

*Unexpected Allies: Imperial Russian Support of Jewish Emigration
at the Time of Its Legal Ban, 1881-1914*

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Abstract

This article analyses the Russian government's involvement in Jewish emigration from the late Tsarist Empire by exploring bureaucratic archival records. Despite the official emigration ban, between 1881 and 1914 about two million Jews managed to cross the Russian border and leave primarily for the United States, Argentina, and Palestine. The understudied yet official documents and police reports from imperial provinces such as Podolia, Volhynia, and New Russia reveal the practical aspects of the Jewish exodus. Some Jewish emigrants left illegally on their own, some used the help of illegal emigration agents, while others were able to leave with the assistance of charitable emigration organizations. In most of these scenarios, this article argues, the Russian government supported Jewish emigration in implicit or explicit ways: it was willing to tolerate Jewish resettlement to the extent that it could regulate the process.

Introduction

Was the Tsarist Regime a Foe of Jewish Emigration? The Historiographical Debate

The Brody Incident: The Russian Empire Starts Sending Its Jews Away

The Jewish Colonization Association as Russia's Helper in Emigration Matters

Tolerable Only if Controllable: The Government's Attitudes Towards Other Agents

Conclusions

Introduction

In April 1882, Kyiv police detained a student, Vladimir Rokhlin, an Austrian citizen, Emil Korkus, and a commoner, Shaia Fridman. All three were members of Am Olam, the Russian-Jewish emigration society that supported the establishment of Jewish agricultural colonies in the United States. The arrested had discussed such plans at secret gatherings in Rokhlin's apartment on Kyiv's main street, Khreshchatitskaia.¹ Their secret activities continued until the police received a letter of denunciation accusing the group of underground publishing activities. During the search of the apartment, the police found a large number of the society's statutes and an appeal to different Jewish circles to unite efforts in support of emigration.² The officers, however, did not find any political motives in the publications and charged the three Am Olam members only with breaching the Publishing Law.³

This story reveals the Russian Empire's permissive attitude towards Jewish emigration, unlike that of other ethnic groups. During the era of mass migration in late imperial Russia, countless emigrants and travelers, whether Jews, Germans, Poles, or Lithuanians, managed to find a way to cross the border. From the death of Alexander II in 1881 until the outbreak of World War I, more than two million people, the majority of them Jews, left Russia forever even though the official law forbade emigration.⁴ Regardless of illegal emigration being a criminal offense in the Russian Empire, tens of thousands did find a way to leave. Sometimes they did it on their own, occasionally with the help of charitable emigration associations, but most often with the assistance of dishonest agents. The latter made money out of migrants' ignorance, as most of them had never left their hometowns before emigrating. Despite the official ban on illegal emigration, local bureaucrats often preferred to close their eyes to the dozens of migrants filtering across the Russian border every day. Frequently, when the Ministry of Interior requested reports

¹ Now Khreshchatyk.

² Tsentralnyi Derzhavnyi Istorychnyi Arhiv u Kyivi [Central State Historical Archive in Kiev, from now on TsDIAK], fond 442, opys 832, spr. 125, ark. 1-1v.

³ Ibid., ark. 1v-2.

⁴ For the relevant statistics see Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of the Russian Jews to the US: Background and Structure," *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975), 49.

from local authorities about the current situation concerning emigration, the latter denied it was a mass movement and reported the departure of only several dozen Jews, Ukrainians, and Germans.⁵

The government was well aware of mass Jewish emigration, as is made evident by the correspondence between state officials, numerous letters to the police, and press publications. Why, then, did the government and the local governors allowed their migration when it broke official policy? How much did the government's attitudes differ towards the migration of different ethnic groups? What measures, if any, did the authorities take to suppress the illegal activities of emigration agents?

The present article seeks to answer these questions and argues that although the Tsarist regime viewed most Russian subjects' emigration as undesirable, it had a different attitude towards Jewish resettlement and tolerated it as long as it could control the process. To support this argument, I will discuss the scholarship on the topic, establish the Russian government's position on Jewish emigration, and analyze its favorable attitude towards the Jewish Colonization Association and its disapproval of other emigration agents.

Was the Tsarist Regime a Foe of Jewish Emigration? The Historiographical Debate

There is no consensus among historians on the Russian government's attitude toward Jewish emigration. Affected by the events, contemporary witnesses, such as Simon Dubnow and Louis Greenberg, saw in the state's repressive measures a willingness to push Jews across the border.⁶ Historians of the twentieth century often quote one of the main ideologists of Alexander III's politics, Konstantin

⁵ See, for example, Derzhavnyi Arhiv Odeskoi Oblasti [The State Archives of Odessa Region, further DAOO], fond 2, opys 4.1, spr. 8958, ark. 1-1v, 5-5v.

⁶ For example, Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, V. II (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1918), 414-415; Louis Greenberg, *The Jews in Russia*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 55-75.

