



The Jewish Role in the Bolshevik Revolution and Russia's Early Soviet Regime

Assessing the Grim Legacy of Soviet Communism

[by Mark Weber](#)

In the night of July 16-17, 1918, a squad of Bolshevik secret police murdered Russia's last emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, along with his wife, Tsaritsa Alexandra, their 14-year-old son, Tsarevich Alexis, and their four daughters. They were cut down in a hail of gunfire in a half-cellar room of the house in Ekaterinburg, a city in the Ural mountain region, where they were being held prisoner. The daughters were finished off with bayonets. To prevent a cult for the dead Tsar, the bodies were carted away to the countryside and hastily buried in a secret grave.

Bolshevik authorities at first reported that the Romanov emperor had been shot after the discovery of a plot to liberate him. For some time the deaths of the Empress and the children were kept secret. Soviet historians claimed for many years that local Bolsheviks had acted on their own in carrying out the killings, and that Lenin, founder of the Soviet state, had nothing to do with the crime.

In 1990, Moscow playwright and historian Edvard Radzinsky announced the result of his detailed investigation into the murders. He unearthed the reminiscences of Lenin's bodyguard, Alexei Akimov, who recounted how he personally delivered Lenin's execution order to the telegraph office. The telegram was also signed by Soviet government chief Yakov Sverdlov. Akimov had saved the original telegraph tape as a record of the secret order.

Radzinsky's research confirmed what earlier evidence had already indicated. Leon Trotsky -- one of Lenin's closest colleagues -- had revealed years earlier that Lenin and Sverdlov had together made the decision to put the Tsar and his family to death. Recalling a conversation in 1918, Trotsky wrote:

My next visit to Moscow took place after the [temporary] fall of Ekaterinburg [to anti-Communist forces]. Speaking with Sverdlov, I asked in passing: "Oh yes, and where is the Tsar?"

"Finished," he replied. "He has been shot."

"And where is the family?"

"The family along with him."

"All of them?," I asked, apparently with a trace of surprise.

"All of them," replied Sverdlov. "What about it?" He was waiting to see my reaction. I made no reply.

"And who made the decision?," I asked.

"We decided it here. Ilyich [Lenin] believed that we shouldn't leave the Whites a live banner to rally around, especially under the present difficult circumstances."

I asked no further questions and considered the matter closed.

Recent research and investigation by Radzinsky and others also corroborates the account provided years earlier by Robert Wilton, correspondent of the London Times in Russia for 17 years. His account, *The Last Days of the Romanovs* - originally published in 1920, and recently reissued by the Institute for Historical Review -- is based in large part on the findings of a detailed investigation carried out in 1919 by Nikolai Sokolov under the authority of "White" (anti-Communist) leader Alexander Kolchak. Wilton's book remains one of the most accurate and complete accounts of the murder of Russia's imperial family.

A solid understanding of history has long been the best guide to comprehending the present and anticipating the future. Accordingly, people are most interested in historical questions during times of crisis, when the future seems most uncertain. With the collapse of Communist rule in the Soviet Union, 1989-1991, and as Russians struggle to build a new order on the ruins of the old, historical issues have become very topical. For example, many ask: How did the Bolsheviks, a small movement guided by the teachings of German-Jewish social philosopher Karl Marx, succeed in taking control of Russia and imposing a cruel and despotic regime on its people?

In recent years, Jews around the world have been voicing anxious concern over the specter of anti-Semitism in the lands of the former Soviet Union. In this new and uncertain era, we are told, suppressed feelings of hatred and rage against Jews are once again being expressed. According to one public opinion survey conducted in 1991, for example, most Russians wanted all Jews to leave the country. But precisely why is anti-Jewish sentiment so widespread among the peoples of the former Soviet Union? Why do so many Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians and others blame "the Jews" for so much misfortune?

A Taboo Subject

Although officially Jews have never made up more than five percent of the country's total population, they played a highly disproportionate and probably decisive role in the infant Bolshevik regime, effectively dominating the Soviet government during its early years. Soviet historians, along with most of their colleagues in the West, for decades preferred to ignore this subject. The facts, though, cannot be denied.

With the notable exception of Lenin (Vladimir Ulyanov), most of the leading Communists who took control of Russia in 1917-20 were Jews. Leon Trotsky (Lev Bronstein) headed the Red Army and, for a time, was chief of Soviet foreign affairs. Yakov Sverdlov (Solomon) was both the Bolshevik party's executive secretary and -- as chairman of the Central Executive Committee -- head of the Soviet government. Grigori Zinoviev (Radomyslsky) headed the Communist International (Comintern), the central agency for spreading revolution in foreign countries. Other prominent Jews included press commissar Karl Radek (Sobelsohn), foreign affairs commissar Maxim Litvinov (Wallach), Lev Kamenev (Rosenfeld) and Moisei Uritsky.

Lenin himself was of mostly Russian and Kalmuck ancestry, but he was also one-quarter Jewish. His maternal grandfather, Israel (Alexander) Blank, was a Ukrainian Jew who was later baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church.

A thorough-going internationalist, Lenin viewed ethnic or cultural loyalties with contempt. He had little regard for his own countrymen. "An intelligent Russian," he once remarked, "is almost always a Jew or someone with Jewish blood in his veins."

Critical Meetings

In the Communist seizure of power in Russia, the Jewish role was probably critical.

