

The Man Who Meant Too Much: Domestic and International Implications of the Beilis Case

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## Introduction: The Beilis Case, Antisemitism, and Jewish Life in Kiev and Late Imperial Russia

In 1911, in Kiev, then part of the Russian Empire, a Jewish man named Mendel Beilis was accused of murdering a young Christian boy named Andrei Iushchinskii. Iushchinskii's killer left his body riddled with approximately forty-seven stab wounds, a grotesque crime, made even more horrible by the fact that the victim was only thirteen-years-old. Although there was no evidence tying Beilis to the crime, he quickly became the subject of investigation because of his religion, and the work of both far-right wing organizations and the Russian government. In an attempt to rally the public in support of a decaying empire, the state tried Beilis for murder in 1913, a year after arresting him. He narrowly escaped conviction, by a vote of six-to-six, but the jury agreed seven-to-five that the crime had been a ritual murder. The allure of a murder mystery surrounds the Beilis case, but even more interesting is the way in which the affair reflects Kievan Jewish history and the international Jewish experience at the time.

Russia has traditionally been thought of as an unfriendly environment for Jews, especially during the early twentieth century, when pogroms were a common occurrence, and large numbers of Jews emigrated to the rest of the Western world. This study complicates the popular understanding of late imperial Russia as a society hostile toward its Jewish population. Although antisemitism clearly played an important role in the Beilis case, the affair cannot be entirely explained by ethnic or religious hatred, as it was also an attempt to unite a dying empire behind an ideology of antisemitism. This reflects the nature of Jewish life in broader Kievan society, where Jews faced oppression, but also achieved economic and cultural success. The international response to the Beilis case, on the part of both Jews and non-Jews alike, suggests that the Western world, as represented by Great Britain and the United States, was shocked and outraged by this antisemitic persecution of an innocent man. However, acts of antisemitism in

these countries during the same period illustrates that the Russian dual dynamic of Jewish oppression and acceptance was present throughout the Western world, albeit to a lesser degree. By examining the historical context of the Beilis case, both locally and internationally, historians can deepen their understanding of Jewish life during this period.

## Chapter 1: Jewish Life in Kiev and Russia During the Late Imperial Period

In order to understand the relationship between the Beilis case and how it represented the broader Russian Jewish experience in the late imperial period, it's necessary to first examine the historical context of Jewish life in Kiev and Russia prior to Iushchinskii's murder. During this time, Kievan Jews dealt with antisemitism, espoused by the government, radical right-wing groups, and members of the local population. They found themselves trapped by a litany of legal restrictions and a constant fear of expulsion from the city, and suffered under the resentment of their Christian neighbors. However, despite this oppression, many members of Kiev's Jewish community managed to succeed economically and culturally, and built communal institutions that sought to address the social problems Jews faced in their daily lives. This trend parallels the Jewish experience throughout the Russian Empire, where Jews faced discrimination but still managed to survive—and, in some cases, thrive. The Beilis case reflects this duality of antisemitism and normal everyday life for Jews in Kiev and Russia—while antisemitism was important, it certainly doesn't tell the whole story.

Economic frustration appears to have been the primary cause of antisemitism in Kiev, but ancient Judeophobia and negative stereotypes about Jews also contributed to these feelings of fear and resentment. Antisemites were afraid that Jews would come to control Kiev, given what appeared to be their disproportionate success in business. However, historically, it was Christians who prescribed Jews the role of money lenders, because prohibitions in Christianity, not Judaism, prohibited the collection of interest. In this way, even the modern conception of antisemitism was shaped by ancient religious resentment. This fear was exacerbated by the fact that many considered the city the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy, and were especially sensitive to

any perceived threat to their faith.<sup>1</sup> By allowing Jews to enter such a sacred city, many felt that Russian Orthodoxy was at risk of being impinged upon. This interpretation of Jewish life within Kiev and the Empire as a whole in the late imperial period challenges the widely accepted notion that anti-Judaism and antisemitism are distinct phenomena. Both ancient Christian ideas of Jews as villains and modern economic resentments contributed to the antisemitism found in Kiev and the Russian Empire after the turn of the twentieth century.