Pobedonostsev (1827-1907), who allegedly described the future of Russian Jewry as follows: “one-third would die out, one-third would emigrate, and one-third would assimilate to the local population without a trace.”⁷

Whether or not Pobedonostsev made this statement is a debated topic among scholars of Russian and Jewish history. The Russian government did not follow this proclamation in its official policy and the implementation of other restrictions, particularly the creation of the infamous Pale of Settlement, made the assimilation of large numbers of Jews into the local population an unlikely possibility. Furthermore, although most Jews from the Pale were destitute and experienced physical violence in some regions, the Russian authorities never inflicted bodily harm on Jews intentionally. Finally, although imperial bureaucrats took certain measures to encourage Jewish emigration, and this article will discuss some of them, the state failed to issue clear emigration laws under which Jews could freely cross the border and leave Russia forever.⁸

On a few occasions, Russian officials did express the view that Jewish emigration from Russia was desirable. One of them was Count Nikolay Ignatyev (1832-1908), a Pan-Slavic statesman who served as the Minister of Interior in 1881-1882, when mass Jewish emigration began. In January 1882, in an interview with the Russophone Jewish journal *Razsvet*, Ignatyev declared that “the Western frontier is open for Jews,” although later he denied saying this.⁹ Dubnow cites another Russian bureaucrat, the Kyiv public prosecutor, Vasiliy Strelnikov, who in May 1881 commented on overpopulation in the Pale of Settlement: “If the Eastern frontier [to the interior Russian governorates] is closed to the Jews, the Western frontier is open to them; why don’t they take advantage of it?”¹⁰

Such statements, however, are not illustrative of general Russian policies concerning Jewish resettlement. Historian Eugene Avrutin, for example, follows

⁷ Irwin Michael Aronson, “The Attitudes of Russian Officials in the 1880s Toward Jewish Assimilation and Emigration,” *Slavic Review* 34, no. 1 (1975): 1-18; 1.

⁸ For further criticism of the myth around Pobedonostsev’s statement, see Aronson, “The Attitudes of Russian Officials,” 2-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁰ Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 264-265.

Hans Rogger's work¹¹ and concludes that while some of the government's actions reflect the desirability of Jewish emigration, imperial Russia failed to develop emigration laws that would have made Jewish departure smoother. As early as 1835, leaving the empire without a special permit was considered a criminal offense. Therefore, despite sometimes positive attitudes toward Jewish emigration and even occasional public statements of encouragement from government officials, emigration was legally forbidden, and there was no exception for any group of Russian subjects.¹²

Despite all the restrictions on traveling, however, the police could not closely patrol the vast western Russian borderlands, and thus illegal border crossing was commonplace. The formal permission to extend the Jewish Colonization Association's activities to Russia in 1892, Avrutin argues, was a significant step the government made to clarify and codify its emigration laws (which will be closely examined later in this article). But even after such new options became available for legal departure, the procedure required to obtain permission for emigration was so slow and complicated that most Jewish emigrants still found the illegal border crossing a better option.¹³ Even though the JCA managed to make the legal departure of many Jews from the Russian Empire possible, around 75 percent of Jewish emigration remained clandestine.¹⁴

The imperial Russian emigration policy was also connected with the corresponding policies in neighboring countries. As John Klier argues, Austrian and German authorities disliked the idea of hundreds of impoverished Russian Jews inhabiting their territories even temporarily. For the Tsarist Empire, a deterioration in the relations with its neighbors could be detrimental. Klier also

¹¹ Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 176-187.

¹² Eugene Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 136.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 136-138; Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1985), 20.

¹⁴ Nikolai Tudorianu, *Ocherki rossiiskoi trudovoi emigratsii perioda imperializma: v Germaniiu, Skandinavskie strany i SShA* [Russian Labor Migration during the Imperial Period: To Germany, Scandinavia, and the USA] (Kishinev: Shtiintsa, 1986), 134.

warns against separating Jewish migration from that of other ethnic groups and examines emigration from Russia as a whole. At times, the government found it complicated to punish or, conversely, encourage a certain group's departure because different ethnic groups cooperated in the process of organizing the departure. For example, Jewish agents used to help both their coreligionists and Polish peasants, whose migration was undesirable for the state since Russian farming needed their labor.¹⁵

Another important question that the researchers raise is why the empire did not legalize emigration even when large numbers of Jews, Poles, and Germans crossed the border illegally and had to use the services of foreign steamship companies and emigration agents with doubtful reputations. Eric Lohr, for instance, asks why the advocacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry in favor of the legalization of emigration yielded no results. These governmental offices argued that making emigration legal would be beneficial for the state treasury, and the money that emigrants paid to criminals or foreign subjects to help them arrange their departure would instead go to the state. Still, their arguments had little impact on imperial jurisdiction.¹⁶

Despite some antisemitic officials in its ranks, the Ministry of Interior strongly opposed such an initiative for several reasons: the state needed workers, the army required soldiers, and most importantly, legalizing emigration would also encourage the departure of ethnic Russians.¹⁷ In 1892, a lawyer, Mikhail Mysh, noted in the *Guide to the Russian Laws about the Jews* that Jewish emigration was harmful to the Russian Empire because the most skillful, healthy, and energetic Jews departed and left the sick and poor behind, who could potentially become a

¹⁵ John Klier, "Kontrabanda liudey: pravitel'stvo Rossii i emigratsiia iz Tsarstva Pol'skogo v 1881-1892 gg." [Human Contraband: The Russian Government and Emigration from the Kingdom of Poland, 1881-1892], in *Evreiskaya emigratsiya iz Rossii, 1881-2005* [Jewish Emigration from Russia, 1881-2005], ed. Oleg Budnitskiy (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008), 20-31.