Two weeks prior to the Bolshevik "October Revolution" of 1917, Lenin convened a top secret meeting in St. Petersburg (Petrograd) at which the key leaders of the Bolshevik party's Central Committee made the fateful decision to seize power in a violent takeover. Of the twelve persons who took part in this decisive gathering, there were four Russians (including Lenin), one Georgian (Stalin), one Pole (Dzerzhinsky), and six Jews.

To direct the takeover, a seven-man "Political Bureau" was chosen. It consisted of two Russians (Lenin and Bubnov), one Georgian (Stalin), and four Jews (Trotsky, Sokolnikov, Zinoviev, and Kamenev). Meanwhile, the Petersburg (Petrograd) Soviet -- whose chairman was Trotsky -- established an 18-member "Military Revolutionary Committee" to actually carry out the seizure of power. It included eight (or nine) Russians, one Ukrainian, one Pole, one Caucasian, and six Jews. Finally, to supervise the organization of the uprising, the Bolshevik Central Committee established a five-man "Revolutionary Military Center" as the Party's operations command. It consisted of one Russian (Bubnov), one Georgian (Stalin), one Pole (Dzerzhinsky), and two Jews (Sverdlov and Uritsky).

Contemporary Voices of Warning

Well-informed observers, both inside and outside of Russia, took note at the time of the crucial Jewish role in Bolshevism. Winston Churchill, for one, warned in an article published in the February 8, 1920, issue of the London Illustrated Sunday Herald that Bolshevism is a "worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality." The eminent British political leader and historian went on to write:

There is no need to exaggerate the part played in the creation of Bolshevism and in the actual bringing about of the Russian Revolution by these international and for the most part atheistical Jews. It is certainly a very great one; it probably outweighs all others. With the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of the leading figures are Jews. Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from the Jewish leaders. Thus Tchitcherin, a pure Russian, is eclipsed by his nominal subordinate, Litvinoff, and the influence of Russians like Bukharin or Lunacharski cannot be compared with the power of Trotsky, or of Zinovieff, the Dictator of the Red Citadel (Petrograd), or of Krassin or Radek -- all Jews. In the Soviet institutions the predominance of Jews is even more astonishing. And the prominent, if not indeed the principal, part in the system of terrorism applied by the Extraordinary Commissions for Combatting Counter-Revolution [the Cheka] has been taken by Jews, and in some notable cases by Jewesses

Needless to say, the most intense passions of revenge have been excited in the breasts of the Russian people.

David R. Francis, United States ambassador in Russia, warned in a January 1918 dispatch to Washington: "The Bolshevik leaders here, most of whom are Jews and 90 percent of whom are returned exiles, care little for Russia or any other country but are internationalists and they are trying to start a worldwide social revolution."

The Netherlands' ambassador in Russia, Oudendyke, made much the same point a few months later: "Unless Bolshevism is nipped in the bud immediately, it is bound to spread in one form or another over Europe and the whole world as it is organized and worked by Jews who have no nationality, and whose one object is to destroy for their own ends the existing order of things."

"The Bolshevik Revolution," declared a leading American Jewish community paper in 1920, "was largely the product of Jewish thinking, Jewish discontent, Jewish effort to reconstruct."

As an expression of its radically anti-nationalist character, the fledgling Soviet government issued a decree a few months after taking power that made anti-Semitism a crime in Russia. The new Communist regime thus became the first in the world to severely punish all expressions of anti-Jewish sentiment. Soviet officials apparently regarded such measures as indispensable. Based on careful observation during a lengthy stay in Russia, American-Jewish scholar Frank Golder reported in 1925 that "because so many of the Soviet leaders are Jews anti-Semitism is gaining [in Russia], particularly in the army [and] among the old and new intelligentsia who are being crowded for positions by the sons of Israel."

Historians' Views

Summing up the situation at that time, Israeli historian Louis Rapoport writes:

Immediately after the [Bolshevik] Revolution, many Jews were euphoric over their high representation in the new government. Lenin's first Politburo was dominated by men of Jewish origins

Under Lenin, Jews became involved in all aspects of the Revolution, including its dirtiest work. Despite the Communists' vows to eradicate anti-Semitism, it spread rapidly after the Revolution -- partly because of the prominence of so many Jews in the Soviet administration, as well as in the traumatic, inhuman Sovietization drives that followed. Historian Salo Baron has noted that an immensely disproportionate number of Jews joined the new Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka And many of those who fell afoul of the Cheka would be shot by Jewish investigators.

The collective leadership that emerged in Lenin's dying days was headed by the Jew Zinoviev, a loquacious, mean-spirited, curly-haired Adonis whose vanity knew no bounds.

"Anyone who had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the Cheka," wrote Jewish historian Leonard Schapiro, "stood a very good chance of finding himself confronted with, and possibly shot by, a Jewish investigator." In Ukraine, "Jews made up nearly 80 percent of the rank-and-file Cheka agents," reports W. Bruce Lincoln, an American professor of Russian history. (Beginning as the Cheka, or Vecheka) the Soviet secret police was later known as the GPU, OGPU, NKVD, MVD and KGB.)

In light of all this, it should not be surprising that Yakov M. Yurovsky, the leader of the Bolshevik squad that carried out the murder of the Tsar and his family, was Jewish, as was Sverdlov, the Soviet chief who co-signed Lenin's execution order.

