945, “not only is anti-Semitism not ebbing, on the contrary it is mounting day by day”. Therefore the opposition against internal anti-Semitism, which was developing at

15 Sovetskie evrei pishut I’l’e Ehrenburgu, 193-194.
both popular and institutional level, came firstly from the Jews themselves, who turned active complicity and collective responsibilities bare.
In face of the ever-increasing anti-Semitic attacks and abuses in different places of the Soviet Union, the authorities reacted mostly by rejecting their collective character and reducing them to isolated episodes of vandalism. This is what emerges from a confidential report sent in September 1944 to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. The report had been commissioned in order to ascertain the truthfulness of the conclusions of a previous enquiry on anti-Semitism in the Ukraine pursued by order of the minister for state security\(^\text{16}\). Denying and partially condemning the previous conclusions, the document stressed that the root of those episodes of intolerance was the anti-Jewish propaganda organised by the Nazis and the local nationalists during the occupation – though it admitted that sometimes it was the problems of ordinary life to embitter people’s spirits. Anyway, it was not a reflection of “the genuine political and moral approach of the people”, so it did not warrant maintaining that manifestations of anti-Semitism were on the rise. On the contrary, the same document insisted specifically on “the nationalistic expressions of single members of the Jewish population”. In brief, they were “Zionistic elements” that were circulating “provocative rumours on the existence of anti-Semitism as a political movement in the Ukraine and even on a supposed anti-Semitic policy on the part of the Republic’s government”\(^\text{17}\).

Further research needs being pursued in the future regarding the differences of views and the contrasts that shook the bodies of the state on this very subjects, as shown – for example – by another confidential document of October 1944, which denounced to the Central Committee the serious mistakes committed by the leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Party, responsible for “having let themselves be kept on the leash by the Jewish community”. Such a brutal accusation was motivated by their authorisation for the building of special schools, a kindergarten and a nursery school; the Lithuanian leaders had accepted to fund the running expenses of a museum promoted by the society for the defence of the Jewish culture through the budget of the ministry of education; they also granted the authorisation for a rally in memory of German atrocities against the Jews\(^\text{18}\).

What these documents reveal most vividly is the determination – already explicit at the end of the war – to resist the creation or the

\(^{16}\) Bitter Legacy, 300-307.

\(^{17}\) Bitter Legacy, 307-314; Mitsel’, Evrei Ukrainy v 1943 – 1953 gg., 54-62; Gosudarstvenyi antisemitizm v SSSR, 40-44.

\(^{18}\) Gosudarstvenyi antisemitizm v SSSR, 44-45.
strengthening of ‘special Jewish organisations’. In such a context, the EAK – which emerged during the conflict with an explicit propaganda purpose, but whose scope had developed into an institution for the protection of identity – was very soon accused of interfering in matters that were out of its competence. Already in the spring of 1944 the proposal of some of its leaders to create a Jewish republic in Crimea, somewhat as compensation, had caused strong uneasiness.\(^\text{19}\) Moreover the Committee was deemed ‘politically damaging’ for having served as bearer and guarantor in connection to the appeals for material help, the complaints and petitions of the survivors or victims of new discriminations; for having unwarrantedly taken charge of “educational-cultural activities”; for having entertained independent relations with Jewish international organisations. When the EAK set the stages for a campaign to raise funds to build monuments to the Holocaust’s victims, or when it acknowledged the needs of the Jewish population and defended them in front of the different Soviet institutions, as well as when it asked for distributing material help to single citizens or entire communities, the Committee tended to strengthen a representing and mediating role that had not been entrusted to it in any way. The principal concern of the communist authorities – as explained in a note to Georgii M. Malenkov in December 1945 – was that the post-war peculiar context could help the transformation of EAK into “a sort of commissariat for Jewish affairs”, which was “a distortion of the aims set at the moment of its foundation”.\(^\text{20}\)

The anti-Cosmopolitical campaign and the attack against the intelligentsia

In the past, well before the fall of the communist regime, Soviet state anti-Semitism has often been remembered; such anti-Semitism emerged beginning with the non-aggression pact with Germany. At that time attention focused on the person of Stalin, whose anti-Jewish prejudices and obsession regarding the existence of a ‘Jewish nationalist plot’ were well known. In the latest studies psychological-based explanations, though not completely abandoned, have been compounded by the effort of understanding the reasons leading to the campaigns against the so-called Jewish ‘cosmopolitanism’ in late 1940s, to a new wave of


trials, and to the physical liquidation of Jewish intellectuals. This research is pursued through the deconstruction of the different levels of the ideology and the interconnections between the cultural purview and the fields of politics.