¹⁶ Eric Lohr, "Population Policy and Emigration Policy in Imperial Russia," in *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia*, eds. Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble, and Erin Trough Hofmann (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 168-173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-174.

burden for the state.¹⁸ Making emigration legal contained potential dangers and, consequently, the government forbade even advertising steamship tickets' sale, as it encouraged resettlement, a prohibition which was nevertheless ubiquitously violated with no severe consequences.¹⁹ It seemed more convenient to the empire to continue to tolerate illegal border crossings, losing finances that the “unfaithful” subjects could potentially pay to the state treasury, and to support the initiatives of some enthusiasts and emigration societies only occasionally.

The new historiographical approach to migration avoids bare statistics in favor of presenting the daily life and decision-making process of people who decided to emigrate. Thus, Gur Alroey narrates migration through the experiences of individual residents of the Pale of Settlement, whose stories he found in Israeli archives and the Ellis Island database.²⁰ This article will also address the fates of the Pale's ordinary residents, whose complicated relationship with the emigration bureaucracy left a paper trace in the archives.

Among these scholarly analyses, Irwin Michael Aronson argues that even if lower-level Russian bureaucrats sometimes articulated radical views usually attributed to Pobedonostsev and Ignatyev, they never tried to implement them in practice. Not being able to study the Soviet archives during the Cold War, Aronson used published sources, namely reports, memoirs, biographies, and scholarly works by contemporary historians. Based on different governorates' commissions and statements of their representatives, Aronson concluded that although some of the officials strongly opposed Jewish emancipation, very few of them saw Jewish emigration as a solution to “the Jewish question.”²¹ In Aronson's view, while the government's oppressive measures drove Jews out of Russia, these policies' true

¹⁸ Mikhail Mysh, *Rukovodstvo k Russkim Zakonom o Evreyakh* [The Guide to the Russian Laws about the Jews] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya A.Benke, 1914), 338-339.

¹⁹ Pamela Nadell, “From Shtetl to Border: East European Jewish Emigrants and the Agents System, 1868-1914,” in *Studies in the American Jewish Experience II*, eds. Jacob R. Marcus and Abraham J. Peck (Lanham; New York: University Press of America, 1985), 52.

²⁰ Gur Alroey, “Bureaucracy, Agents, and Swindlers: The Hardships of Jewish emigration from the Pale of Settlement in the Early 20th century,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 19 (2003): 214-231.

²¹ Aronson, “The Attitudes of Russian Officials,” 13.

goal was to ameliorate their situation and assimilate the Jewish population, and it was only in some exceptional cases that officials tolerated (but did not promote) Jewish emigration.²² In short, the authorities' attitudes were ambivalent.

My research, which draws on official state documents now available in Russian and Ukrainian archives, reveals a different tendency. Despite the ban on emigration in the Russian legislative system, local authorities facilitated Jewish emigration and often did that under the supervision of high-ranking officials from St. Petersburg. On the basis of materials from the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg (RGIA) and two Ukrainian archives, the Central State Historical Archive in Kyiv (TsDIAK) and the State Archives of the Odessa Region (DAOO), I analyze how Russian bureaucrats assisted Jews in crossing the border. Their support ranged from issuing free exit permits and canceling fines, which could hinder the migrants' departure, to turning a blind eye to denunciations about Jews leaving Russia illegally. Both modes of assistance had similar outcomes for Jewish migrants, who eventually found themselves on the other side of the border with very little chance to return.

Several scholars mentioned above argue that the official restrictive emigration policy differed significantly from actual practice, and illegal emigration thrived. This article shows how local bureaucrats managed to make border crossing quasi-legal for Jews when the empire could not legalize emigration because it could potentially deprive Russia of its workforce. This conclusion can be drawn on the basis of documents from several western imperial provinces (Podolia, Volhynia, and New Russia), which in turn indicate how widespread the phenomenon was.

