

Kiev District Commission of the Jewish Public Committee
for Relief to Victims of Pogroms
State Archive of the Kiev Oblast
Fond FR-3050

*By Vladimir Danilenko,
Director of the State Archive
of the Kiev Oblast*

The State Archive of the Kiev Oblast (GAKO) hosts a collection designated as FR-3050 and entitled "Kiev District Commission of the Jewish Public Committee for the Provision of Aid to Victims of Pogroms." The collection includes 879 files covering 1920-1924. It remained classified and inaccessible to researchers for many years. In 1990-1991, the collection was declassified and made generally accessible.

The fratricidal war caused by the 1917 coup engulfed virtually the entire territory of the former Russian Empire, leaving a trail of blood across Russia and Ukraine. Civil war in Ukraine also resulted in pogroms that occurred where Jewish urban and rural populations were pillaged by the troops. In the course of the war, Ukraine was repeatedly swept by waves of pogroms initiated by units of the Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the White Movement and the Red Army, though these armies never officially proclaimed anti-Semitic slogans. Another more serious and active force in the pogroms was represented by members of the peasant insurgent movement notorious for its massive destruction, cruelty and moral degradation.

Vladimir Vinnichenko, one of the leaders of the 1817-1921 revolution in Ukraine and political and public figure and author, said about the pogroms:

"The main causes of this horrible and disgusting phenomenon consists above all in the age-long ignorance, the downtrodden and tormented condition of ordinary men and women (especially peasants). Always taking advantage of this ignorance was the criminal element back during the tsarism. It was very easy to direct dark impulses against Jewry, and the ringleaders took advantage of the fact." ¹

American historian Taras Gunchak singles out yet another cause of the pogroms in his book "Simon Petliura and the Jews." He writes that violence against Jews became synonymous in the minds of peasants with the struggle against the Bolsheviks, many of whom, especially in leading positions, were Jews.

¹ Vladimir Vinnichenko. "*Vozrozhdenie natsij*," vol. III, ch. VI, section 4.

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An article in *Ukrainskaia tribuna* on September 07, 1921 about the attitude toward Jews among "a considerable proportion of Ukrainian peasants" says: "The new phenomenon in the life of Ukraine is Bolshevism and a broad, from the viewpoint of the people, involvement of Jews in it. Bolshevism erodes folkways, Jews study Bolshevism and there you have the grounds for irreconcilable enmity . Bolsheviks are Jews; the commune is their handy work." ²

The first pogroms broke out as early as January 1918 (Novgorod-Volynsk), but the main wave coincided with the offensive launched by the troops of the Central Ukrainian Rada against the Bolsheviks in February-March along the route between Zhitomir and Kiev. Anti-Semitic and pogrom sentiments were running high among the ranks of Ukrainian troops. On Feb. 17, the *Haidamaks* ³ attacked Jews at the rail stations of Sarny and Korosten and murdered many of them. Then, in late February in Berdichev, 20 Jews fell victim to pogroms. The survivors were made to pay 5 million rubles.

But the longer and more dramatic pogroms occurred in Kiev. As soon as the *Haidamaks* entered Kiev, they launched a vigorous campaign to incite the population to pogroms; there was a wave of arrests and executions by a firing squad. The worst affected were Jewish residents in the Podol and Demievka suburbs. According to records of the City Duma Commission, there were, between March 1 and March 8 alone, 172 cases of violence against Jews: 22 of them were murdered, 11 were tortured, 3 were raped, 19 were threatened with execution, 28 were arrested and subsequently lost, 16 were missing, etc.

The wave of pogroms in March and April rolled across a number of localities in the Kiev provinces: Korsun, Brusilov, Bucha, Gostomel, Khabnoe, Brovary and Gogolevo. Bloodshed excesses took place at rail stations along the lines between Kiev and Poltava and Kiev and Bakhmach.

In addition to pogroms staged by the Ukrainian Army, there were numerous other pogroms involving peasants, yet another and even more formidable force in the pogrom movement. Pogroms staged by peasants in 1918 were comparatively rare and sporadic. They became systematic in 1919. The first pogroms began in January 1919 in the town of Ovruche of the Volynia province and in neighboring villages. For two weeks, the gangs led by Ataman Kozyr-Zyrka conducted pogroms against Jews; on Jan 16 near a rail station, they executed 32 people. Simultaneous pogroms took place in Zhitomir, Berdichev, Cherniakhov and other places.

In February 1919 pogroms reached the Kiev, Poltava and Kherson provinces. In May, after the proclamation of the "Universal" by Ataman Grigor'ev and the start of an anti-Bolshevik uprising, they began on a massive scale (30 against 3 in March, and 7 in April in the Kiev province alone).

² FR-3050, *opis 1, delo 37*, p. 22.

