

II

ANTI-SEMITES ON TRIAL

I.

ONE EARLY MORNING IN THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER, I left the city of Zdolbunovo, in the Polish Ukraine, and late in the afternoon of that day I was already strolling along the Kreshchatic, the main street in the most renowned city of the Soviet Ukraine—Kiev.

Again in Kiev after sixteen years. It seems as though it were yesterday. Physically, in spite of the Revolution, the radical social and economic changes, the city has hardly changed. It still retains its exotic, essentially Ukrainian charm.

To a child from the province as I was when I first visited Kiev years ago, the city was an endless source of wonder. The Kreshchatic, the by now well-known river Dnieper, the Pecherskaya Lavra—an ancient monastery where the relics of Russian saints are kept and where even to this day devout Russians stream in pilgrimage—all these, just as the Statue of Liberty and the Capitol in Washington are known to the American child, were familiar things to every Russian child in my day. They were eulogized and glorified in every elementary textbook. What impressed me most, however, when I first visited Kiev, was

Brodsky's synagogue, then renowned throughout the country as the biggest synagogue in the world.

The famous Jewish millionaire, Brodsky, as well as his synagogue, was always a welcome topic for discussion wherever provincial Jews gathered. In our synagogue, for instance, on Saturday toward evening, before prayer commenced, the worshippers, among other things would debate endlessly: "Who is richer, Brodsky or Rothschild?", or, "How many thousands of roubles must Brodsky have spent on his synagogue?"

On every occasion that I visited Kiev, I was taken to this synagogue. Years later, when I lived in the neighborhood of the Empire State building, the synagogue still seemed to me as a wonder of wonders.

My memories of Kiev are more than sixteen years old. I was twelve years old when the civil war prevented us from visiting our relatives who lived in a town nearby. Needless to say, the world has changed a great deal since then. Many things that were glorified in Old Russia acquired new meaning in New Russia. Some lost their significance altogether. The Pecherskaya Lavra, once the holiest place in Russia, is now an anti-religious museum. Brodsky's synagogue became simply a Jewish Workers' Club and what once seemed to me a grand structure was nothing but a huge brick house, the kind one can see anywhere in Brooklyn.

Indeed, romantic pictures of my childhood faded into insignificance when I came face to face with them sixteen years later.

All that I found out later. Upon the second day of my arrival to Kiev I set out to visit the synagogue. It was early in the morning. The inhabitants of the city were on their way to work. There was strong commotion everywhere. This was something new, for in the old days Kiev was noted as a languid, lazy city. Now the street cars were overcrowded. As in Moscow and the rest of Russia, the transportation facilities were still inadequate. (Ask any Russian boy of eight and he will tell you that transportation is still the weakest link in the Five-Year Plan.) One had to be a real acrobat to get into a car. When I finally managed to elbow my way inside one, every button on my coat was gone. In the meanwhile, an argument started between a city woman and a *kolhoznitsa* (peasant woman).

"Citizen *kolhoznitsa*," cried the city woman, "where do you push yourself with your sack?"

"None of your business, comrade, I push where I feel like."

"*Damochka!*" (lady.)

"Why do you insult me, comrade? You think that if I am not a city damsel, because I don't wear spectacles and carry a portfolio under my arm I am already a *damochka*."

"Comrades, citizens, *prokhdite vperiod!*" (move forward) I cried trying to elbow my way to the exit. The *damochka* and the city comrade paid no attention to my plea. In a moment, everyone joined the quarrel. The debate became heated. It was for the

first time that I realized what a famous Soviet poet meant when he exclaimed: "There is a revolution in Russia—all Russia is a huge meeting!" . . .

An impromptu meeting was taking place before my very eyes. A young worker in a leather cap and jacket was shouting:

"Oh, those ignorant country people! Why in the devil do they flock to the city?"

"Look at him, the aristocrat," responded a bearded peasant, apparently the husband of the *kolhoznitsa*, "and your city females, are they any better? We know those . . ."

"*Pozhaluista nie vyrzhaisia* (please don't curse) citizen," interrupted the young worker.