Igor Shafarevich, a Russian mathematician of world stature, has sharply criticized the Jewish role in bringing down the Romanov monarchy and establishing Communist rule in his country. Shafarevich was a leading dissident during the final decades of Soviet rule. A prominent human rights activist, he was a founding member of the Committee on the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR.

In *Russophobia*, a book written ten years before the collapse of Communist rule, he noted that Jews were "amazingly" numerous among the personnel of the Bolshevik secret police. The characteristic Jewishness of the Bolshevik executioners, Shafarevich went on, is most conspicuous in the execution of Nicholas II:

This ritual action symbolized the end of centuries of Russian history, so that it can be compared only to the execution of Charles I in England or Louis XVI in France. It would seem that representatives of an insignificant ethnic minority should keep as far as possible from this painful action, which would reverberate in all history. Yet what names do we meet? The execution was personally overseen by Yakov Yurovsky who shot the Tsar; the president of the local Soviet was Beloborodov (Vaisbart); the person responsible for the general administration in Ekaterinburg was Shaya Goloshchekin. To round out the picture, on the wall of the room where the execution took place was a distich from a poem by Heine (written in German) about King Balthazar, who offended Jehovah and was killed for the offense.

In his 1920 book, British veteran journalist Robert Wilton offered a similarly harsh assessment:

The whole record of Bolshevism in Russia is indelibly impressed with the stamp of alien invasion. The murder of the Tsar, deliberately planned by the Jew Sverdlov (who came to Russia as a paid agent of Germany) and carried out by the Jews Goloshchekin, Syromolotov, Safarov, Voikov and Yurovsky, is the act not of the Russian people, but of this hostile invader.

In the struggle for power that followed Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin emerged victorious over his rivals, eventually succeeding in putting to death nearly every one of the most prominent early Bolsheviks leaders - including Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, and Kamenev. With the passage of time, and particularly after 1928, the Jewish role in the top leadership of the Soviet state and its Communist party diminished markedly.

Put To Death Without Trial

For a few months after taking power, Bolshevik leaders considered bringing "Nicholas Romanov" before a "Revolutionary Tribunal" that would publicize his "crimes against the people" before sentencing him to death. Historical precedent existed for this. Two European monarchs had lost their lives as a consequence of revolutionary upheaval: England's Charles I was beheaded in 1649, and France's Louis XVI was guillotined in 1793.

In these cases, the king was put to death after a lengthy public trial, during which he was allowed to present arguments in his defense. Nicholas II, though, was neither charged nor tried. He was secretly put to death - along with his family and staff -- in the dead of night, in an act that resembled more a gangster-style massacre than a formal execution.

Why did Lenin and Sverdlov abandon plans for a show trial of the former Tsar? In Wilton's view, Nicholas and his family were murdered because the Bolshevik rulers knew quite well that they lacked genuine popular support, and rightly feared that the Russian people would never approve killing the Tsar, regardless of pretexts and legalistic formalities.

For his part, Trotsky defended the massacre as a useful and even necessary measure. He wrote:

The decision [to kill the imperial family] was not only expedient but necessary. The severity of this punishment showed everyone that we would continue to fight on mercilessly, stopping at nothing. The execution of the Tsar's family was needed not only in order to frighten, horrify, and instill a sense of hopelessness in the enemy but also to shake up our own ranks, to show that there was no turning back, that ahead lay either total victory or total doom This Lenin sensed well.

Historical Context

In the years leading up to the 1917 revolution, Jews were disproportionately represented in all of Russia's subversive leftist parties. Jewish hatred of the Tsarist regime had a basis in objective conditions. Of the leading European powers of the day, imperial Russia was the most institutionally conservative and anti-Jewish. For example, Jews were normally not permitted to reside outside a large area in the west of the Empire known as the "Pale of Settlement."

However understandable, and perhaps even defensible, Jewish hostility toward the imperial regime may have been, the remarkable Jewish role in the vastly more despotic Soviet regime is less easy to justify. In a recently published book about the Jews in Russia during the 20th century, Russian-born Jewish writer Sonya Margolina goes so far as to call the Jewish role in supporting the Bolshevik regime the "historic sin of the Jews." She points, for example, to the prominent role of Jews as commandants of Soviet Gulag concentration and labor camps, and the role of Jewish Communists in the systematic destruction of Russian churches. Moreover, she goes on, "The Jews of the entire world supported Soviet power, and remained silent in the face of any criticism from the opposition." In light of this record, Margolina offers a grim prediction:

The exaggeratedly enthusiastic participation of the Jewish Bolsheviks in the subjugation and destruction of Russia is a sin that will be avenged Soviet power will be equated with Jewish power, and the furious hatred against the Bolsheviks will become hatred against Jews.

If the past is any indication, it is unlikely that many Russians will seek the revenge that Margolina prophesies. Anyway, to blame "the Jews" for the horrors of Communism seems no more justifiable than to blame "white people" for Negro slavery, or "the Germans" for the Second World War or "the Holocaust."

Words of Grim Portent

Nicholas and his family are only the best known of countless victims of a regime that openly proclaimed its ruthless purpose. A few weeks after the Ekaterinburg massacre, the newspaper of the fledgling Red Army declared:

Without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies by the scores of hundreds, let them be thousands, let them drown themselves in their own blood. For the blood of Lenin and Uritskii let there be floods of blood of the bourgeoisie -- more blood, as much as possible.