However, antisemitism didn't define the Jewish experience in Kiev in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Jews in Kiev were able to develop a rich cultural life, and some reached incredible heights in the world of business, illustrating their ability to succeed even duress. They also formed a number of communal organizations, designed to combat the ills of poverty that many within the community faced. These achievements remind historians that the story of Jews in Kiev and late imperial Russia isn't one solely of devastation and failure—in many ways Kievan Jews were similar to their Christian neighbors. Jewish life in Kiev also counters the stereotype of Jews as passive in the face of oppression, an idea littered through more traditional histories of them as a people.

This mixture of traditional anti-Judaism with modern antisemitism is the same form of religious and ethnic hatred present in the Beilis case itself. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Beilis was framed for a crime that Christians have accused Jews of committing since the 1100s. The roots of blood libel lie in the false depiction of Jews as Christ-killers, which originated in Christian scriptures. However, the resentment of Jewish influence in modern Kiev and the tsar's political goals, both contemporary ideas, drove the progression of the case, and antisemitic experts cited "science" in their attempts to prove that a ritual murder had occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 18-19.

Placing the case within the historical context of Jewish life in Kiev and the Russian Empire more broadly reveals that it was largely representative of antisemitism and the Jewish experience there, as opposed to exceptional.

There are only two academic works in English specifically on Jewish life in Kiev, Natan Meir's *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis, 1859-1914*, published in 2010, and Victoria Khiterer's *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of the Jews in Kiev Before February 1917*, published in 2016. These two scholars both argue that Jews faced considerable oppression in the city, but continued to live there because of the opportunities it offered them. Both Khiterer and Meir also note the relative lack of available primary source materials on Jewish life in Kiev, which has proved problematic for researchers and likely discouraged further scholarship on the subject. This difficulty with accessing primary source materials, as well as the language barrier between the researcher and the relevant documents, limited the scope of this investigation. However, this project contributes to the work on Jewish life in Kiev by analyzing the Beilis case, one of the momentous events in its history. This analysis confirms Meir's and Khiterer's conclusion that Kievan Jews experienced both antisemitism and success within the city.

Much more scholarly work has been written on the Jewish experience in the Russian Empire more broadly. Benjamin Nathans' *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, published in 2002, has dominated discussions of the history of Jews in late imperial Russia in recent years. Other secondary works on Jews in imperial Russia include: Jeffrey Veidlinger's *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (2009), Pauline Wengeroff's *Memoirs of a Grandmother: Scenes from the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (2010), Antony Polonsky's *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (2009), and a variety of John Doyle Klier's books on the subject, including *Imperial Russia's Jewish*

*Question* (1995) and *Perspectives on the 1881-1882 Pogroms in Russia* (1984). In the broader body of work on Russian Jewish history, this project is a case study of one antisemitic event, the city it occurred in, and the international response to it.

Prior to the end of the eighteenth-century, few Jews lived in Russia. The three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, 1793, and 1795 introduced Jews into the Russian Empire in large numbers.<sup>2</sup> In response to this influx of an undesirable population, Catherine II created the Pale of Settlement in the 1790s, which would ultimately become home to the vast majority of the Empire's Jews.<sup>3</sup> In this way, modern Russian Jewish history immediately began on the wrong foot.

Christian merchants, resentful of Jewish businessmen's success and tired of competing with them for customers, petitioned the government to ban Jews from Kiev, a request that was granted by Nicholas I in 1827, and executed in 1835, when he expelled the Jews and excluded Kiev from the Pale.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, the expulsion of Jewish merchants from Kiev caused the city's economy to suffer and, as a result, Jews began to be readmitted to Kiev in 1859. Initially, only first-guild merchants were allowed in, but two years later, in 1861, second-guild merchants were also granted the right of residency.<sup>5</sup> This event marked the permanent establishment of a Jewish community in Kiev, and the following fifty years preceding the Beilis case will be the primary focus of this chapter. It's important to note that Jews were allowed to return to Kiev for economic purposes, highlighting the nature of their relationship to Russian society at the time.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> John Klier, "Pale of Settlement," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale\\_of\\_Settlement](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement).

<sup>4</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 25.