The Brody Incident: The Russian Empire Starts Sending Its Jews Away

The Russian authorities were aware of Jewish mass migration and knew about it from the start. In August 1881, the Governor-General of Kyiv, Podolia, and Volhynia, Alexander Drenteln, learned from the local governor in the Volhynia

²² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

governorate that the famous Jewish bankers, Rothschild and Montefiore, had bought a large piece of American land to settle 1,000 Russian-Jewish families and that they had sent their representative to the Austrian border town of Brody, to promote the resettlement of Russian Jews. The Volhynia governor claimed that the idea appealed mostly to the homeless, who readily accepted the invitation and had been preparing to travel across the ocean. The governor wondered whether such emigration was actually desirable, considering Jewish overpopulation in the Pale of Settlement, and whether the government should facilitate the process by issuing travel passports in the shortest possible time, or take measures against the departure instead.²³ The official response is missing, but a side note indicates a favorable attitude towards Jewish emigration: “Do not change the established order. There are no reasons to keep Jews.”²⁴

A month later, the Volhynia governor confirmed that the Jews had secretly continued to cross the border and were concentrating in Brody. Their number had already reached 2,000, with many conscripts and active and retired soldiers among them. The Austrian government was worried about the situation and decided to send a military guard to the border if the migration flow continued.²⁵ The side note was cool-headed: “Leave this to the Austrian government.”²⁶ A similar reaction followed the report on an appeal to the Jewish population published in Brody and titled “To Our Brothers.” A Russian bureaucrat commented about this fundraising plea to support Russian-Jewish resettlement to Palestine, “Do not take it seriously.”²⁷

Meanwhile, the Austrian authorities took measures against border crossing even in the case of those Russian Jews who had valid travel passports and wanted to travel internationally for business or personal matters. In June 1882, an Austrian official insisted on returning 13,000 poor Russian Jews who had come to Brody and did not have the means to continue the trip. Russia, however, did not want to

²³ TsDIAK, fond 2, opys 534, spr. 267, ark. 2-3.

²⁴ Ibid., ark. 2.

²⁵ Ibid., ark. 10-10v.

²⁶ Ibid., ark. 10.

²⁷ Ibid., ark. 18.

accept its subjects back. Tired of waiting for a Russian response, Austrian gendarmes started forcibly returning groups of Jewish men, women, children, and newborn babies through unguarded parts of the border. Sometimes they even engaged in open confrontations with Russian border patrols.²⁸

Eventually, the Russian government agreed to admit the Jewish migrants back if they could prove that they were Russian subjects, which was practically impossible since most Jews had left Russia illegally without any documents.²⁹ To carry out this task, the Ministry of Interior sent to Brody a Russian official, Captain de Bille. He had to establish which Jews were from Russia and give them entry passes, enabling their return to the empire.³⁰ The results of his mission, unfortunately, did not leave any trace in the archives.

These instances reveal the Russian authorities' intention to keep the Jewish population out of the Tsarist empire. The bureaucrats disregarded even the departure of Jews of conscription age that could potentially serve in the army. Under pressure from Austrian officials, the Russian government sent Captain de Bille to Brody and instructed him to facilitate the poor migrants' return, but it intentionally made his mission nearly impossible. Although we do not know how many Jews de Bille managed to return to the empire, we can assume that their number was minuscule. The Jews were crossing the border secretly without any documents and therefore could not prove their status as Russian subjects. The Tsarist authorities knew this very well and, therefore, de Bille's mission must be taken to signify the empire's efforts to satisfy the demands of the Austrian government but not a will to make Jewish emigrants return to Russia.

The Jewish Colonization Association as Russia's Helper in Emigration Matters

The most telling example of the Russian state's readiness to accept Jewish emigration was its national and local authorities' cooperation with Baron Maurice

²⁸ Ibid., fond 442, opys 535, spr. 206, ark. 18.

²⁹ Ibid., ark. 20.

³⁰ Ibid., ark. 35-36.

de Hirsch. In 1891, he established the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) in London, with the goal to alleviate the dire economic situation of Jews and facilitate their resettlement from Europe to the Americas (both North and South). The association also directed its efforts towards making Jews productive and self-sufficient members of society, by connecting them to the land and transforming them into agricultural laborers on American soil.³¹

The next year, Hirsch petitioned the Russian government to allow the JCA to extend its activities to Russia. When the Minister of Interior, Ivan Durnovo, reported to Alexander III about the possibility of using the Baron's assistance to reduce the number of Jews in the empire, his reply was as follows: "THIS IS ALL GOOD, BUT KEEP AN EYE ON THEM".³² The Russian Council of Ministers also discussed JCA's support of Jewish emigration to America and concluded that all measures directed to reduce the Jewish population in Russia deserved attention and sympathy.³³

The Governor-General of Kyiv, Podolia, and Volhynia, Count Alexei Ignatyev,³⁴ also wholeheartedly supported the JCA's efforts to assist Jewish emigration. In his letter to the Minister of Interior from December 16, 1891, Ignatyev named the overpopulation of Jews in the Pale of Settlement as the Jewish question's main issue.³⁵ Hence, he found all measures to reduce the Jewish population in Russia desirable, including Baron de Hirsch's project to resettle 3.25 million Russian Jews. However, since the JCA was a Jewish organization, the governor recommended keeping it under tight control.³⁶

³¹ Norman, *An Outstretched Arm*, 1-2.

³² Emphasis in the original.

³³ *Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenniy istoricheskiy arkhiv* [Russian State Historical Archive, further RGIA], fond 1284, opys 224, delo 619, l. 8.

³⁴ The younger brother of the previously mentioned Nikolay Ignatyev.

