

JEWS SLAIN IN UKRAINE

Their Former Minister in That Country Sends a Review of the Pogroms

Former Jewish Minister of Ukraine in the Jewish newspaper, The Day, of New York.

ON Nov. 15, 1918, the rebellion of the Ukrainian peasants against the aristocratic government Hetman Skoropadsky broke and it struck a sympathetic chord in the various strata of the Jewish population. Except for the few sugar magnates and several other big speculators who were organized in a reaction group, the Jews were unanimously opposed to Skoropadsky. In a few provincial towns groups of Bundists (Jewish Social Democrats) and Poale Zionists even armed themselves and joined the rebels.

The Directorate, which gave to the revolt its initial momentum, showed an exceedingly friendly attitude toward Jews. Its first decree, which became the gospel of the rebels, contained a clause about the Jews: "Do not harm the Jews! They are our allies in the struggle against the Polish clique Galicia, and here, too, they will be with us."

Two weeks later, when the rebellion had spread through the greater part of Ukraine, the Directorate, at that time situated at Vinitza, re-enacted, by special decree of Dec. 9, the national-political autonomy law, which six months previous had been revoked by the Hetman. The Poale Zionists, Sholem Gorn, was appointed temporary director of national affairs.

The rebellion was a complete success. It seemed that the German army occupation, which, including the Austrians, represented a force 250,000 strong would soon become insufficient protection for the Hetman, especially after reports of the revolution in Germany began to be circulated. On Dec. 15, when the Directorate victoriously marched into Kiev, it had under its flag an army from the lower ranks and had no strength of some 300,000.

Although the revolt was organized discipline, no violations were committed on the Jews at this period. This fact particularly noteworthy because many places the Jews were the only ones who could understand and speak the German language, and this gave the ignorant peasant masses, who loathed the Germans fearfully, an impression that they were helping the foreigners.

That period was too good to last. On Jan. 1, just a month and a half after hostilities had begun, the first Jewish pogrom occurred in Avrutch, a city in the Province of Wohlin. During the first pogrom forty-five Jews were killed and the loss in property was considerable. In the middle of June this pogrom was repeated, and during the terrible period that ensued this unfortunate city suffered heavily from massacre. Several times it passed from the Ukrainians to the Bolsheviks, and vice versa. The leader of the first pogrom was certain Kozir-Zirko, an "ataman" who by the way, disobeyed the orders of the Central Government.

The second pogrom occurred a week later in Berditchew. It took place at the railroad station, and about twenty-five transient Jews were killed. Within the city this pogrom was not so significant in its immediate results—only a few lives were lost and little property was destroyed—as in its character, which brooded of evil. It was carried on entirely by soldiers of a special "Battalion of Death" which claimed to perform a "sacred mission"—namely, fighting Bolsheviks.

The fears of the Jews were realized. A few days after the Berditchew affair the same military band made a ferocious massacre in Zhitomir. A Bolshevik revolt which had occurred the day before served as a pretext for this atrocity. It is significant, however, that this revolt was started not by Jews but by soldiers of local regiments.

The pogrom in Zhitomir lasted for two days, and resulted in ninety deaths and about 100,000,000 rubles in losses. The plundering of the shops was so systematic that afterward it was impossible to buy a collar or a box of matches anywhere in the town.

The Zhitomir pogrom forced the Government, then entirely socialist, to take steps. Unfortunately, however, the real power was not in the hands of the Government, but in the Directorate, and the Directorate, which consisted of five members, was torn by internal strife. Its two principal leaders, Vinichenko and Petlura, were divided. While the former was in favor of joining the Bolsheviks, the latter sought the aid of the Entente against the Bolsheviks. Thus, torn by internal strife and dependent upon reactionary, anti-Semitic military leaders, the Directorate was unable to stop the massacres. Its proclamation against pogroms, (issued Jan. 10,) which was undoubtedly prompted by honest motives, failed to satisfy Jewish public opinion.

The last clause of this proclamation was an appeal to the Jewish Democrats "to crush the individual Anarchist-Bolshevik Jews, who are antagonistic to the Ukrainian working people and the Ukrainian Government, thereby giving the Hetman and the provocators a chance to agitate against the peace-loving Jewish race, and causing misunderstanding between the Ukrainians, the real defenders of the working people, and the Jewish Democrats, who are not Anarchist-Bolsheviks and are loyal to the Ukrainian Government."

It was feared in Jewish circles that such an ending to a proclamation, the beginning of which was decidedly opposed to pogroms, might serve local military leaders to justify their indifference to outrages committed on Jews, and an effort was made immediately to check the spread of the proclamation in the army. At the same time a second proclamation was issued, signed by Melnick, the commander of the Artillery Corps, distinctly condemning pogroms or violations of any kind.