Grigori Zinoviev, speaking at a meeting of Communists in September 1918, effectively pronounced a death sentence on ten million human beings: "We must carry along with us 90 million out of the 100 million of Soviet Russia's inhabitants. As for the rest, we have nothing to say to them. They must be annihilated."

'The Twenty Million'

As it turned out, the Soviet toll in human lives and suffering proved to be much higher than Zinoviev's murderous rhetoric suggested. Rarely, if ever, has a regime taken the lives of so many of its own people.

Citing newly-available Soviet KGB documents, historian Dmitri Volkogonov, head of a special Russian parliamentary commission, recently concluded that "from 1929 to 1952 21.5 million [Soviet] people were repressed. Of these a third were shot, the rest sentenced to imprisonment, where many also died."

Olga Shatunovskaya, a member of the Soviet Commission of Party Control, and head of a special commission during the 1960s appointed by premier Khrushchev, has similarly concluded: "From January 1, 1935 to June 22, 1941, 19,840,000 enemies of the people were arrested. Of these, seven million were shot in prison, and a majority of the others died in camp." These figures were also found in the papers of Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan.

Robert Conquest, the distinguished specialist of Soviet history, recently summed up the grim record of Soviet "repression" of its own people:

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the post-1934 death toll was well over ten million. To this should be added the victims of the 1930-1933 famine, the kulak deportations, and other anti-peasant campaigns, amounting to another ten million plus. The total is thus in the range of what the Russians now refer to as 'The Twenty Million'.

A few other scholars have given significantly higher estimates.

The Tsarist Era in Retrospect

With the dramatic collapse of Soviet rule, many Russians are taking a new and more respectful look at their country's pre-Communist history, including the era of the last Romanov emperor. While the Soviets -- along with many in the West -- have stereotypically portrayed this era as little more than an age of arbitrary despotism, cruel suppression and mass poverty, the reality is rather different. While it is true that the power of the Tsar was absolute, that only a small minority had any significant political voice, and that the mass of the empire's citizens were peasants, it is worth noting that Russians during the reign of Nicholas II had freedom of press, religion, assembly and association, protection of private property, and free labor unions. Sworn enemies of the regime, such as Lenin, were treated with remarkable leniency.

During the decades prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the Russian economy was booming. In fact, between 1890 and 1913, it was the fastest growing in the world. New rail lines were opened at an annual rate double that of the Soviet years. Between 1900 and 1913, iron production increased by 58 percent, while coal production more than doubled. Exported Russian grain fed all of Europe. Finally, the last decades of Tsarist Russia witnessed a magnificent flowering of cultural life.

Everything changed with the First World War, a catastrophe not only for Russia, but for the entire West.

Monarchist Sentiment

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the relentless official campaign during the entire Soviet era to stamp out every uncritical memory of the Romanovs and imperial Russia, a virtual cult of popular veneration for Nicholas II has been sweeping Russia in recent years.

People have been eagerly paying the equivalent of several hours' wages to purchase portraits of Nicholas from street vendors in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other Russian cities. His portrait now hangs in countless Russian homes and apartments. In late 1990, all 200,000 copies of a first printing of a 30-page pamphlet on the Romanovs quickly sold out. Said one street vendor: "I personally sold four thousand copies in no time at all. It's like a nuclear explosion. People really want to know about their Tsar and his family." Grass roots pro-Tsarist and monarchist organizations have sprung up in many cities.

A public opinion poll conducted in 1990 found that three out of four Soviet citizens surveyed regard the killing of the Tsar and his family as a despicable crime. Many Russian Orthodox believers regard Nicholas as a martyr. The independent "Orthodox Church Abroad" canonized the imperial family in 1981, and the Moscow-based Russian Orthodox Church has been under popular pressure to take the same step, in spite of its long-standing reluctance to touch this official taboo. The Russian Orthodox Archbishop of Ekaterinburg announced plans in 1990 to build a grand church at the site of the killings. "The people loved Emperor Nicholas," he said. "His memory lives with the people, not as a saint but as someone executed without court verdict, unjustly, as a sufferer for his faith and for orthodoxy."

On the 75th anniversary of the massacre (in July 1993), Russians recalled the life, death and legacy of their last Emperor. In Ekaterinburg, where a large white cross festooned with flowers now marks the spot where the family was killed, mourners wept as hymns were sung and prayers were said for the victims.

Reflecting both popular sentiment and new social-political realities, the white, blue and red horizontal tricolor flag of Tsarist Russia was officially adopted in 1991, replacing the red Soviet banner. And in 1993, the imperial two-headed eagle was restored as the nation's official emblem, replacing the Soviet hammer and sickle. Cities that had been re-named to honor Communist figures -- such as Leningrad, Kuibyshev, Frunze, Kalinin, and Gorky -- have re-acquired their Tsarist-era names. Ekaterinburg, which had been named Sverdlovsk by the Soviets in 1924 in honor of the Soviet-Jewish chief, in September 1991 restored its pre-Communist name, which honors Empress Catherine I.

Symbolic Meaning

In view of the millions that would be put to death by the Soviet rulers in the years to follow, the murder of the Romanov family might not seem of extraordinary importance. And yet, the event has deep symbolic meaning. In the apt words of Harvard University historian Richard Pipes:

The manner in which the massacre was prepared and carried out, at first denied and then justified, has something uniquely odious about it, something that radically distinguishes it from previous acts of regicide and brands it as a prelude to twentieth-century mass murder.