³⁵ "The Jewish question" in the Russian Empire can be briefly described as a discussion among Russian officials about the appropriate place of Jews and their treatment in society. The major issue was how to make Jews less "harmful" in social, economic, and political terms. For further reading see John Klier, *Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772-1825* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986); Id., *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁶ TsDIAK, fond 442, opys 620, spr. 323, ark. 28-28v.

Moreover, Ignatyev worried that the choice of emigration candidates lay entirely with the JCA. He was sure that the association was picking the most energetic, skillful, and well-off Jews, those fit for manual labor. The governor feared that the “best” Jews were leaving and the “worst” remained in Russia and continued to be a heavy burden for the state. Ignatyev was also concerned that Russia’s political rivals would compare the future Russian-Jewish affluent diasporas with the impoverished Jewish communities left in the Pale and use this image against Russia in the international arena. As a solution, the governor proposed to oblige the JCA to send away at least some percentage of the poor Jews even if the Russian government had to subsidize their travel using the kosher meat tax.³⁷ Indeed, a booklet titled *The Price List for the Russian Railways*, published in 1893, described discounts for JCA’s emigrants in the price of train tickets and baggage delivery until the border.³⁸

On May 8, 1892, Tsar Alexander III approved guidelines that regulated the JCA’s activities in the empire. Throughout the Pale, the JCA could establish offices where Jewish emigrants could receive free exit permits to leave Russia forever. The lucky recipients of these permits also got an exemption from military and other civil duties. The government could close the JCA if: it did not develop its activities sufficiently in the next two years; neighboring countries refused to accept Jews; Jewish emigrants returned to Russia before becoming citizens of other countries.³⁹ Although the government did not officially approve the Jews’ departure, its eagerness to facilitate the JCA’s work and punish it for not being effective enough indicates the authorities’ willingness to promote Jewish emigration. Tsarist bureaucrats even took care of the emigrants’ safety and assigned an essential role in Jewish resettlement to the local police. Policemen had to ensure that the emigrants’ trip to the border was safe, and that Jews were protected from popular unrest. At the same time, they had to make sure that the Jews left the country within one month after receiving exit permits.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., ark. 29-30.

³⁸ RGIA, fond 1284, opis 224, delo 528, l. 102.

³⁹ Ibid., delo 619, ll. 1-2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., l. 4.

The government took measures to ensure that Jewish emigrants did not leave behind anything that could make them return to Russia. Therefore, it obliged the JCA to make accurate lists of Jewish emigrants' family members and prevent them from leaving behind children, elderly, or disabled people, who might become a burden for the state. The JCA also had to gather full information about the emigrants' personal property and real estate to guarantee that the migrants did not have any debts, potentially affecting the state's finances. The imperial government instructed the JCA to carry out this inspection in a speedy manner so "it would not become an obstacle to the timely departure of Jewish emigrants and especially those of draftable age."⁴¹ To encourage Jewish emigration, Durnovo even advised the cancellation of fines for dodging conscription and other kinds of sanctions in case departing Jews had debts but did not have any property that they could sell to pay the fines.⁴²

The government did adhere to these obligations and often canceled the fines imposed on Jewish emigrants, but only under the condition that they would leave Russia forever. In 1911, the Ministry of Interior, with the consent of the Ministry of Finance, canceled the 600-ruble fine imposed on a Jewish landowner,⁴³ Leivik Shub, and his family, a wife and five children, from the colony "V'iun" in the Mogilev governorate.⁴⁴ The government disregarded the fact that Shub was fined when two of his older sons evaded military service. To prevent delays in their departure, the Ministry issued exit permits to the Shub family and instructed them to never return to Russia.⁴⁵ Conversely, the government rejected petitions for exit permits from those Jews who could likely reenter the Tsarist empire. Vita Fainberg

⁴¹ Ibid., ll. 3-3v.

⁴² Ibid., ll. 6v-7.

⁴³ This was an enormous amount of money in the Russian Empire at that time. Immigrants who did not want to wait for exit permits, had to pay 15 rubles to get a passport, which not everyone could afford. A shoemaker's monthly wage in 1912 was, for example, 25 rubles (Alroey, "Bureaucracy, Agents, and Swindlers," 215). Hans Rogger estimates that the yearly budget of a Jewish family living in a small town was around 300 rubles (Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics*, 183). Therefore, 600 rubles was a significant amount of money. The fact that the Russian state decided to cancel such a debt reflected a strong willingness to get rid of its Jewish population.

⁴⁴ According to Russian law, Jews could not own land, except in rare occasions.

⁴⁵ RGIA, fond 1284, opis 224, delo 528, ll. 214-214v, 218-218v.

from the Minsk governorate applied for an exit permit the same year as Leivik Shub. Her request, however, was rejected by the Minsk governor since the police found out that Vita was not going to abandon Russia forever but planned to work abroad for some time and then return home.⁴⁶ Considering all the concessions that the Russian government made to the JCA, we can conclude that they both worked for the same goal: sending Russian Jews overseas, far away from the Tsarist empire.

