

Review

A. Solzhenitsyn: Two hundred years together

In these books (I: Before the Revolution and II: In the Soviet Union), Solzhenitsyn is dealing with an explosive topic – explosive from its revelation of the Jewish influence on the revolutionary process in Russia and the inevitably related accusation of causing anti-Semitic sentiments – it is difficult to imagine how to avoid such a reaction. He does it in a way which is both fascinating and boring; this seemingly controversial statements calls for explanation. We do not read much of Solzhenitsyn's writing, he is mainly connecting quotations with a few linking words. That, however, is an art of itself. The quotations are thoroughly cited though. I must admit, it is impossible for a non-Russian to check these references, mostly originating from older Russian books and papers, and the whole army of names leaves in most cases no recognition by me. And the quotations seem to represent Jews as well as non-Jews. So you, the reader, form an opinion not from what Solzhenitsyn wrote but from what other wrote and Solzhenitsyn collected – or perhaps selected?

The reaction will undoubtedly claim that a selection leads the reader to an unfavourable conclusion. Solzhenitsyn can argue back, that all essential items are documented numerous of times and from different angles of vision – and exactly this thoroughness also makes the book a bit boring; at least, it was heavy stuff for me, ideal literature for nearly instant sleep. That is also the reason why I allow me this succinct review, which may give the essence in brief but without the shadow of documentation of the statements made here. For that, I make a general reference to Solzhenitsyn's books but I am not certain that he would agree to my conclusion.

It has for months been the literature for inducing my sleep. Not that you misunderstand me here, it is indeed most interesting, but also a very heavy literature. The author emphasizes that he is trying to give a neutral description, and I strongly believe he attempted that, but two circumstances make it difficult: This is a topic where only few were neutral, and the conclusion, the reader adopts, becomes anything else than neutral:

Up to the first part of the 18th Century, there were hardly any Jews in Russia. What changed that situation was the conquest of Lithuania and the Eastern part of Poland. Russia came to the Jews, where after the Jews came to Russia. In the newly conquered territories, the Jews had already gained a fixed position, and there we meet an issue, which easily touches anti-Semitism, possibly while touching the truth simultaneously: there seems to have been something close to a monopoly for Jews in the new territories to make strong alcohol and sell it to the peasants, who were thereby partly taken away from their work on the fields.

Since 1804, a number of commissions have been dealing with the question of, how to integrate the Jews in Russia. For more than 50 years,

while history took various other turns, this was done with ill-fated attempts to settle them as peasants in some new territories, most of which had been conquered from the Turks. How much was invested by the Russian government, and how badly was it received by a people which, with a few exceptions, were not the least motivated for this kind of life. Many Jews wanted to leave the farmland to others and take money for that rent, but this was in the beginning prohibited.

With the increasing settlement of Jews, it was also demanded that they should contribute with recruits, indicating the integration. That proved to be a persistent troublesome issue, never really solved, while the (predominantly poorer) Jews, who were appointed by their Jewish committees, tried nearly everything possible to evoke military service or at least overcome it in a non-military way.

Up through the 19th Century, there was a definite tendency for improved education, at first against the will of the Jewish organizations. From basic school and higher school, it was soon allowed also to participate at the highest educations at the universities, and Jews with an academic degree were given permission to settle all over Russia. In the 1860^{ies}, Jews were given more freedom to settle and also to buy business shares. This resulted in a few families completely dominating the export firms of grains and taking the majority of the evolving railway firms. The majority of the Jews did, of course, not belong to the rich families, although the integration attempts had put them at a somewhat privileged level in comparison to Russian farmers.

A turning point in Russian history is marked by the killing of Czar Alexander II in 1881. Until this time, Jews had taken no particular part in the revolutionary movements. That changed now rapidly, up to the end of the century, somewhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of the prominent revolutionaries were Jewish, to be compared with the Jews making up about 6% of the population.

Starting in 1881 (in Odessa earlier) were the ill-famed 'pogroms.' Here we discover the importance of utilizing bizarre descriptions abroad. The first pogroms had, with one singular exception, no fatalities. They were, however, referred quite differently, and most effectual abroad. The Russian government were never acquainted with such use of propaganda. The Jewish community, however, took two consequences of their successes: they provoked more conflicts between Christians and Jews and they conquered the press referring it. This strategy has been maintained up to date.