Another historian, Ivor Benson, characterized the killing of the Romanov family as symbolic of the tragic fate of Russia and, indeed, of the entire West, in this century of unprecedented agony and conflict.

The murder of the Tsar and his family is all the more deplorable because, whatever his failings as a monarch, Nicholas II was, by all accounts, a personally decent, generous, humane and honorable man.

The Massacre's Place in History

The mass slaughter and chaos of the First World War, and the revolutionary upheavals that swept Europe in 1917-1918, brought an end not only to the ancient Romanov dynasty in Russia, but to an entire continental social order. Swept away as well was the Hohenzollern dynasty in Germany, with its stable constitutional monarchy, and the ancient Habsburg dynasty of Austria-Hungary with its multinational central European empire. Europe's leading states shared not only the same Christian and Western cultural foundations, but most of the continent's reigning monarchs were related by blood. England's King George was, through his mother, a first cousin of Tsar Nicholas, and, through his father, a first cousin of Empress Alexandra. Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm was a first cousin of the German-born Alexandra, and a distant cousin of Nicholas.

More than was the case with the monarchies of western Europe, Russia's Tsar personally symbolized his land and nation. Thus, the murder of the last emperor of a dynasty that had ruled Russia for three centuries not only symbolically presaged the Communist mass slaughter that would claim so many Russian lives in the decades that followed, but was symbolic of the Communist effort to kill the soul and spirit of Russia itself.

Notes

1. Edvard Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 327, 344-346.; Bill Keller, "Cult of the Last Czar," *The New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1990.
2. From an April 1935 entry in "Trotsky's Diary in Exile." Quoted in: Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1990), pp. 770, 787.; Robert K. Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: 1976), pp. 496-497.; E. Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 325-326.; Ronald W. Clark, *Lenin* (New York: 1988), pp. 349-350.
3. On Wilton and his career in Russia, see: Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), pp. 141-142, 144-146, 151-152, 159, 162, 169, and, Anthony Summers and Tom Mangold, *The File on the Tsar* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp. 102-104, 176.
4. AP dispatch from Moscow, *Toronto Star*, Sept. 26, 1991, p. A2.; Similarly, a 1992 survey found that one-fourth of people in the republics of Belarus (White Russia) and Uzbekistan favored deporting all Jews to a special Jewish region in Russian Siberia. "Survey Finds Anti-Semitism on Rise in Ex-Soviet Lands," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1992, p. A4.
5. At the turn of the century, Jews made up 4.2 percent of the population of the Russian Empire. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: 1990), p. 55 (fn.). By comparison, in the United States today, Jews make up less than three percent of the total population (according to the most authoritative estimates).
6. See individual entries in: H. Shukman, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: 1988), and in: G. Wigoder, ed., *Dictionary of Jewish Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991). The prominent Jewish role in Russia's pre-1914 revolutionary underground, and in the early Soviet regime, is likewise confirmed in: Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism* (New York: Oxford, 1982), pp. 92-94. In 1918, the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee had 15 members. German scholar Herman Fehst -- citing published Soviet records -- reported in his useful 1934 study that of six of these 15 were Jews. Herman Fehst, *Bolschewismus und Judentum: Das jüdische Element in der Führerschaft des Bolschewismus* (Berlin: 1934), pp. 68-72.; Robert Wilton, though, reported that in 1918 the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party had twelve members, of whom nine were of Jewish origin and three were of Russian ancestry. R. Wilton, *The Last Days of the Romanovs* (IHR, 1993), p. 185.
7. After years of official suppression, this fact was acknowledged in 1991 in the Moscow weekly *Ogonyok*. See: *Jewish Chronicle* (London), July 16, 1991.; See also: Letter by L. Horwitz in *The New York Times*, Aug. 5, 1992, which cites information from the Russian journal "Native Land Archives."; "Lenin's Lineage? 'Jewish,' Claims Moscow News," *Forward* (New York City), Feb. 28, 1992, pp. 1, 3.; M. Checinski, *Jerusalem Post* (weekly international edition), Jan. 26, 1991, p. 9.
8. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1990), p. 352.
9. Harrison E. Salisbury, *Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions, 1905-1917* (Doubleday, 1978), p. 475.; William H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 291-292.; Herman Fehst, *Bolschewismus und Judentum: Das jüdische Element in der Führerschaft des Bolschewismus* (Berlin: 1934), pp. 42-43.; P. N. Pospelov, ed., *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: A Biography* (Moscow: Progress, 1966), pp. 318-319. This meeting was held on October 10 (old style, Julian calendar), and on October 23 (new style). The six Jews who took part were: Uritsky, Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Sverdlov and Soklonikov. The Bolsheviks seized power in Petersburg

on October 25 (old style) -- hence the reference to the "Great October Revolution" -- which is November 7 (new style).