However, in 1909, the Ministry of Interior noticed that the JCA Central Committee in St. Petersburg had stopped sending minutes of its meetings and since 1896 had limited the information on its activities to yearly reports. Despite Alexander III's instructions to keep the JCA under close control, the Ministry noticed JCA's violations only 13 years later, when the Police Department took charge over all Jewish matters from the Department of General Affairs.⁴⁷ The JCA quickly reacted to the criticism and provided all the missing reports in the same year.⁴⁸

After receiving the documents, government officials closely inspected them and concluded that the JCA had significantly departed from the original goal of assisting Jewish resettlement from Russia to other countries. Instead, the association helped improve the economic situation of the masses of poor Jews within the Russian Empire itself. It gave loans to local Jewish agricultural colonies, financed small businesses, and sponsored primary and vocational schools. Moreover, instead of issuing exit permits that were "one-way" tickets to exit Russia, the JCA assisted Jews in obtaining passports that allowed them to travel back and forth across the border. Worse, the JCA also helped retired soldiers and artisans to settle in the inner Russian provinces. The government, therefore, decided to follow JCA's activities more closely in the future.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., ll. 228-228v.

⁴⁷ Both departments operated within the Ministry of Interior.

⁴⁸ RGIA, fond 1284, opis 224, d. 619, l. 10v.

⁴⁹ Ibid., ll. 11, 15v, 16-17.

In 1913, the JCA Central Committee responded to the concerns and explained that they had to move beyond the strict rules created more than twenty years earlier due to the fast modernization of life in the Tsarist empire. The Committee stressed that it could no longer function under the 1892 regulations. The head of the association, Mark Warshawski, emphasized that “the emigrant mass” contained many “elements” not yet ready for labor in the new countries, which in turn set standards for “the quality of the emigrant material.” Physically strong, well-off people with some knowledge of crafts and agriculture had a much greater chance of settling in the countries across the ocean, and the JCA had to take this into account. Warshawski assured that the JCA leaders correctly and timely evaluated the rising difficulties of immigration and adaptation. They started preparing “perfect” emigrants that entered new countries with no problems and better adjusted to new conditions. The association offered English classes, sponsored artisan and agricultural education, and financed emigrants for the sole purpose of making the Russian-Jewish emigrants more competitive. Were it not for these efforts, cases of remigration would happen much more frequently.⁵⁰

To legalize its previous violations of the 1892 rules, in 1913 the JCA sent a memorandum to the Russian government, asking for a revision of the earlier regulations that would make them more applicable to life in the modern world. The association insisted that substituting exit permits with passports would help speed up resettlement and limit illegal agents’ activities, especially in remote small towns. The waiting period also had to become shorter; otherwise, emigrants could change their minds concerning resettlement. To make its patronage more appealing to Jews, the JCA asked the government to extend the time for travel preparation after receiving exit permits from one month to three, which would give emigrants more time to sell their property. Finally, the JCA asked that exit passes be issued to individuals and not to entire families, since often heads of the family emigrated first and then, after earning some capital, invited their relatives to join them. All these changes, the memorandum assured, would help facilitate emigration and increase the number of migrants, especially to the United States, which was already the primary immigration destination. In the current iteration,

⁵⁰ Ibid., ll. 48-50, 57-57v, 64.

the 1892 rules lacked clarity, did not give the JCA representatives sufficient authority and hindered the association's work.⁵¹

The government found the JCA's explanations convincing and issued an addendum to the 1892 rules. The Tsarist bureaucrats readily accepted all the points mentioned in the JCA's appeal, and the new addition justified all measures the JCA took without the authorities' sanction in the previous years. The government added categories of Jews eligible for getting exit permits and increased the period between obtaining the documents and the actual departure to three months. Moreover, it granted the JCA the right to publish emigration brochures and provide medical treatment to potential emigrants, all of which evidenced the government's desire to send its Jewish population away from the empire.⁵² However, the JCA had to make some compromises and stopped financing loan and savings associations.⁵³

Further correspondence between Russian officials suggests that had it not been for World War I, the government would have granted the JCA even more authority. On March 18, 1914, on the eve of the war, one official of the Department of General Affairs, Senior Counselor Putilov, praised the JCA's work highly in his report to the Ministry of Interior. Given its contribution to the development of productive labor among Jews and its efforts to increase Jewish emigration, the Ministry agreed to expand the JCA's functions. Although the officials admitted the need to keep the JCA under close control, they concluded that the organization's contribution to promoting Jewish emigration served the government's purposes.⁵⁴

This collaboration between the Russian government and the Jewish Colonization Association is one of the very few examples in which the state openly facilitated Jewish emigration. Russian bureaucrats were ready to compromise and agree to the JCA's demands for the sake of increasing Jewish emigration rates. However, they had one reservation. Eager to send away the poorest among Jews, the state

⁵¹ Ibid., ll. 56-56v, 63-64v.

⁵² Ibid., ll. 66-66v.

⁵³ Ibid., l. 44.

⁵⁴ Ibid., ll. 85-86.

wanted the JCA to arrange their departure first, even if the government would have to provide partial financing. However, officials often suspected other Jewish emigration organizations of disloyalty and severely punished them.