The assassination of Alexander II by revolutionaries in March of 1881 triggered a violent outburst of antisemitism in Russia, as there was a strong association between Jews and the leftist radical movement. This association had some basis in fact, given that Jews disproportionately supported the left after being persecuted for decades by the conservative right. Pogroms began in April of 1881 and continued across the Empire into 1882. Kiev itself exploded with antisemitic violence on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, in a multi-day pogrom that would challenge Jewish relations with gentiles in the city. To a large degree, the local government refused to get involved, despite the likelihood that they could've stopped the pogrom, according to Khiterer.<sup>6</sup> The pogrom in Kiev was the largest of 1881-1882 in terms of both the number of people who participated in the violence and looting, and the losses of the Jewish community.<sup>7</sup>

These pogroms inspired the government to write the May Laws of 1882, also known as the "Temporary Laws." Although one might expect that these laws, created after an epidemic of mass violence, would *protect* Jews, the May Laws actually blamed Jews for the pogroms of 1881-1882, and instated restrictions against them. The four provisions of these laws stated that Jews: 1) were forbidden to settle outside of "towns and boroughs," 2) were forbidden from receiving mortgages or deeds, and 3) were forbidden from conducting business on Sundays and other holy Christian days. These measures were anything but temporary, as they remained in place until 1917,<sup>8</sup> and contributed to the decision of over one million Jews to emigrate from Russia.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 261.

<sup>7</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 268.

<sup>8</sup> David B. Green, "This Day in Jewish History: May Laws Punish Russia's Jews," *Haaretz*, May 15, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard K. Johnpoll, "Why They Left: Russian-Jewish Mass Migration and Repressive Laws, 1881-1917," American Jewish Archives, [http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1995\\_47\\_01\\_00\\_johnpoll.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1995_47_01_00_johnpoll.pdf).

Select groups of Jews were expelled from Kiev throughout the 1880s and 1890s, and into the 1900s, further illustrating the instability and uncertainty that haunted their existence. Expulsion appears to have been the primary threat to Jews in Kiev, as it was one of the major concerns of their daily lives. Kievan police began raiding Jewish homes by night during the 1880s, in search of Jews residing in the city illegally.<sup>10</sup> Many would accept bribes in exchange for ignoring illegal residents. The confusing nature of the laws governing Jewish residency, as well as the willingness of police officers to abuse them for their own personal gain, created a system in which it was easy for fearful Jews to be exploited. But not only Jews without residence permits were subject to expulsion. In 1886, over 2,000 families were expelled from Kiev, and in 1910, the authorities forced another 1,200 to leave.<sup>11</sup> The government justified these campaigns by playing on fears of Jewish participation in the revolutionary movement.<sup>12</sup> This instability that many of Kiev's Jews were forced to reckon with on a daily basis highlights their tenuous position within the city.

In May of 1886, Nicholas II was reluctantly crowned tsar. He was a staunch antisemite and a terrible politician, relying on his "inner voice" to make his governing decisions. His unpredictability made it difficult to determine what he was thinking, and the desire to please him would later contribute to the progression of the Beilis case. Nicholas II had a surprisingly close relationship with right-wing political groups in the Empire, given his conservatism and the right's desire to preserve the autocracy. His preference for the right wing enabled the

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<sup>10</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 132.

<sup>11</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 121.

<sup>12</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 126-127.

development of these organizations, as well as their antisemitism. In the following chapter, the important role that the far-right wing played in the Beilis case itself will be discussed.

The following decade, prior to the turn of the century, was a period of relative peace for Kiev's Jewish community. Surprisingly, the 1881 pogrom appears to not have had a permanent effect on Christian-Jewish relations. However, the turn of the century marked the beginning of a decade of despair for the Russian Jewish community. 1903 in particular was a difficult time for Jews in late imperial Russia, as it was the year of both the Kishinev Pogrom and the initial publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, two of the most important antisemitic events of this period. Between April 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, in Kishinev, the capital of Bessarabia, forty-nine Jews were killed, 424 were wounded, 700 Jewish homes were destroyed, and 600 Jewish businesses were demolished.<sup>13</sup> This brutal attack on the Kishinev Jewish community served as a reminder that Jews were still not accepted as Russians. Ten days later, Jews in Kiev, approximately 300 miles away, fled the city after rumors spread that they were also going to be attacked.<sup>14</sup> This fear, so far from the original pogrom, suggests that Kievan Jews didn't feel entirely comfortable within the city, and were willing to believe that they too could easily become the victims of such violence. This same year, portions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a document claiming to contain Jewish plans for world domination, was published in *Znamya*, a Russian newspaper.<sup>15</sup> *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* remains an important antisemitic chronicle to this day, and contributed to the rising tide of hatred at the time.