"So . . . so . . .," put in the *kolhoznitsa*, "we can't even open our mouths any more. Only Jews are allowed to talk these days. Speak, speak, *golubchik* (dove), it is your Government now; you are running the country."

In the excitement she stuck her hand under her kerchief and began to scratch her head violently. Then she spat out in disgust.

A murmur of disapproval ran through the car. The fellow in the leather jacket caught the note and once more went after the unhappy peasant woman.

"Look, comrades," he cried, "on the sixteenth year of the Revolution she has not yet learned even the most elementary rules of hygiene. Here, comrade *kolhoznitsa*, is a poster. Do you see it? On it is written, black on white: 'Don't spit because it spreads disease. Offenders will be fined!' You didn't know that, eh? But you know how to repeat fairy tales

about Jews running this country. I'll bet that you don't even know what kind of a country this is. Have you ever read Ilitch (Lenin)? Of course not. Did you know that this is a proletarian country where Jews and Gentiles are alike? Of course not. Besides, citizen, so that you may sleep in peace, let me introduce myself: Ivan Ivanovich Ivanoff, not a Jew."

We all shook with laughter. The peasant woman was as red as a lobster. It was obvious that she did not feel very comfortable. When I finally got off the car, she was still being given a lesson in hygiene, politeness and racial tolerance.

This, to be sure, was not an isolated incident in Russia. It did not take me long to discover anti-Semitism there. The older generation retained it from the old days along with other "worldly goods." It crops up everywhere, sometimes in the most unexpected places. Even among members of the Communist Party one encounters this prejudice. One encounters it also in the coöperative stores, in the factories as well as in the theatres.

Indeed, anti-Semitism is still in existence in Russia. I knew that even before I went there. What interested me most, however, was the highly reputed methods that the Soviet Government is applying to eradicate it.

Since the first day of the Revolution, in fact even before, the Bolsheviks have been carrying on an educational campaign against racial animosity. Famous Soviet leaders—Lenin, Stalin, Kalinin and Lunacharsky—have written numerous books and pamphlets against anti-Semitism. This educational cam-

paign has not ceased for a moment. The newspapers devote much space to exposés of anti-Semites. Lectures are delivered on this subject at clubs, factories and collective farms. Even Soviet literature and the theatre have been mobilized in the fight against the anti-Semitic curse.

The following dialogue, taken from a play by Maltzev that was presented throughout Russia, sums up the attitude of the Soviet Government toward the Jewish question. Like much of Soviet art and literature, it is not a product of the author's imagination, but represents a true incident.

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Three Russians—Raznochintseva, formerly the wife of a colonel in the Tsar's army, now working at *Zags* (Soviet registration bureau of marriages, divorces, births, deaths); Boychenko, a factory worker; and Gnivenko, an illiterate peasant—are brought to trial on the charge of anti-Semitism.

The indictment reads:

Some time ago, the Jewish citizen, Abraham Shapiro, applied to Raznochintseva, the clerk at *Zags*, for a birth certificate. He asked that this certificate be given to him the same day because he was leaving for the Crimean colonies where he was being transferred by the *Ozet*—the organization that settles Jews on land. Citizen Raznochintseva treated Shapiro with bureaucratic indifference. "I suppose," she remarked to the peasant Gnivenko who was there, "the Jew no longer likes the *gesheft* in the city so he is running to the country." Shapiro replied that

he was not running to the country but that he was being sent there by the Soviet Government. Whereupon Raznochintseva laughed. "The Jews," she said, "have already forgotten what a pogrom is like but soon there will be another war and we shall remind them what it means to capture Russia's Government, land, factories and everything else."

Encouraged by Raznochintseva, the peasant Gnivenko began to complain that the Soviet Government was giving to the Jews free land, seeds, credits and agricultural implements, while at the same time it was taking everything away from the Russian peasants. Raznochintseva then asked Gnivenko why he and his fellow peasants didn't come out in protest against the settling of the Jews on land. The metal worker, Boychenko, joined the conversation, saying: "Not only in the country, but also in the factories the Jews are capturing the most lucrative places. Before the Revolution, Jews were not allowed to work in factories but now many of them get jobs because it is their Government."