10. William H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution* (1987), vol. 1, p. 292.; H. E. Salisbury, *Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions, 1905-1917* (1978), p. 475.
11. W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 274, 299, 302, 306.; Alan Moorehead, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: 1965), pp. 235, 238, 242, 243, 245.; H. Fehst, *Bolschewismus und Judentum* (Berlin: 1934), pp. 44, 45.
12. H. E. Salisbury, *Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions, 1905-1917* (1978), p. 479-480.; Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), pp. 27-28, 32.; P. N. Pospelov, ed., *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: A Biography* (Moscow: Progress, 1966), pp. 319-320.
13. "Zionism versus Bolshevism: A struggle for the soul of the Jewish people," *Illustrated Sunday Herald* (London), February 8, 1920. Facsimile reprint in: William Grimstad, *The Six Million Reconsidered* (1979), p. 124. (At the time this essay was published, Churchill was serving as minister of war and air.)
14. David R. Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy* (New York: 1921), p. 214.
15. *Foreign Relations of the United States -- 1918 -- Russia*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: 1931), pp. 678-679.
16. *American Hebrew* (New York), Sept. 1920. Quoted in: Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1963), p. 268.
17. C. Jacobson, "Jews in the USSR" in: *American Review on the Soviet Union*, August 1945, p. 52.; Avtandil Rukhadze, *Jews in the USSR: Figures, Facts, Comment* (Moscow: Novosti, 1978), pp. 10-11.
18. T. Emmons and B. M. Patenaude, eds., *War, Revolution and Peace in Russia: The Passages of Frank Golder, 1913-1927* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1992), pp. 320, 139, 317.
19. Louis Rapoport, *Stalin's War Against the Jews* (New York: Free Press, 1990), pp. 30, 31, 37. See also pp. 43, 44, 45, 49, 50.
20. Quoted in: Salo Baron, *The Russian Jews Under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: 1976), pp. 170, 392 (n. 4).
21. *The Atlantic*, Sept. 1991, p. 14.; In 1919, three-quarters of the Cheka staff in Kiev were Jews, who were careful to spare fellow Jews. By order, the Cheka took few Jewish hostages. R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (1990), p. 824.; Israeli historian Louis Rapoport also confirms the dominant role played by Jews in the Soviet secret police throughout the 1920s and 1930s. L. Rapoport, *Stalin's War Against the Jews* (New York: 1990), pp. 30-31, 43-45, 49-50.
22. E. Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar* (1992), pp. 244, 303-304.; Bill Keller, "Cult of the Last Czar," *The New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1990.; See also: W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 90.
23. Quoted in: *The New Republic*, Feb. 5, 1990, pp. 30 ff.; Because of the alleged anti-Semitism of Russophobia, in July 1992 Shafarevich was asked by the National Academy of Sciences (Washington, DC) to resign as an associate member of that prestigious body.
24. R. Wilton, *The Last Days of the Romanovs* (1993), p. 148.
25. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (1990), p. 787.; Robert K. Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: 1976), pp. 496-497.
26. An article in a 1907 issue of the respected American journal *National Geographic* reported on the revolutionary situation brewing in Russia in the years before the First World War: "The revolutionary leaders nearly all belong to the Jewish race, and the most effective revolutionary agency is the Jewish Bund" W. E. Curtis, "The Revolution in Russia," *The National Geographic Magazine*, May 1907, pp. 313-314. Piotr Stolypin, probably imperial Russia's greatest statesman, was murdered in 1911 by a Jewish assassin. In 1907, Jews made up about ten percent of Bolshevik party membership. In the Menshevik party, another faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, the Jewish proportion was twice as high. R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (1990), p. 365.; See also: R. Wilton, *The Last Days of the Romanovs* (1993), pp. 185-186.
27. Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of Jewish History* (1977), pp. 71, 74.; In spite of the restrictive "Pale" policy, in 1897 about 315,000 Jews were living outside the Pale, most of them illegally. In 1900 more than 20,000 were living in the capital of St. Petersburg, and another 9,000 in Moscow.
28. Sonja Margolina, *Das Ende der Lügen: Russland und die Juden im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1992). Quoted in: "Ein ganz heisses Eisen angefasst," *Deutsche National-Zeitung* (Munich), July 21, 1992, p. 12.
29. *Krasnaia Gazetta* ("Red Gazette"), September 1, 1918. Quoted in: Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (1990), pp. 820, 912 (n. 88).
30. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: 1990), p. 820.
31. Contrary to what a number of western historians have for years suggested, Soviet terror and the Gulag camp system did not begin with Stalin. At the end of 1920, Soviet Russia already had 84 concentration camps with approximately 50,000 prisoners. By October 1923 the number had increased to 315 camps with 70,000 inmates. R. Pipes, *The*

- Russian Revolution (1990), p. 836.
32. Cited by historian Robert Conquest in a review/ article in *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 23, 1993, p. 27.
 33. *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 23, 1993, p. 27.
 34. Review/article by Robert Conquest in *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 23, 1993, p. 27.; In the "Great Terror" years of 1937-1938 alone, Conquest has calculated, approximately one million were shot by the Soviet secret police, and another two million perished in Soviet camps. R. Conquest, *The Great Terror* (New York: Oxford, 1990), pp. 485-486.; Conquest has estimated that 13.5 to 14 million people perished in the collectivization ("dekulakization") campaign and forced famine of 1929-1933. R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (New York: Oxford, 1986), pp. 301-307.
 35. Russian professor Igor Bestuzhev-Lada, writing in a 1988 issue of the Moscow weekly *Nedelya*, suggested that during the Stalin era alone (1935-1953), as many as 50 million people were killed, condemned to camps from which they never emerged, or lost their lives as a direct result of the brutal "dekulakization" campaign against the peasantry. "Soviets admit Stalin killed 50 million," *The Sunday Times*, London, April 17, 1988.; R. J. Rummel, a professor of political science at the University of Hawaii, has recently calculated that 61.9 million people were systematically killed by the Soviet Communist regime from 1917 to 1987. R. J. Rummel, *Lethal Politics: Soviet Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1917* (Transaction, 1990).
 36. Because of his revolutionary activities, Lenin was sentenced in 1897 to three years exile in Siberia. During this period of "punishment," he got married, wrote some 30 works, made extensive use of a well-stocked local library, subscribed to numerous foreign periodicals, kept up a voluminous correspondence with supporters across Europe, and enjoyed numerous sport hunting and ice skating excursions, while all the time receiving a state stipend. See: Ronald W. Clark, *Lenin* (New York: 1988), pp. 42-57.; P. N. Pospelov, ed., *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: A Biography* (Moscow: Progress, 1966), pp. 55-75.
 37. R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (1990), pp. 187-188.;
 38. *The Nation*, June 24, 1991, p. 838.
 39. Bill Keller, "Cult of the Last Czar," *The New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1990.
 40. "Nostalgic for Nicholas, Russians Honor Their Last Czar," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1993.; "Ceremony marks Russian czar's death," *Orange County Register*, July 17, 1993.
 41. R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (1990), p. 787.
-