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<sup>13</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 272.

<sup>14</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 272.

<sup>15</sup> "Protocols of the Elders of Zion: Timeline," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007244>.

The Revolution of 1905 and the subsequent publication of the October Manifesto triggered another wave of antisemitism and pogroms—this one more powerful and enduring than that of 1881-1882. According to Polonsky, 690 pogroms occurred in 660 cities, towns, and villages between October 18<sup>th</sup> and October 29<sup>th</sup>. During these pogroms, Polonsky estimates that 3,100 Jews were killed, 2,000 were seriously injured, and more than 15,000 were wounded.<sup>16</sup> This massive outbreak of violence and destruction against Jews illustrates their continued outsider status in the Russian Empire. Kiev was no exception.

In Kiev, the pogrom broke out on October 18<sup>th</sup>, beginning with the suppression of a large political meeting downtown, where participants were celebrating the October Manifesto and the anticipated liberalization of Nicholas II's reign. Troops fired on the gathered crowds, and the chaos that ensued evolved into a pogrom. On October 19<sup>th</sup>, the homes of rich Jews were looted, along with the Jewish artisan school.<sup>17</sup> Even the wealthiest Jews in Kiev were not safe from attack. Some policemen and troops actively participated in the pogrom themselves, while others remained indifferent, allowing the violence and looting to continue for days. The strength of the military and police presence in Kiev is testament to their refusal, not inability, to act—the city was under martial law beginning October 14<sup>th</sup>, housed a garrison of 30,000 men, and had as many as 10 police stations. Both the governor and the governor-general were also present.<sup>18</sup> The fact that government officials likely could've prevented the pogrom, but chose not to, suggests tacit approval of the riots. The violence lasted three days, during which 100 Jews were killed, approximately 406 were wounded, and most of the Jewish property in the city was destroyed,

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<sup>16</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 273.

<sup>17</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 275.

<sup>18</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 276.

with 1,800 homes and businesses ransacked.<sup>19</sup> This massive wave of destruction reminded Jews that there were still many to whom they were an unwelcome presence in Kiev.

This pogrom devastated the Kievan Jewish community, and marred Jewish relations with their gentile counterparts in a way that the 1881 pogrom hadn't. Many Jews felt threatened by the possibility of more pogroms, and began to avoid socializing with Christians outside of professional settings. For example, the membership of the Kiev Literary Society, an interfaith organization, consisted of 55% Jews prior to the pogrom, and was composed of only 32% Jewish afterwards.<sup>20</sup> This dramatic decrease in Jewish participation in an interfaith organization like this one illustrates significant Jewish discomfort with the idea of mingling with non-Jews in Kiev. The pogrom also contributed to the growth of the Jewish nationalist movement, as well as support for emigration from Russia, as many Jews began to lose faith in the idea that the Jewish situation in Russian society would ever improve.

Antisemitism in the Russian Empire came to a head on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1911, when the Jewish revolutionary Dmitrii Bogrov assassinated Prime Minister Stolypin, deepening the association between Jews and the radical left, and ending the government's belief that Jewish elders could resolve the question of Jewish revolutionary radicalism.<sup>21</sup> This event, only months after the arrest of Beilis, triggered further antisemitism and fear of Jews.

However, despite the oppression and discrimination that Jews faced in Kiev, it's also important to note their successes, including the ways in which some were very successful in business. The fact that Jews were able to participate in the Kievan economy, and even reach enormous success, supports the argument that antisemitism didn't define Jewish life. Jews played

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<sup>19</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 277.