In the summer of 1946 the campaign against foreign influences started, ‘bourgeois nationalism’ and ‘western decadency’ managed by Andrei A. Zhdanov. It amounted to general prescriptions against literature and arts, along with a strong action aimed at destroying the peculiar features of the Jewry, accused of ‘rootless cosmopolitism’. Only in post-Soviet times was the Communist Party’s Central Committee resolution of 14 August 1946 was published; the resolution vehemently condemned the ‘servility’ towards western culture and denounced the deviations of that press which was circulating “ideologies that are alien to the spirit of the Party” through poetry and literature. If the resolution had no anti-Semitic flavour, nevertheless it caused immediate consequences in the Jewish circles, which had found in the writers the most strenuous defenders of identity reconstruction. Then the attacks multiplied against those intellectuals who seemingly claimed a cultural autonomy by recalling the issues of the genocide, so recovering the idea of a relatively independent Jewish community with respect to the geographic and political divisions of the contemporary world. As shown by many confidential party documents, the misgiving arose – often purposely fomented – that the active engagement in the fight against internal anti-Semitism and the effort to assume ‘representational functions’ in the Soviet Jewry were the Trojan horse for foreign organisations, which had an interest in strengthening ‘nationalist’ and ‘Zionist’ leanings. Against this background, any attempt to collect documents or commemorate the shoah began to be seen as a mere expression of Jewish ‘particularism’.

In spite of many projects for the EAK dissolution or self-dissolution, as well as proposals for suitting its tasks and composition to the new post-war scenario, the communist authorities did not seem ready to disestablish the EAK as late as in the midst of the Middle East crisis.

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Nevertheless, the accusatory mechanism was refined in the different institutional interventions denouncing the Committee’s ‘nationalist’ activity and the ‘Zionistic’ propaganda of its leaders; this mechanism would soon serve as a base for the arrests and other restrictive measures enacted in late 1948, supporting even the following trial evidence procedure. The most serious accusation was certainly of being an organisation at the service of the U.S., which was fomenting ‘separatist feelings’ and circulating ideas of ‘specificity’ by supporting the creation of an independent state in the Middle East.

Actually the post-genocide strengthening of the Jewish identity led to the formation of informal groups in different areas of the country, which debated on the problem of internal anti-Semitism and the ways to counter it, considered the perspectives of Zionism, and analysed the events in Palestine. We can consider this leaning as a form of resistance against the anti-Jewish chauvinism that was beginning to permeate the administration and a reaction to a merely negative- or discriminatory-construed Jewry (for instance the refusal to reintegrate the Jews in their former working positions or the barrier to upper education represented by the numerus clausus). One should also consider the jubilation followed by the establishment of Israel, when thousands of Soviet Jews expressed publicly their support to the new state entity and many applied for clearance in order to emigrate there. The reactions of the Communist Party Central Committee were of alarm, while misgivings and suspects increased in September 1948 after the arrival in Moscow of the Israeli diplomatic mission led by Golda Meyerson (Meir), which was welcomed with genuine public demonstrations in several occasions. These events strengthened the ‘plot’ thesis, namely the firm belief that such mobilisations covered a certain design and that an underground campaign was under way to attain the recognition of the Zionist ideology.