³ *Haidamaks* (robbers or rebels in Turkish) were members of Ukrainian military units of the Central Rada and the Directory.

The uprising was caused by the requisitioning of grain by force, forced collectivization, monopolization by the Bolsheviks of government, punitive raids by Ukraine's Security forces against peasants, etc. The "Universal" called for a people's government without Communists and for Ukraine for the Ukrainians. Grigor'ev's supporters captured many urban and rural centers between May 9 and May 29. In most of them, they staged pogroms against the Jews.

A leaflet issued for the anniversary of Grigor'ev-led pogrom, signed by the Committee for Relief to the Victims of the Pogrom in Zolotonosha *uezd* (a subdivision of the province) of the Kiev province says:

"The path of the Russian Revolution before the overthrow of autocracy is drenched in Jewish blood; more than one thousand Jews, fighters for freedom, died in jails, but all that pales in comparison to the horrors, exquisite cruelty and tortures of the time of the Inquisition that Jews have been subjected to over the last year in Ukraine. "

A historian of the revolution in Ukraine would have to open this black book of the boundless sea of trouble and sufferings that fell to the lot of Jews regardless of their class, sex, age and political views over this last year and to stand without a doubt in consternation at the atrocities to which human beasts of the 20th century descended.

"The wave of shocking and unprecedented for their hellish cruelty pogroms against Jews that rolled across Ukraine beginning in early 1919 also swept across our own *uezd* .

"On the anniversary of the Grigor'ev-led pogrom in our town, let us remember those who died the death of martyrs, the innocent, chance victims and wish they may rest in peace." Next there follow lists of those who died at the hands of the gangs of supporters of Grigor'ev, Denikin, Tiutiunnik and others. ⁴

A brief decline in the number of pogroms in June (16) was followed by an upswing in the next three months: July, 27; August, 40; September, 22.

All in all, in the Kiev province, pogroms took place in 231 populated areas (402 areas around Ukraine), or 57 percent. Some were pogromed several times. In Pereiaslav, for example, every Jewish apartment was visited by Zeliony's gangs 20 or 30 times a day. Boguslav was won and lost five times, and each time the change of government was accompanied by plunder and pogroms.

The pogroms in Belaia Tserkov were started by Petliura's gangs and continued by Zeliony's men and Terek Cossacks. Pogroms involved the mass murder of Jews. In Fastov, they killed 1,000; in Belaia Tserkov, 300; in Vasilkov, 110. All in all, according to incomplete data, at least 100,000 Jews were killed in Ukraine in the pogroms. The appeal "To the Jewish Poor Pogromed in Ukraine" signed by M. Golodets, a special authorized representative (commissioner) of the People's Commissariat for Ethnic Affairs and the Central Jewish Commissariat says:

⁴ FR-3050, *opis* 1, *delo* 39, p. 14, 14 *ob*

"There are no words in human vocabulary to describe all the horrors of the latest pogroms and everything that Ukraine's Jewry has experienced.

"The streets of towns and villages are drenched in the blood of the murdered old people, women and children.

"The pools of blood are still there on the pavement, as are the dried brains of small children stuck to the walls of houses and fences which are the glaring signs of the heart-rendering horrors, the living witnesses of the eternal disgrace - the raped girls and wives and those beaten within an inch of their life and old people with massive injuries dumped in hospitals who were blasphemously tormented by the brazen thugs are calling for vengeance -" ⁵

In 1920, pogroms began to decline. They had virtually ceased by the end of 1921. In a bid to prevent pogroms, the Jewish community in Kiev proposed, as early as August 1918 to the government of Hetman Skoropadsky ⁶ that they issue an appeal to the population against pogroms, form an investigation commission, published a bill calling for the payment of damages to the victimized part of the population appropriate 300,000 rubles for urgent aid among other measures. All these proposals were in vain; the hetman's government did nothing to prevent pogroms or provide any aid. The Kiev community took the initiative to set up a socialist commission for legal, administrative and monetary assistance to the Jews that became victims during the transitional period in Ukraine. The commission elected a bureau and went to work, but it could not accomplish its objectives. What it could do was mostly collect material and record pogroms and it could do nothing to have the pogroms stopped.

In June 1920, the Kiev Regional Commission of the Jewish Public Committee for the Provision of Aid to Victims of Pogroms was established. ⁷ Aid to pogrom victims had been provided by a number of public organizations: OZE (society for health of the Jews), EKOPO (Jewish commission for aid to victims of the war and pogroms), ORT (society for agriculture and artisan work among the Jews), Kultur-Liga, BUND, United Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, Poalei-Tsion and SETMASS (Union of Jewish Toiling Masses). When American delegates of the Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) visited Russia and promised support for a unified body, it provided the impetus to create the much-needed coordinated operations.