This was followed by a number of other measures by the Ministry to check the pogrom wave, and for a while it seemed to be effective. During the latter part of January, the pogroms were less frequent and less bloody. But then began a regular, systematic persecution of Jews on trains. At a number of large railroad stations Jewish passengers were dragged out of cars, robbed, beaten, and often shot. To find the offenders was, of course, impossible, as the trains were all in a state of siege, due to the war against the Bolsheviks, and orders of the civil Government were disregarded. The number of Jews killed on trains during the month of January and to Feb. 10 was no less than 200.

It is fair to say here that many villages which were suspected of Bolshevism, or failed to meet the passing troops with bread and porridge, suffered the same fate as some of the smaller Jewish towns. The only difference is that, while for the villages

some pretext was necessary, in the case of the Jews their race was sufficient.

The latter part of January and the beginning of February brought reports of minor pogroms in the Cherubloff section, in Slavuta, in unfortunate Avrutch, in Lettichew, and in a number of smaller towns near the front. About these pogroms I have no official facts or data, as they usually occurred just before the towns were surrendered to the Bolsheviks.

All this took place in that part of Ukraine which prior to the revolution belonged to Russia. In Western Ukraine, (Eastern Galicia,) where there was a separate Government, (Secretariate,) with headquarters at Stainslaw, all was comparatively quiet. The Secretariate at Stainslaw had more power than the Government at Kiev, and it fought the pogroms energetically. On Feb. 13 and 14, when a band of soldiers arrived from Russian Ukraine, and started a pogrom in Tarnopol, it was at once quelled by the local military power, and the instigators were tried by court-martial and shot. The losses of this pogrom amounted to about three million crowns.

The first of a new series of events which leave the scope of ordinary pogroms and assume the character of slaughter occurred in a city which will forever be written in letters of blood on the pages of Jewish history.

Proskurov.

It happened in Proskurov. The slaughter began immediately after the crushing of a Bolshevik rebellion in which the Jews by no means played a prominent part. But there is good ground for believing that the Bolshevik revolt was a convenient excuse for carrying out a scheme long planned. When I was in Proskurov in March—a month after the massacre—I was shown a printed "command" from the "ataman," Semesenko, that was dated Feb. 7, (a week before the pogrom.) This "command," conspicuous for its illiteracy, contained a special point in which the Jews are warned not to "incite the Christian populace; such a wretched nation and it seeks to overturn the whole world. Why don't you value your lives?" This "command," and particularly the verbal threats of the self-styled "ataman," created much uneasiness among the Jewish population. In addition to that, it was learned that Semesenko had twice refused to obey orders from higher up, to leave with his troops for the front, on the ground that he expected a Bolshevik revolt in Proskurov any day.

The dark forebodings became a reality. On Feb. 15, after a Bolshevik uprising which lasted several hours, Semesenko, at the head of several hundred of his Cossacks, marched victoriously into the city. Immediately the slaughter of Jews began, and the killing was marked by terrible ferocity and unusual rapidity.

Within four hours (from 2 to 6) approximately 3,000 beings—men, women, children, and aged—were slaughtered. This figure was given to me by the Elder of the Jewish community of Proskurov, Dr. Lissner, and the President of the local Poale Zionists, Dr. Greenfield. This figure is absolutely authentic. It is characteristic that in Proskurov no pillage was done; there was no time for that. This was not a pogrom in the old sense of the word; there was no torn bedding or ruined stores—it was a slaughter. After the bloody spectacle the troops remained in the city another week and disappeared. On their way they made another slaughter in the neighboring town of Feishtin, where 600 victims fell.

Simultaneously with the slaughter in Proskurov and shortly thereafter pogroms occurred in Balta, Golta, Vasilkoff, and Christinowka. The exact number of victims is unknown, as the figures vary and I was unable to ascertain them, being by that time (the middle of February) already out of office. The Jewish Ministry was taken over by a member of the People's Party, Mr. Krasny.

On Feb. 5 the Bolshevik Army entered Kiev; by the middle of March it reached Zhmerinka. After that time, the Directorate was in power only in parts of Podolien and in Wohlin, where the front constantly kept shifting from east to west and back. The anarchy that reigned in these sections was terrific. It stands to reason that the Jews drained the bitter cup to the last.

The early part of April, Berditchew—according to Ukrainian official reports—was largely destroyed by artillery fire. Berditchew, Zhitomir, Dubna, Rovna, and other thickly populated Jewish cities passed several times from one to the other of the contending forces.