‘Forced’ assimilation and repression: anti-Semitism from the top

State anti-Semitism, however, was already in a very advanced stage and exploited these misgivings and suspects to its own advantage. The beginning of the most violent period of repression has been conventionally set on 12 January 1948, when the actor Solomon M. Mikhoels – director of the State Jewish Theatre in Moscow and president of the EAK – was murdered in Minsk by some security agents. His death was officially ascribed to a car accident and a state

25 Natalia Vovsi-Mikhoels, Moi otets Solomon Mikhoels. Vospominaniiha o zhizni i gibeli [My Father Solomon Mikhoels. Reminiscences on His Life and Death], (Moskva: Vozvrashchenie, 1997); Marvei Geizer, Mikhoels, zhizni i smerti [Mikhoels: Life and
funeral was bestowed upon Mikhoels, who was a prominent figure in Soviet culture.

The murder, whose instigator is now plainly identified as being Stalin, marked the beginning of a new stage in the relations between the Soviet state and the Jews, at the same time when the fight against ‘cosmopolitism’ broke out and the campaign of anti-Semitic hatred became ever more explicit. Both the worsening of international relations and the foundation of Israel influenced it by leading the authorities to look at the Jews as a ‘Diaspora nationality’, which was animated by increasingly evident Zionist feelings and potential aspirations to emigration – in brief, a potential threat to ‘patriotic’ integrity. Some stages of the ‘normalisation’ ushered in the last season of Stalin’s terror: the dismantling of the network of surviving cultural institutions; the suppression of the press and book industry in Yiddish language; the closure of the most active Jewish sections of the Union of Writers, often followed by the arrest of the main collaborators. Moreover, in violation of the rights sanctioned by the Constitution, the trend towards ‘forced’ assimilation was strengthened through an increasing social and economic discrimination. No explicit obstacle was opposed either to residence or to the admission of Jews into the army, the party or the trade unions, but a clandestine system of quotas was actually in force (particularly in the education and public employment) in order to hinder their accession to certain functions and specific sectors.

On 20 November 1948 came the decision of finally liquidating the EAK by means of a resolution of the Central Committee’ of the politburo, which entrusted to the Ministry for State Security the task of dissolving the organisation “since the facts show that it is an anti-Soviet propaganda centre and it regularly sends information […] to foreign secret services”. Even before the adoption of this resolution, the first arrests of writers of Jewish nationality had already taken place and the process would gain momentum in the following months, with

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Death], (Moskva: Zhurnalicheskoe Agenstvo “Glaznost”, 1998); Viktor Levashov, Ubiirstvo Mikhoelsa [The assassination of Mikhoels], (Moskva: Olimp, 1998).


28 Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR, 372.
charges ranging from treason and espionage to subversive activity and nationalism. The charge of ‘anti-patriotic’ activity, which was made public especially since the infamous article appeared in the Pravda in January 1949\(^\text{29}\), would play a prominent role in passing from the anti-Cosmopolitical campaign to the anti-Jewish one. The latter would reach its climax on 12 August 1952, when – after a closed-door trial (8 May – 18 July) – the most important leaders of EAK were executed. The press did not cover the hearings nor reported any information on the fate of the defendants, who were all sentenced to death with just one exception. All of them had been subjected to brutal and exhausting interrogations, somebody was even beaten and tortured in order to extract a confession. As several testimonies suggest, the enquiry had manifest anti-Semitic connotations and its main thread consisted of alleged ‘nationalistic’ subversion, with a view to demonstrating that the project of a Jewish republic in Crimea had been pursued in close contacts with American agents, who were interested in a kind of bridgehead in the Black Sea region – maybe in the perspective of a possible attack against the Soviet Union. The issue was no more the censure of ‘Jewish nationalism’, but espionage and an attempt against the security of the state.