⁵ FR-3050, *opis* 1, *delo* 3,7, p.121.

⁶ In late April 1918. The Central Rada was disbanded by the German troops and Pavlo Skoropadskii was installed as hetman of Ukraine

⁷ FR-3050, *opis* 1, *delo* 1, p. 3.

June 1920 saw the organization in Moscow of the All-Russia Jewish Public Committee for Aid to the Pogromed (Evobshchestkom), made up of representatives of all public and political organizations that were in operation. It was followed by the creation of the Kiev District Commission. Later, Bergman and Novakovskii authorized representatives of the Moscow committee arrived in Kharkov and organized the All-Ukraine Jewish Committee (Ebobkom). Ukraine was divided into three regions: Kiev, Odessa and Kharkov. The commission's objective was to provide monetary, medical and legal aid to the Jewish population that suffered in the 1919-1920 pogroms and distribute parcels and money sent in from America. Its operation covered the Kiev, Podolye, Volynia and Chernigov provinces. It was subordinated to the All-Ukraine Jewish Public Committee for Aid to Pogrom Victims in Kharkov.

Provincial commissioners were appointed to organize and supervise the work. In the Kiev province, there were commissioners in Boguslav, Belaia Tserkov, Lipovets, Uman, Tarashcha, Berdichev, Skvir, Zvenigorodok, Shpol, Padomysl, Cherkasy, Chernobyl and Pereiaslav.

The committee operated under the difficult conditions of a dislocation in the economy (especially on transport) and banditry. Its effectiveness was also impaired by limited funds which were not provided on a timely basis and by the location of the headquarters established too far away from the provincial offices.

When there were no more pogroms on a large scale by the middle of 1921, the commission was faced with new objectives: the provision of aid to victims of pogroms, care for homeless children, medical care and vocational training for the victims, and helping locate lost relations.

The Kiev regional commission was disbanded in 1924, or thereabouts. It proved impossible to establish precisely when it was closed down from the documents in this collection.

Documents in the FR-3050 collection contain a vast body of informative, valuable data. The files include the charter and the statute of the committee; circular letters of the commission for the provision for relief to pogrom victims; reports describing the commissioners' activities; records of the investigation into charges of pogroms; records of the revolutionary tribunal and of refugee meetings of the emigration bureau; lists of the survivors and of the killed; witnesses' accounts, newspaper cuttings; figures of the pogroms in the Kiev, Odessa, Podolye, Volyn', Nikolayev, Poltava, Minsk, Gomel, Kharkov, Kherson, and Chernigov provinces and information about the refugees along the border with Romania. There is also information on the organization and operation of children's homes, kindergartens, orphanages, vocational schools, artels and workshops, hospitals, pharmacies, canteens, homes for disabled persons, etc for the Jewish population affected by pogroms.

Delos 47, 53, 155 (*opis'* 1) contain information on the self-defense detachments in the towns of Boguslav and Steblev; *delo* No. 37 contains military

orders and leaflets signed by S. Petliura, the chieftains Zeliony, Struk, Pegii, Chert, Khmara, Marusia, among others. Here is one such order:

To the Dashev Yid community

I thereby order to immediately collect for the needs of the detachment entrusted to me 4 million in Soviet money, 40 pairs of high boots for *starshinas* (Cossack commanders), 50 suits for *starshinas*, 50 pairs of new underwear, leather for making 50 saddles, 1 *pood* (16.381 kg) of soap, 100 boxes of matches, 1 *pood* of fine strong tobacco and cigarette paper, 4 *buckets* (1 *bucket* is 12.299 liters) of fine strong *hori/ka* (Ukrainian vodka).

All this must be in readiness not later than Friday, July 2, and issued to the person who will produce a note bearing my signature and seal.

Failing to do as instructed above, your entire township will be destroyed.

Col. Lykho,
Ataman of the uprising of four provinces

Lt. Shevchenko
Aide-de camp.⁸

This same *De/o* contains Boris Savinkov's statement in connection with the complaint from the Polish general, Stanislaw Bulach-Balachowicz, about assistance with the pogroms against Jews.

There is also correspondence with American representatives about the operation of "Joint" and ARA, correspondence with the American bureau of the Jewish public committee on looking for relations, rules for leaving for and entering America, a report on Jewish emigration to America and Palestine, certificates, lists and questionnaires of those who left for America and personal files of members of the commission.

Evidence contained in the documents of this collection allows researchers to take a deeper look at this period in Ukrainian history that, according to Ukrainian historian Volodymir Serheichuk, has been scantily studied. The vast number of persons mentioned in the documents should be great of interest to scholars. To learn about the history of their people and ancestors.

The documents are in Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish.

⁸ FR-3050, *opis* 1, *delo* 37, p. 156.

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