On the complaint of citizen Shapiro, confirmed by other witnesses, the defendants are here on trial for consciously misinterpreting the Government's measures taken in order to solve the precarious economic position of the Jews, as well as for inciting hatred against a national minority.

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JUDGE: Citizen Raznochintseva, do you plead guilty?

R: Not guilty.

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J: Have you any explanations to offer?

R: I work in *Zags* since 1925. I was always courteous to everybody. I am, thank God, a well brought up lady. I graduated from a gymnasium during the Tsarist regime . . . I did not insult this little Jew, pardon, citizen Shapiro. True I asked him why he was leaving the city and what he will do with his land. Haven't I a right to ask that? And if I did say something it was not against the Soviet Government . . . only against the Jews. Is that a crime? . . . I am accused unjustly. This is all the doings of the Jews. . . . I can't stomach them. That is all.

PROSECUTOR: Why did you, an official person, suddenly become interested in the Jew Shapiro's personal affairs?

R: I was not in the least interested in his affairs. What do I care about him? I simply could not get used to the idea that Jews will till the soil. You, tell me, do you actually think that the Jews are capable of doing it? Don't you know that they have always been after easy money?

ATTORNEY FOR THE DEFENSE: How well do you know the Jews?

R: Personally, I know very few of them. I always avoid them. My friends were always military people.

P: Did you ever read any literature about the Jews?

R: I was never interested enough.

ATT: Is it true that you said that the peasants should protest against Jewish colonization?

R: The Jews are everywhere—in the factories, government offices, publishing houses—and now they

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are trying to take away the land, too. The worker Boychenko and the peasant Gnivenko agree with me. They also complain against it. I don't have to tell them a thing. They are Russian people; they know what's what.

J: You know of course that the Soviet Government treats all nationalities alike. Why, then, did you advocate a pogrom against the Jews?

R: I didn't say a word against the Soviet Government. I am for the Soviets. I am also a member of a trade union. But the Jews I can't stomach. It is they who destroyed our holy church. Because of them my husband is now unemployed.

P: You stated when you applied for the job at *Zags* that your husband was killed during the civil war, and now you say that he is unemployed.

R: He is just as well as dead. He is now abroad, unemployed . . .

P: What did he do before the Revolution and why is he abroad?

R: He was in the military service . . . a colonel . . . What else could he have done but run away?

J: He could now serve in the Red Army if he were an honest man.

P: Your father was a gendarme?

R: No . . . yes, only until 1910 . . .

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The Judge now called on the defendant Boychenko.

B: I have nothing to do with the whole matter. I didn't say a word. But you know, the tongue has

no bones, so maybe I did say something. I don't quite remember how it happened . . . I came to *Zags* to register my baby. My wife, you see, gave birth to a little girl. When I came in they were saying that the Jews are taking away the land from the Russian people.

P: Who was saying that?

B: She, Raznochintseva. She said that the Jews are now going to take away the land from the Russian people.

ATT: Did you believe her?

B: Why shouldn't I believe her? She is an educated lady; she knows what she is talking about.

J: Are there any Jews working in your factory?

B: Sure there are. Now they work everywhere because it is their Government.

P: How are your relations with the Jews that work in your factory?

B: Oh, all right. They are good fellows. Sometimes we have a drink together.

ATT: Can you point out one place where the Jews run everything? How about your factory, for instance?

B: To tell the truth, I don't know. Only everybody says so.

J: Did you ever live among Jews? Why are you so much against them?

B: When I served in the Tsar's army, the sergeant always used to tell me that the *zhids* are our eternal enemies. The priest, too, says that they crucified our Lord.

P: Did you know that the Government was giving free land to the Jews so that they may cultivate it?

B: I never knew it.

ATT: Don't you ever read the newspapers?

B: Why should I?

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The Judge now called defendant Gnivenko.

G: I shall tell everything from the very beginning, just as it happened. My old woman died that day. I went to *Zags* for a permit to bury her. This Jew Shapiro came in together with me. I don't know what he asked for because I am still an illiterate man. Citizen Raznochintseva began to talk about the Jews. She said that it was wrong to give them land. Then she asked me why we peasants don't protest against it. You know, my woman died that day and I didn't feel so good . . .