Shortly after the conclusion of this process, the case of the so-called ‘doctors-saboteurs’ broke out, an alleged plot revealed by Tass and the Pravda on 13 January 1953\(^\text{30}\). The news was that the security services had discovered a terrorist organisation that wanted to make an attempt on the life of high-ranking Soviet leaders and was already responsible for the death of leading members of the party like A.A. Zhdanov and A.S. Shecherbakov. Nine physicians were said to be involved, six of them with clearly Jewish names, who were arrested with the charge of having operated at the behest of an international Zionistic agency, as well as the U.S. and British secret services. It was the beginning of a new step in the anti-Semitic campaign, with the alleged ‘plot’ used in order to engender an atmosphere of violent and explicit hostility with respect to the Jews. Up this moment state anti-Semitism had been evolving basically as an underground dynamic, as shown also by the secrecy that had surrounded the last trial against the EAK. During the fight against ‘cosmopolitism’ the very term ‘Jew’ had been rarely used, as well as this the press had not reported any information about the sentence and the shooting of many representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia. Instead, beginning with January 1953, both denigration and persecution of the Jews became apparent.

Shortly after the sudden death of Stalin (5 March 1953) came the

\(^{29}\) “Ob odnoi antipatrioticheskoi gruppe teatral’nykh kritikov” [About an Anti-patriotic Group of Theatre Critics], Pravda, 28 January 1949; Stalin i kosmopolitizm, 232-241.

\(^{30}\) See also Stalin i kosmopolitizm, 651-654.
acknowledgement that the ‘plot’ had been merely a provocation of the security services. Indeed on 4 April 1953 Pravda’s front page reported a communiqué of the Ministry of Interior informing that the charges against the physicians were groundless and obtained with “means of investigation that are unacceptable and rigorously forbidden by Soviet laws”. No explicit mention was made to the anti-Semitic dimension of the issue, but the charges were dropped and the arrested people released, almost at the same time as the mass liberation of the Gulag prisoners. No other explanation was given and – in his secret report to the XX Congress of the Communist Party – N. Khrushchev simply laid the whole responsibility for this event on Stalin.

Judophobia: a means of political pressure and social intimidation

In spite of the Soviet-era difficulty in pursuing these topics – because of the denial of access to enquiry material, trial proceedings or other archival sources – the Stalinist anti-Semitic campaign has been the subject of growing attention over the years. Only after 1991, however, did the conditions for a thorough analysis of its ways and reasons materialise.

There is a point that made the debate heated up. Since early 1950s, and increasingly as the time went by, it had been said that a mass deportation of Jewry to Siberia was imminent, prepared upon Stalin’s direct urging over that period. The trial staged against the ‘doctors-saboteurs’ – according to several accounts, including the one by high-ranking Soviet officials (though reported indirectly) – would have been openly celebrated and ended up with public executions in...
Moscow and other big cities, in order to be followed by a huge wave of pogroms organised by the regime throughout the country. It was only because of Stalin’s death that the project was not implemented. In fact, the way the physicians had been arrested, the use of torture to extort their confessions, and the great propaganda campaign that came together with this operation suggest the imminence of a new wide-range ‘purge’. Rumours of a possible forced movement of Soviet Jewry to Birobidzhan or other areas in the Far East had already begun circulating in early 1948, after the mysterious death of Mikhoels. They strengthened at the end of the same year, at the time of the EAK dismantling and the arrest of its leaders. Later on they found confirmation in statements that reported even the construction of special camps and the preparation of trains in order to move the deportees35. Still, no document has been found in support of the existence of such a plan. Thence the issue has always been controversial.

The existence of an actual base for such deportation is undeniable in a country where forced mass movement of population, for reasons of either class or nationality, had been common practice in both the 1930s and 1940s36. But the implementation of this threat against the Jews would have encountered significant hurdles. According to Gennadii Kostyrchenko, unlike the case of geographically localised populations, the deportation of hundreds of thousands of people who did not live in specific areas, rather in densely populated urban centres, could not be executed swiftly and in secret; all the more if one consider that these people were deeply integrated with the rest of the population, up to the point of holding prominent position in the public life. Even more important for a country that did not present the ethnic homogeneity of Germany, any institutional anti-Semitism in the multi-national Soviet Union could not match Nazi radicalism, rather it had to develop gradually and discreetly, most of all without formal legitimacy. Otherwise anti-Semitism would lead to a substantial departure in the communist ideology “that was still keeping a small but crucial element of Bolshevik internationalism, in spite of the Stalinist mark of chauvinism”37. Thus confidentiality, gradualism and multi-ethnicity placed out of question the possibility of adopting short-term, coercive mass measures regarding the Jewry in peacetime. If any, Stalin’s project

37 Kostyrchenko, Stalin protiv “kosmopolita”, 333.
consisted in the assimilation of the Jews by ‘fostering’ even through repressive actions – first of all against Jewish culture and intelligentsia (responsible for resisting the process of denationalisation) – a development once considered natural and objective.