Tolerable Only if Controllable: The Government's Attitudes Towards Other Agents

While the Russian government explicitly or implicitly encouraged emigration to America, it viewed nationalist movements, like Zionism and territorialism, as a danger to the regime. On June 24, 1903, the Minister of the Interior, Vyacheslav von Plehve, sent a top-secret circular letter to all imperial governors, *gradonachalniki* (mayors), and police chiefs. Von Plehve believed that Zionists were postponing the creation of a Jewish settlement in Palestine to the distant future and were focusing instead on strengthening the Jewish national idea in the Russian Empire. The Minister insisted that such ideology halted Jewish assimilation and stoked tension between Jews and other nationalities, which contradicted the Russian statehood principles. Von Plehve urged local bureaucrats of all ranks to report all Zionist endeavors and oppose the Zionist movement's development in their governorates, towns, and districts. The forbidden activities included Zionist propaganda, public gatherings, *s'ezdy* (conventions), fundraising, and educational activities. Moreover, local authorities had to make sure that Jewish community leaders and rabbis did not share the Zionist ideology.⁵⁵

Therefore, unlike the JCA, the Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO), with headquarters in Warsaw, had a thorny path to legalization in the Tsarist empire. In 1907, the ITO's statute provoked the government's suspicion because its goal was to acquire free territories outside of Europe, where Jews who did not want to stay in their birth countries could resettle and live autonomously. The St. Petersburg city governor thought ITO's commitment to concentrate Jews in one territory would facilitate "national segregation of the Jewish masses." The official

⁵⁵ GARF, fond 102, opis 99, delo 143, ll. 1-2v [CAHJP HMF 81].

saw this as a Zionist sentiment, and since the empire forbade Zionist organizations in 1903, he endorsed the organization's dissolution.⁵⁶

The Ministry of Interior became especially interested in ITO's activities after the organization transferred its headquarters to Kyiv. In 1908, in response to the Ministry of Interior's inquiries, the Kyiv deputy governor explained that initially the organization shared the Zionist ideology, but after Theodor Herzl's death in 1904 it moved to Israel Zangwill's positions and rejected Palestine as the only possible place for an autonomous Jewish settlement. The deputy governor informed the Ministry that the ITO attempted to direct Jewish emigration to the Galveston port in Texas, made efforts to provide security for migrants during the trip and help them find a job upon arrival. Although the governor admitted that the local authorities had never detained ITO's head and board members for any political offenses, in his view they still belonged to the left-wing parties hostile to the Russian government, and therefore ITO's continued existence was not desirable for the state.⁵⁷ A charity theater performance held in Odessa on June 30, 1909, further undermined ITO's reputation, since the local police suspected the organizers of collecting money for political emigrants.⁵⁸

In 1908, the Governing Senate strongly recommended closing the ITO as an organization closely associated with the Zionist ideology.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the authorities feared that the ITO could focus its efforts beyond emigration matters and direct them towards advocating Jewish emancipation and improving Jewish families' economic condition in Russia.⁶⁰ The ITO's leadership, for their part, made efforts to justify its ideology and assure the state of its loyalty. They even tried to operate under different names (such as the Jewish Emigration Territorialist Organization, the Jewish Resettlement Society, and the Jewish Emigration Association). However, the authorities continued to associate this organization with Zionism, and the ITO never achieved the same level of trust and

⁵⁶ Ibid., delo 209, ll. 1b-1bv.

⁵⁷ Ibid., listy 13-14.

⁵⁸ DAOO, fond 2, opys 7, spr. 133, ark. 25.

⁵⁹ RGIA, fond 1284, opis 224, delo 209, l. 150.

⁶⁰ DAOO, fond 2, opys 7, spr. 133, ark. 139v-140.

power as the JCA.⁶¹ Moreover, the government refused to legalize another organization, “The Informational Bureau for Jewish Emigrants,” because bureaucrats suspected its leaders belonged to the far-left end of the political spectrum. Although the IBJE petitioned the Odessa town governor repeatedly in 1912-1913 and amended their statute several times according to the authorities’ demands, the Minister of Interior kept finding new excuses not to legalize the organization.⁶²

The government attempted to suppress illegal emigration too. In this case, the authorities worried that emigration agents incited Polish, German, Ukrainian, and Russian peasants to emigrate when the Russian Empire needed their labor. In 1896, the Minister of Interior, Ivan Goremykin, raised the issue of the harmfulness of illegal emigration and its undesirable impact on the local population and asked his subordinates to take measures against it.⁶³ The police did detain illegal agents from time to time but often released them because of the lack of evidence.

The following story illustrates the authorities’ permissive attitude towards illegal Jewish emigration. In 1901, the Rovno⁶⁴ police discovered a secret Jewish emigration company and accused its members, Shimon-Haim Rafman, Itsko Makh, and Moshka Niman, of encouraging the local population to emigrate to America and assisting them in this process. However, they escaped punishment because the court did not find evidence of any criminal offense.⁶⁵ A year later, the police discovered that the agents continued to help Jewish conscripts, German colonists, and criminals to cross Russia’s western border. This time, they received a warning, but nothing more.⁶⁶ After repeated complaints, the gendarme department forbade Niman, Rafman, and Makh to reside in southwestern governorates for three years, starting from May 8, 1904.⁶⁷

⁶¹ RGIA, fond 1284, opis 224, delo 209, ll. 167-169v, 201, 203-205, 261.