Appendix

A striking feature of Mr. Wilton's examination of the tumultuous 1917-1919 period in Russia is his frank treatment of the critically important Jewish role in establishing the Bolshevik regime.

The following lists of persons in the Bolshevik Party and Soviet administration during this period, which Wilton compiled on the basis of official reports and original documents, underscore the crucial Jewish role in these bodies. These lists first appeared in the rare French edition of Wilton's book, published in Paris in 1921 under the title *Les Derniers Jours des Romanoffs*. They did not appear in either the American or British editions of *The Last Days of the Romanoffs* published in 1920.

"I have done all in my power to act as an impartial chronicler," Wilton wrote in his foreword to *Les Derniers Jours des Romanoffs*. "In order not to leave myself open to any accusation of prejudice, I am giving the list of the members of the [Bolshevik Party's] Central Committee, of the Extraordinary Commission [Cheka or secret police], and of the Council of Commissars functioning at the time of the assassination of the Imperial family.

"The 62 members of the [Central] Committee were composed of five Russians, one Ukrainian, six Letts [Latvians], two Germans, one Czech, two Armenians, three Georgians, one Karaim [Karaites] (a Jewish sect), and 41 Jews.

"The Extraordinary Commission [Cheka or Vecheka] of Moscow was composed of 36 members, including one German, one Pole, one Armenian, two Russians, eight Latvians, and 23 Jews.

"The Council of the People's Commissars [the Soviet government] numbered two Armenians, three Russians, and 17 Jews.

"According to data furnished by the Soviet press, out of 556 important functionaries of the Bolshevik state, including the above-mentioned, in 1918-1919 there were: 17 Russians, two Ukrainians, eleven Armenians, 35 Letts [Latvians], 15 Germans, one Hungarian, ten Georgians, three Poles, three Finns, one Czech, one Karaim, and 457 Jews."

"If the reader is astonished to find the Jewish hand everywhere in the affair of the assassination of the Russian Imperial family, he must bear in mind the formidable numerical preponderance of Jews in the Soviet administration," Wilton went on to write.

Effective governmental power, Wilton continued (on pages 136-138 of the same edition) is in the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party. In 1918, he reported, this body had twelve members, of whom nine were of Jewish origin, and three were of Russian ancestry. The nine Jews were: Bronstein (Trotsky), Apfelbaum (Zinoviev), Lurie (Larine), Uritsky, Volodarski, Rosenfeld (Kamenev), Smidovich, Sverdlov (Yankel), and Nakhmkes (Steklov). The three Russians were: Ulyanov (Lenin), Krylenko, and Lunacharsky.

"The other Russian Socialist parties are similar in composition," Wilton went on. "Their Central Committees are made up as follows:"

Mensheviks (Social Democrats): Eleven members, all of whom are Jewish.

Communists of the People: Six members, of whom five are Jews and one is a Russian.

Social Revolutionaries (Right Wing): Fifteen members, of whom 13 are Jews and two are Russians (Kerenski, who may be of Jewish origin, and Tchaikovski).

Social Revolutionaries (Left Wing): Twelve members, of whom ten are Jews and two are Russians.

Committee of the Anarchists of Moscow: Five members, of whom four are Jews and one is a Russian.

Polish Communist Party: Twelve members, all of whom are Jews, including Sobelson (Radek), Krokhenal (Zagonski), and Schwartz (Goltz).

"These parties," commented Wilton, "in appearance opposed to the Bolsheviks, play the Bolsheviks' game on the sly, more or less, by preventing the Russians from pulling themselves together. Out of 61 individuals at the head of these parties, there are six Russians and 55 Jews. No matter what may be the name adopted, a revolutionary government will be Jewish."

[Although the Bolsheviks permitted these leftist political groups to operate for a time under close supervision and narrow limits, even these pitiful remnants of organized opposition were thoroughly eliminated by the end of the 1921.]