Part of the post-Soviet debate focused on the project of a collective letter to be published in Pravda in the name of a sizeable number of leading members of Soviet Jewry; they would condemn the ‘treacherous’ physicians and suggest a voluntary deportation of the Jews in order to escape popular wrath. None of the known versions of the letter, however, speaks explicitly of such a plan. In 2003 the publication of the book edited by Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov, which drew on new archival material, has reignited the debate. The volume allows a deeper knowledge of the means and reasons that led to the physicians’ involvement in an alleged ‘conspiracy’ against the Soviet power. The editors allude frequently to the building of new camps in Kazakhstan, at Irkutsk and in the autonomous Komi Republic, which were supposed to receive the Jewish deportees. Nevertheless, it has been remarked that in giving details about the specific places of internment the reference documents speak only of detention areas for “Germans, Austrians and other criminals”; moreover, in the lack of any specific directive, the only other supporting sources are still the accounts of the people concerned.

Thereupon it seems fair to say that the deportation of Soviet Jews is a ‘myth’, which was the product of ‘social hysteria’ and panic permeating the Jewish community in the years immediately after the war and the Holocaust, later on purposely fomented in the peculiar context of the cold war. It follows the urgency in the post-Soviet era not merely to fill in the gaps and the voluntary omissions thanks to the archival declassification, but also to redeem the Russian society’s ‘historical conscience’, which was deformed by both the ideological control of the Communist Party and the circulation of ‘popular’ myths created as an alternative to the official interpretation.

The enquiries made at Union, republic, regional, and provincial level offer a promising research perspective, since they let us better ascertain

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38 See Kostyrchenko, Stalin protiv “kosmopolitov”, 364-374.
42 Kostyrchenko, Stalin protiv “kosmopolitov”, 329.
the soundness of the ‘collective psychosis’ that overwhelmed the Soviet Jewish community during the post-war years. In particular the period January-March 1953 was a sign of insecurity, distrust, suspicion and hatred. Ongoing investigation not only confirm the re-launch of the anti-Semitic campaign between the end of 1952 and the beginning of 1953, but they also prove the existence of an organised plan for mobilising the population through Judophobia. The regime used the latter as an effective means of political pressure and social intimidation – and as an excuse to give new strength to the anti-religious struggle, so obtaining the closure of several synagogues and the confiscation of their properties. Confidential reports for the Central Committee of the Republic of Ukraine regarding popular reactions to the Tass press release on the arrest of the ‘doctors-saboteurs’ explain both the means and content of anti-Semitic propaganda, and the growing misgivings of the Jewish community. The reports suggest that the authorities, though having actively instigated Judophobia, were remarkably anxious at the possibility of spontaneous manifestation of popular violence. Indeed the population gave proof of a high level of anti-Semitism, calling most often for the expulsion of the Jews from their positions, but also their execution or deportation to Siberia. In some cases, even Stalin’s death was ascribed to the Jews and somebody explained the liberation of the physicians by resorting to the alleged Jewishness of Lavrentii P. Beria. The same situation occurred in Byelorussia where – by means of any possible media of communication – a major press campaign was orchestrated with the support of party propagandists in assemblies, in workplaces and particularly in schools of every kind and level. The campaign led to the almost complete expulsion of the Jews from any position of responsibility in the whole republic, with people calling for their dismissal, but also their internment and deportation. It is

remarkable that among the most frequent charges (parasitism, economic offences, links with the West and Israel) there was the recurring idea of the Jews as a ‘nation’ apart, which was not able of being loyal to the motherland.

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