The Jews demanded two things: equal rights and autonomy. Other national groups demanded either or. It was indeed a controversy, that – with few but important exceptions – the Jews tried to evade the duty to defend their country (logically to be associated with equal rights) but demanded full access to all areas of Russia, geographically as well as occupationally. They filled up high schools and universities (academic professions had the right to practice outside the restricted areas) but seldom wished integration. Only few converted to Christianity, some certainly with the intention thereby to be permitted a stay in the large cities. In a quest, which language the persons considered their 'first' language, only 3% of the Russian Jews answered

'Russian.' Yiddish was prevailing, Hebrew was only practised by very few and was threatened in its existence at the time.

The dominance of the press was obtained with comparatively few people. There were a considerable amount of craftsmen and academics (physicians and lawyers) but typical occupation towards 1900 were connected to banks and trade. This often contributed to sentiments, feeling that some Jews were utilizing trade monopolies and internal agreements to press the prices for corn (almost the entire agricultural export was in Jewish hands). What they were largely unable to produce, they were more able to sell, but with most negative effects upon the peasants. It is not difficult to guess, which sentiments that evoked.

Russia was/is a homeland to many nationalities. These generally understood themselves as Russian with a certain national background. Only few of the Jews wanted to understand themselves as Russian. They were fighting (with various means) for equal rights, but not for assimilation. To that desire, one might remember how the Jews were never really welcome to enter Russia in the 19th century but came as Russia engulfed nations with a high proportion of Jews.

The description of Jewish domination in trade, banking, press and two academic professions, law and medicine, towards the end of the 19th Century has clear resemblance with the domination of the same professions by a smaller minority in the United States after World War II.

With the revolutions (yes, there were two completed, plus a Bolshevik attempt in-between), matters differed dramatically. The first one, the one in February, was a Russian one, but the Jews were rapid to draw advantage of the situation. All limitations to the Jews were cancelled. The provisional government under Kerensky decided nothing; instead all important decisions were made by a secret 'executive committee' of the Soviet in Petrograd.

The Jews almost dominated the *October Revolution* and the succeeding period of *Red Terror* and the *Civil War* (Largely there were 30-50% Jews in the leading positions of the Bolshevik organs, but excesses appeared; in the lower ranks, the Jew were much less frequent). There were also Jews in the opposition and in the White Army, but they were comparatively scarce. In the beginning of the 1920ties, the Jews largely moved the large cities, and their political domination continued, giving rise to a beginning anti-Semitism – but any talk about it and its reasons were banned as itself anti-Semitic (as Solzhenitsyn's studies and this review will be) and contra-revolutionary, the latter then generally rewarded with 9 gram lead in the neck. The Jews found advantage in being admitted to the higher academic studies, but that was an indirect consequence of the punishment of the old nobility and bourgeoisie, whose descendants were barred, and the not so convincing accomplishments of the worker's and peasant's offspring at the universities.

In the 1920ies, the situation was largely as predetermined, with a disproportionately amount of Jews in leading positions. With the conflict with Trotsky 1926/27, a number of Jews disappeared, but Stalin made no systemic anti-Semitism being part of the fight for power. In 1929, millions of peasants were killed in the destruction of their independence and the creation of the

kolkhozes. That was a process which hardly made Jews the victims, since they had largely occupied the position as peasants for long. Conversely, many Jews were made victims of the monstrous era of 1937/38. However, this was not, as frequently described, a consequence of anti-Semitism but of their domination of the new upper class

In Gulag, the Jews gained special treatment – if they wanted. Except for one case, Solzhenitsyn avoids use of the 'title' Kapo (known from the German concentration camp) and instead, in the German translation uses the word 'Schlauberger' (smart aleck or wise guy). Jews gained and helped each other to obtain special light job, occasionally even associated with an income. Solzhenitsyn also mentions a few persons who did not grasp the outstretched hand and instead demonstrated solidarity, but such cases were exceptional. In the official leadership of the camps, the Jews dominated. The author regrets that this relation in itself may stimulate anti-Semitic conclusions but does not take it for a reason to disguise the facts.