J: Have you any idea what land is being given to the Jews and where?

G: The peasants say that the Jews are given free land, seeds and money while everything is being taken away from us.

P: Do you know personally such peasants whose land was taken away and given to the Jews?

G: I don't know of such cases in our village but that is what they say.

ATT: Have you ever been in any of the Jewish colonies? What is your opinion: will the Jews be able to work on land?

G: I was. I've got a Jewish friend in the village of Dobro—a darn good peasant.

ATT: Did citizen Raznochintseva tell you anything about organizing a pogrom against Jews?

G: I guess she said something about it.

P: Did you ever see a pogrom?

G: Once; it was long ago, in 1905. I had just arrived in the city and began to unharness my horses when a policeman came over and said: "Hey, there, aren't you a Christian? There is an order to kill Jews and you stand here as though you weren't a Christian at all. Get on your horses and beat it." So I harnessed my horses and went to the center of the city. Everything was already in full swing there. The Cossacks were showing everybody what to do. But I didn't touch anyone. I just took for myself a couple of suits and a pair of boots.

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Citizen Shapiro is now called.

J: What is your occupation?

SH: Before the Revolution I was a petty trader; I used to sell fish in the market. (You can imagine what kind of business that was.) If I earned sometimes enough to buy a herring, I didn't always have enough for bread. When after the Revolution a law was passed to give land to the Jews, I was the first one to apply to *Ozet*.

J: Are you certain that you will be able to do such heavy labor?

SH: I have plenty of strength left. I was a soldier both in the World War and civil war and that didn't break me.

P: Why did you decide to settle on land?

SH: What sort of a life did I have until now? I suffered, I was hungry and still everybody pointed to me as a "Shylock" and a "speculator." Tilling the soil, I will feel like a free human being—on earth and not in the *luft*.

P: Could you say for certain that Raznochintseva was advocating a pogrom against Jews?

SH: Yes, but I no longer fear pogroms, not as long as the Soviet Government is in existence.

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The witness Kantorovich is called.

K: I was always a worker, a bookbinder. Now I am manager of the shop. I am also a member of the city Soviet.

P: What do you know about Raznochintseva?

K: It was called to my attention that instead of doing her work she indulges in private conversations.

ATT: Are you acquainted with the nature of these conversations?

K: I understand that she preaches anti-Semitism.

J: As a member of the local committee, didn't you ever consider it worth while to look into the defendant's actions?

K: You see, comrade Judge, I am an internationalist and such matters do not interest me.

P: As an internationalist, however, wasn't it your duty to share your views with a person like Raznochintseva, to explain to her the attitude of the Government and the International toward national minorities?

K: I am not interested in nationalities. As I have

said, I am primarily an internationalist. The Revolution, I believe, has liquidated the national question. As to the *Ozet*, it is strictly a Jewish business and I don't consider myself a Jew.

ATT: How do other people consider you?

K: What do I care how others consider me? At times, to be sure, there are misunderstandings. Thus, during a pogrom I was once nearly killed because they recognized me as a Jew. But now there is no danger of pogroms.

P: In view of the fact that Kantorovich knew of Raznochintseva's anti-Jewish activities and did nothing to expose her, I propose to the court to bring him up on charges as her accomplice.

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The witness Peredovikov is called.

PER: I work in a factory. I am a member of the Communist Party since 1912 and have also recently joined the *Ozet*.

J: Do you know any of the defendants?

PER: I work together with Boychenko. Several times in our conversations I have touched upon the subject of Jewish colonization. He made a lot of silly statements which convinced me that politically he is totally ignorant. He is still a petty bourgeois at heart.

ATT: Do you consider him a convinced anti-Semite?

PER: No, he just likes to talk a lot and repeat what other people say.

J: You are not a Jew. Why did you join the *Ozet*?

PER: Before the Revolution, when I did secret work for the Party, I often had to hide myself in the "Jewish Pale." I saw the suffering of the Jews at a very close range. The Jewish worker suffered doubly—as a worker and as a Jew. For a trifle, he was exploited by his own brother, the Jewish bourgeois. I am in complete agreement with the *Ozet* whose aim is to give the Jew a better deal in life. That is why I joined it.