⁶² DAOO, fond 2, opys 7, spr. 499, ark. 1-3v, 10-10v, 12, 14, 21, 24.

⁶³ TsDIAK, fond 442, opys 620, spr. 323, ark. 126-127v.

⁶⁴ Present-day Rivne, Ukraine.

⁶⁵ TsDIAK, fond 442, opys 620, spr. 592, ark. 2-4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., ark. 5, 11.

⁶⁷ Ibid., ark. 12.

The punished agents, however, petitioned for the penalty to be canceled. Niman demanded a reexamination because the local police officer Todorovich, who had already been fired, was biased.⁶⁸ The Minister of the Imperial Court investigated the case and found out that the local population considered Niman a respected and honest man, and he had never been convicted before. Therefore, the Chamberlain agreed to let Niman return to the southwest in a decree of October 12, 1904.⁶⁹ Rafman (who in some documents is also mentioned as Reif) went even further and appealed directly to the Emperor. He recognized that he earned a living assisting Jews to leave for America but did so without any political motives. This activity caused no harm, he insisted, since the government itself did not oppose Jewish emigration, and the law did not forbid assistance to inexperienced Jews.⁷⁰ The Ministry of Interior granted him the right to return home on October 8, 1904.⁷¹ Finally, Makh came back to Rovno on December 16, 1904, thanks to the petition of his wife, Sura, who explained that she and her five children could not survive without Itsko's salary.⁷² The three detainees' return to their working routine within a few months clearly showed the state's indifference towards this kind of offense. Niman was arrested again in 1907, but this time because the police were concerned that he was helping Russian peasants, whose departure was undesirable, unlike Jewish emigration.⁷³

Sometimes, the authorities punished Jews for speaking up against emigration. In 1892, an Odessa resident, David Sloushch, received a telegram from the Konigsberg official rabbi and the head of the Jewish Emigration Committee, Doctor Bamberg. He asked to spread the news that the American ports had closed their gates to Jews. Therefore, emigration committees also had to shut down their activities temporarily. Sloushch read the telegram's content in the local prayer house and asked several people to do the same in other synagogues and houses of prayer. Unable to openly disapprove of the telegram's content, the local police convicted Sloushch for reading a non-religious proclamation in a religious institution. Since

⁶⁸ Ibid., ark. 20-20v.

⁶⁹ Ibid., ark. 53.

⁷⁰ Ibid., ark. 46-47v.

⁷¹ Ibid., ark. 45.

⁷² Ibid., ark. 67.

⁷³ Ibid., ark. 79v-80v.

this contradicted the rules set out by the Department of Spiritual Affairs for Foreign Confessions, Sloushch received a 40-ruble fine.⁷⁴ The fine's spiritual undertone was probably an excuse. Odessa, as a big port, played a significant role in the Jewish emigration movement. Rumors about the closure of foreign ports and emigration committees could significantly reduce the number of potential migrants, which went against the government's interests.

As we have seen, the Russian government was ready to tolerate Jewish emigration only when it happened under its control. Although the state favored the Jewish Colonization Association, it banned other emigration agencies because they could not prove their loyalty. The police persecuted illegal emigration agents only when they sent away useful workforce—Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian peasants. Conversely, the authorities discouraged everything that could detain Jews from leaving, like improving living conditions in the Pale or spreading rumors about entrance being denied in immigration countries.

Conclusions

The Russian government's attitude towards Jewish emigration was inconsistent—national policies restricted emigration, but local authorities often acted permissively. Scholars have not reached a consensus yet on why the Tsarist regime failed to develop emigration laws to regulate the border crossing, which was happening on a large scale anyway. The question of whether the Russian state wanted Jews to leave or not is also debated. Contemporary Jewish historians, who suffered from the Russian Empire's anti-emancipation actions, believed that the state wanted to get rid of the Jews. Later, scholars took a more critical and sober approach and concluded that the government's actions revealed its unreadiness to take a decisive step towards Jewish expulsion.

However, the newly available archival documents reveal the Russian authorities' tendency to close their eyes to Jewish clandestine emigration, further proving their

⁷⁴ DAOO, fond 2, opys 4.1, spr. 3716, ark. 1-2, 7-9.

desire to reduce the Jewish population in the Tsarist empire. The repressive measures against emigration agents and other suspicious propagandists of resettlement indicate that the Russian government encouraged Jewish emigration as long as it was under the authorities' control. Therefore, the archival materials reflect the complexity of the Russian policies towards Jewish migration. While the authorities wanted to decrease the number of the Jewish population in Russia, they also had to consider emigration of other nationalities, the empire's relationships with neighboring countries, and Russia's image in the international arena. Under these circumstances, the Russian government had to play a double game: while it banned emigration officially, it supported Jewish resettlement in practice.

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