The Soviet government, or "Council of People's Commissars' (also known as the "Sovnarkom") was made up of the following, Wilton reported:

Peoples Commissariat (Ministry)	Name	Nationality
Chairman	V.I. Ulyanov (Lenin)	Russian
Foreign Affairs	G.V. Chicherin	Russian
Nationalities	J. Dzhugashvili [Stalin]	Georgian
Agriculture	Protian	Armenian
Economic Council	Lourie (Larin)	Jew

Food Supply	A.G. Schlikhter	Jew
Army and Navy [Military]	L.D. Bronstein (Trotsky)	Jew
State Control	K.I. Lander	Jew
State Lands	Kaufmann	Jew
Works [Labor]	V. Schmidt	Jew
Social Relief	E. Lilina (Knigissen)	Jew
Education	A. Lunacharsky	Russian
Religion	Spitzberg	Jew
Interior	Apfelbaum [Radomyslski] (Zinoviev)	Jew
.Hygiene	Anvelt	Jew
Finance	I. E. Gukovs [and G. Sokolnikov]	Jew
Press	Voldarski [Goldstein]	Jew
Elections	M.S. Uritsky	Jew
Justice	I.Z. Shteinberg	Jew
Refugees	Fenigstein	Jew
Refugees	Savitch (Assistant)	Jew
Refugees	Zaslovski (Assistant)	Jew

Out of these 22 "Sovnarkom" members, Wilton summed up, there were three Russians, one Georgian, one Armenian, and 17 Jews.

The Central Executive Committee, Wilton continues, was made up of the following members:

Y. M. Sverdlov [Solomon] (Chairman)	Jew
Avanesov (Secretary)	Armenian
Bruno	Latvian
Breslau	Latvian [?]
Babtchinski	Jew
N. I. Bukharin	Russian
Weinberg	Jew
Gailiss	Jew
Ganzberg [Ganzburg]	Jew
Danichevski	Jew
Starck	German
Sachs	Jew
Scheinmann	Jew
Erdling	Jew
Landauer	Jew
Linder	Jew
Wolach	Czech
S. Dimanshtein	Jew
Encukidze	Georgian
Ermann	Jew
A. A. Ioffe	Jew

Karkhline	Jew
Knigissen	Jew
Rosenfeld (Kamenev)	Jew
Apfelbaum (Zinoviev)	Jew
N. Krylenko	Russian
Krassikov	Jew
Kaprik	Jew
Kaoul	Latvian
Ulyanov (Lenin)	Russian
Latsis	Jew
Lander	Jew
Lunacharsky	Russian
Peterson	Latvian
Peters	Latvian
Roudzoutas	Jew
Rosine	Jew
Smidovitch	Jew
Stoutchka	Latvian
Nakhamkes (Steklov)	Jew
Sosnovski	Jew
Skrytnik	Jew
L. Bronstein (Trotsky)	Jew
Teodorovitch	Jew [?]
Terian	Armenian
Uritsky	Jew
Telechkine	Russian
Feldmann	Jew
Fromkin	Jew
Souriupa	Ukrainian
Tchavtchevadze	Georgian
Scheikmann	Jew
Rosental	Jew
Achkinazi	Imeretian [?]
Karakhane	Karaim [Karaite]
Rose	Jew
Sobelson (Radek)	Jew
Schlichter	Jew
Schikolini	Jew
Chklianski	Jew
Levine-(Pravdine)	Jew

Thus, concluded Wilton, out of 61 members, five were Russians, six were Latvians, one was a German, two were Armenians, one was a Czech, one was an Imeretian, two were Georgians, one was a Karaim, one was a Ukrainian, and 41 were Jews.

The Extraordinary Commission of Moscow (Cheka) 'the Soviet secret police and predecessor of the GPU, the NKVD and the KGB was made up of the following:

F. Dzerzhinsky (Chairman)	Pole
Y. Peters (Deputy Chairman)	Latvian
Chklovski	Jew
Kheifiss	Jew
Zeistine	Jew
Razmirovitch	Jew
Kronberg	Jew
Khaikina	Jew
Karlson	Latvian
Schaumann	Latvian
Leontovitch	Jew
Jacob Goldine	Jew
Galperstein	Jew
Kniggisen	Jew
Katzis	Latvian
Schillenkuss	Jew
Janson	Latvian
Rivkine	Jew
Antonof	Russian
Delafabre	Jew
Tsitkine	Jew
Roskirovitch	Jew
G. Sverdlov (Brother of president of the Central Executive Committee)	Jew
Biesenski	Jew
J. Blumkin (Count Mirbach's assassin)	Jew
Alexandrovitch (Blumkin's accomplice)	Russian
I. Model	Jew
Routenberg	Jew
Pines	Jew
Sachs	Jew
Daybol	Latvian
Saissoune	Armenian
Deylkenen	Latvian
Liebert	Jew
Vogel	German
Zakiss	Latvian

Of these 36 Cheka officials, one was a Pole, one a German, one an Armenian, two were Russians, eight were Latvians, and 23 were Jews.

"Accordingly," Wilton sums up, "there is no reason to be surprised at the preponderant role of Jews in the assassination of

the Imperial family. It is rather the opposite that would have been surprising."

Bibliographic information

Author:	Weber, Mark
Title:	The Jewish Role in the Bolshevik Revolution and Russia's Early Soviet Regime
Source:	<i>The Journal for Historical Review</i> (http://www.ihr.org)
Date:	January/February 1994
Issue:	Volume 14 number 1
Location:	Page 4
ISSN:	0195-6752
Attribution:	"Reprinted from <i>The Journal of Historical Review</i> , PO Box 2739, Newport Beach, CA 92659, USA. Domestic subscriptions \$40 per year; foreign subscriptions \$60 per year."
Please send a copy of all reprints to the Editor.	

[Main](#) | [Leaflets](#) | [Journal](#) | [Books](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Search](#) | [Support IHR](#) | [Subscribe](#)