ATT: Do you think that the Jews are capable of working on land?

PER: Yes, only the Black Hundreds claim to the contrary. In the old days I saw Jewish workers often substitute for horses and even then they didn't earn enough for a piece of bread. In a healthy environment, I am certain that their productivity will at least be equal to that of the peasants'.

ATT: Do you know what land is being given to the Jews?

PER: Free land that has hitherto remained uncultivated. Only those who want to return the land back to the landowners are crying about Jewish colonization. I am firmly convinced that the settling of the Jews on land will bring nothing but benefits to our economic life.

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Then the social prosecutor made his speech:

Comrades, the Russian monarchy which served as a bulwark of European reaction transformed our country into a "prison of nations." The roots of the monarchy's "nationalism" were intimately bound up

with the interests of the Russian landowners and capitalists . . .

The Bolshevik Revolution believes that everyone has a right to live and work. Its chief aim is to achieve economic equality not for a privileged minority but for all people, regardless of race or religion, who live in the Soviet Union.

During the civil war, the counter-revolutionary whiteguard bandits made pogroms in 911 villages, affecting 700,000 Jews. What the bandits commenced hunger completed, leaving us 300,000 orphans.

Today, however, out of 2,800,000 Jews in Russia, more than 200,000 have already settled on land. Hundreds of thousands have been given employment in the new Soviet industries.* The Government also set aside a large tract of land in Biro-Bidjan, situated in Siberia on the Amur river, which will soon become a Jewish Soviet Republic. Besides this, there have been established four autonomous Jewish regions in the Ukraine and the Crimea—Kalinindorf, Stalindorf, Neizlatopol and Freidorf—administered entirely by Jewish colonists.

The defendants have been undermining the Government's decisions. National hatred, in this case anti-Semitism, has been advocated by Raznochintseva in order to hide her anti-Soviet deeds. Also, the worker Boychenko, particularly since he is a member of a trade union and could not have been ignorant of our policy towards the national minorities, and the peas-

* Over 500,000 Jews work in heavy industries and about 400,000 are handicraft and government workers.

ant Gnivenko should be punished for their non-proletarian behaviour and for spreading false rumors.

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Speech of the attorney for the defense:

. . . The defendants belong to different social groups. Raznochintseva whose group interests have been injured by the revolution, because of the old ideology of the environment in which she was brought up, places the blame on the Jews. She belongs in a class by herself and should be considered separately from the other two defendants. Boychenko cannot be convicted as a conscious anti-Semite because of his extreme ignorance. The same is true of Gnivenko . . . Not through force and repressions shall we rid ourselves of this anti-Semitic curse, but through a well worked out plan of educating the masses, transforming them into cultured human beings.

In conclusion I shall quote from a speech by Lenin—*The Shameful Hounding of the Jews*—which was recorded on a photograph record and distributed in the thousands throughout Russia:

“Anti-Semitism,” says Lenin, “is called a widespread hatred for Jews. When the cursed Tsarist Monarchy was living its last days, it tried to incite the ignorant workers and peasants against the Jews. The Tsarist police in union with the capitalists and landowners were organizing pogroms against them. The landowner-exploiters directed the hatred of the hungry workers and peasants against the Jews. In other countries, too, we often see how the capitalists

are inciting hatred for the Jews in order to divert the attention of the workers and toilers from their real enemy—the capitalist . . .

“The Jews are not the enemies of the workers! Their enemies are the capitalists of all countries. There are many exploited workers among the Jews—the majority of them. They are our brothers oppressed by capitalism, our comrades in the fight for socialism . . .

“Shame on the cursed monarchy that hounded and persecuted the Jews. Shame on those who stir up hatred for the Jews and other nationalities. Long live brotherly confidence and the militant union of all nations in the struggle against capitalism.”

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The Court's verdict: Raznochintseva was dismissed from her post, expelled from the trade union, and sentenced to two years in prison for counter-revolutionary activity in inciting anti-Semitism. The other two defendants, being illiterate, were freed with a reprimand and warning not to lend themselves to anti-Semitic acts or propaganda.