According to various reports, the Government of Martos, (Ukrainian Social Democrat,) since the beginning of April the nominal ruling power in that section, did everything within its power to stop the pogroms, but it is impossible to say to what extent it succeeded. Authentic reports are harder to get from that part of the world than from the wilds of Africa.

However, from all the reports that have reached me, it is clear that since April the bloody pogrom wave has been swept over to those parts which were occupied by the Bolsheviks. Due to the constant bread requisitions and other causes, a series of peasant revolts began, the character of which soon became anti-Semitic. The pogroms and massacres were carried on not only by rebellious soldiers but also by large masses of the peasant population. Here atrocities were committed that recall to mind the bloody persecutions of Bogdan Chmielnitzki. Thousands of peasants, armed with scythes and pitchforks, swooped down upon the surrounding Jewish towns.

In several places attempts were made to organize a self-defense, but these attempts were unsuccessful, for the reason that the Bolshevik power forbids Jews to carry weapons. They contend that if the Jews want to defend their lives they must join the Red Army. But such a step would have another effect. Should Jews in large numbers join the Red Army the terrible struggle of the peasants against the Bolsheviks would then openly take the form of a crusade against the Jews.

The fate that befell the Jewish population of those parts where the uprising of Gregoriev occurred was particularly disastrous. In January this "ataman" was on the side of the Directorate, and he behaved fairly decent, although there is good ground for believing that the massacre at the station Bobrinskaja, (January, fifteen victims,) took place with his knowledge and consent.

At the end of February, when the Bol-

sheviki crossed the Dnieper, he joined them with all his forces. He made himself famous by forcing the French and the Greeks—in spite of the support of the French fleet—to leave Cherson, Nicholaeff, Odessa, and Krim. By the end of April, however, he again became an opponent of the Bolsheviks. He started a rebellion against them on purely anti-Semitic grounds. At the same time a revolt broke out in the Province of Kiev under the leadership of Zelson. During all these outbreaks Jewish blood flowed most freely. In Yelisavetgrad there were 2,000 victims; in Cherkassy, 600. In several smaller towns nearly the entire Jewish population was exterminated. To these belong Miedzebova, Kuchlitch, Alexandrowka, Ziabokritch, and Trostianetz. In the Jewish colony of Babri the slaughter was so cruel that only a woman and five children remained alive.

Communication between the various cities is so bad that, from many places where massacres occurred, exact data or figures cannot be obtained. Among these are Uman, Kremenchug, Balta, Vasilkoff, Zvieniigorodka. Altogether there were registered from Jan. 1 to the end of May no less than 120 pogroms, and the total number of deaths is estimated at 30,000. These figures are authentic and not exaggerated.

Lately, a new series of pogroms was started on the left side of the Dnieper—in the province of Ekaterinoslaw. These parts, which were not affected very much by the earlier pogroms, suffered heavily from Machno's bands.

This remarkable—semi-savage but strong-willed—man underwent, within one year, a tremendous "development." He changed from an extreme anarchist to a disciple of Denikin, whom he now supports against his former comrades, the Bolsheviks.

He is a sort of Stenko Razin of the

twentieth century. He exercised particular cruelty on the Jewish colonies of the Province of Ekaterinoslaw.

To be accurate, it must be said here that in the Red Army, too, there appeared strong tendencies toward pogroms. This army has lost a good deal of its former military character. Direct need compelled the Bolsheviks to receive within their ranks elements whose class instincts would place them among their opponents. Those are the peasants of Central Russia. Whenever uprisings of these military bands take place, they are directed against the Jews, and such uprisings occur quite frequently.

It is true that the Bolsheviks resort to strong measures to crush such revolts and pogroms. Hundreds have been shot for participating in them. But until something is done the condition of the Jews is deplorable.

Finally, a word as to the condition of the Jews in that part of Ukraine now occupied by the Poles, which is now a considerable area. Besides East Galicia, it includes a large part of the Province of Wohlin.

Pogroms in the full sense of the word have not been heard of during the last few months. The Polish military power is quite strong here, so that pogroms cannot take place without its knowledge. And the many protests against the Polish pogroms all over the world force Poland to be a little more careful. The hatred against the Jews, therefore, expresses itself in different forms. Thousands of Jews from East Galicia are interned in prison camps, where they are treated with terrible cruelty. For the slightest offense they are mercilessly beaten. The camps are swept by a deadly typhoid epidemic—a result of bad food and insanitary conditions. All Jews who held Government posts under Ukrainian rule have been discharged. Thousands of Jewish teachers, railroad workers, postal employees, and the like were thrown out of employment and are starving. Economic conditions which formerly were bad enough, are now intolerable. The trains are entirely in the hands of the anti-Semitic Polish army, which stops at nothing to prevent the Jews from using them for economic purposes.