The war made a difference to the relationship. At first, the division of Poland in 1939 led to the inclusion of many Jews, that of the Baltic countries in 1941 to further. After the War broke out in that year, the fast progress of the German invasion made further rescue of the resting Jews impossible, but else Jews were evacuated to safe areas with priority. In particular in Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania, monstrous pogroms were carried out under participation of the local population. Largely, Jews took active part in the war; it is informed that there were during the war in total 270 Jewish generals or admirals, an impressive figure though difficult to make in relation in the absence of knowledge of the absolute number of the highest officers. Altogether, Jews added some 425,000 soldiers to the Red Army. Two important numbers are given: 2.7 million killed Jews and 27 million killed Russians. However, these figures are not directly comparable. The Jews were largely murdered in the new areas (East-Poland, the Baltic countries, Moldavia) and Ukraine in the relation 2:1 new:old Soviet area, whereas the bigger figure only refers to the 'genuine' pre-war Soviet union. The remaining Jewish inhabitants were largely killed on the spot – predominantly shot – whereas you find that many Russian soldiers died of hunger and typhus in the concentration camps – how many exactly is currently unknown, as the Jews attempt to take credit of all such deaths to have occurred on account of their (also without any Holocaust) terrible fate.

With the end of the War, the eastwards evacuated Jews wanted to return home – and were surprised to find out that they were not at all welcome. In particular in Ukraine, the reception was hostile. In the 'Jewish autonomous region of Birobidshan' in Siberia, on the border to Amur, only 14,000 of 60,000 Jewish settlers in the region, an area on the Chinese almost double as big as Israel, were present, comprising just 9% of the population. 1948-52 appeared a new era of Stalin's 'cleansing' of the party, which also hit many Jews (without necessarily being of anti-Semitic origin). With the death of Stalin on March 5, 1953, this chapter ended suddenly.

Khrushchev became first secretary after Stalin, but his position as the first man in the state can only be considered secure four years later. The Jews now completely disappeared from the party leadership, a development which

continued what had commenced under Stalin. Of the Jews, 95% had moved to the big cities, there comprising 3.8 (Leningrad), 5.8% (Moscow) and 13% (Kiev), as compare to their 1.1% part of the Soviet population. Of the physicians, 15% were Jews and Psychiatry was virtually a Jewish speciality – a bad time for Russian psychiatry, by the way. But the domination of university studies slowly decreased towards the 1960ies.

The Six-Day War occurred around the time when the relationship changed, whether related to that or not. The Jews, who had played a disproportionate big influence in Soviet society from 1917 to the death of Stalin in 1953, suddenly perceived themselves as the tyrant's foremost victims. With very few exceptions no regrets were expressed over the Jewish people's own complicity towards the Russian people (or the Soviet as a whole). On the contrary, the Russian people were made responsible for the Jewish suffering in this era.

Jewish immigration started, at first (but often only as a first step) to Israel. In 1970, less than 1% of the Soviet population were now Jewish. And then comes the surprise: yes, there were a high proportion of Jews among the ruling class – but they had allegedly only prevented worse (?) from occurring, due to the high education and humanist behaviour which is typical for all Jews. Another aspect: never had anyone expressed insult over blunt insults about the Russian soul; but try to imagine, some had used the same expression about the Jewish soul? The sensitive and paranoid guards of Anti-Semitism would raise the alarm bells by slightest indication.

In 1972, the exodus started with some 30,000 Jews, who almost all went to Israel (at first, at least). The following year brought similar results, but already in 1974, 70% were 'redirected' to the West from Vienna or Rome, a figure soon increasing to 98%. This happened as Jewish assimilation stood at its highest; it was based essentially on a financial background and not anti-Semitism – except perhaps the question: "Why were only they permitted to leave?"

A last return of attempted Jewish supremacy occurred after the dismantling of the Soviet Union under Boris Jelzin, when a few Jewish oligards (Berezovsky and Khodorchovsky, among others) in a few years had collected immense riches and demanded political influence while simultaneously keeping a double Israeli citizenship for safety; this development exceeds the frames of Solzhenitsyn's study.

In Wikipedia is mentioned that the study was only translated to German and French, and that it gave rise to claims of the author's anti-Semitism: three of the cited reviews falls into this pit, two excludes it while the content of the last two is not revealed (only the titles). This is characterized by anxiety of confronting the real question, as also Solzhenitsyn initially expressed.

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