<sup>20</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 207.

<sup>21</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 421.

an especially important role in the grain, sugar, alcohol, tobacco, and garment trades.<sup>22</sup> The most notable example of Jewish economic prowess was the Brodsky family, the most prestigious Jewish family in Kiev, which initially made its fortune in the sugar industry. Another influential Jewish family was the Zaitsevs, who also made a name for themselves in the sugar trade, and at whose factory Beilis was employed.<sup>23</sup> The establishment of these families as influential figures in Kiev is a testament to the heights that were possible for Jews involved in business.

Other figures that embodied the possibility for Jewish economic success in Kiev were David Margolin, Lev Ginzburg, and Iosif Marshak, all three of whom were prominent businessmen and leaders within the city's Jewish community. Margolin was an industrial tycoon who owned transportation, shipping, and manufacturing companies, donated generously to philanthropic efforts, and served as an economic advisor to the state, receiving many awards for his contributions to society.<sup>24</sup> Ginzburg was a building developer, constructing some of Kiev's most important buildings, including: the Museum of Antiquities and Art, the Choral Synagogue, the Karaite religious building, the Catholic cathedral, the South Russian factory, the Opera, the Operetta, the Solovstov Theater, and the polytechnic institute. He too was a noted philanthropist, and received the title of Commercial Adviser and other state awards, including the order of Saint Anna.<sup>25</sup> Marshak was a prestigious jeweler, creating pieces for a wide range of clients, including Nicholas II and members of the Union of the Russian People, and served as president of the jewelers' organization, the Diamond Club.<sup>26</sup> The fact that all three of these men began their lives

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<sup>22</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 199.

<sup>23</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 204-205.

<sup>25</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 211-212.

<sup>26</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 215-217.

in poverty and made a fortune in Kiev illustrates the ability of Jews to overcome the oppression they faced within the city. However, it's important to note that not all Jews in Kiev were wealthy—far from it. The fact that some Jews achieved business success doesn't mean that they all did, it just indicates that the environment they were in made it possible for some to.

A number of influential Jewish cultural figures also emerged from Kiev, many of whom were writers and poets. The most notable of these was Sholem Aleichem, perhaps the most influential Jewish author of the nineteenth-century, and one of the founding fathers of Yiddish literature. Aleichem lived in Kiev for almost twenty years, moving there to pursue a career in business in 1887, and leaving shortly after the 1905 pogrom.<sup>27</sup> Aleichem frequently wrote about Kiev, whether directly or indirectly, and even authored a fictional novel based on the Beilis case, entitled *The Bloody Hoax*. Other Jewish writers and poets in Kiev included Isaak Kaminer, Yehalel, Yitskhok Yoel Linetskii, Gershon Badenes, Mendele Moicher Sforim, and Hayim Nachman Bialik.<sup>28</sup> The rich literary life of Jewish Kiev reveals that this was a community with something to say, not one beaten into silence by oppression. In 1909, the Jewish community even created a publishing house named Kunst-verlag, which specialized in Yiddish literature.<sup>29</sup> The presence of a Jewish literary culture is an indication of a strong Jewish cultural life in Kiev, surprising given the duress Jews were under from both antisemitism and poverty.

The influence of these Jewish writers was significant, so much so that in 1914, the governor of Podolia ordered that portraits of Aleichem and other Jewish writers, poets, and politicians be confiscated from stores in Litin and Letichev. Authorities also tried to ban

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<sup>27</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 113-114.

<sup>28</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 345-346.

<sup>29</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 355.

celebrations of Aleichem's work, and kept him under police surveillance during his years in Kiev.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that Jewish cultural activity in Kiev was powerful enough to frighten the authorities. Despite the oppression Jews suffered under, they weren't defined by their victimhood—they were able to create a rich cultural community in the face of discrimination.

Kiev was also home to a number of Jewish visual artists, as well as musicians and actors. Art schools, including the Kiev Art School, didn't have Jewish quotas, and so naturally attracted more Jewish students. Kiev's most notable visual artists included: Abram Manevich, Aleksandr Tyshler, Mark Epshtein, Zinovii Tolkachev, and Isaac Rabinovich.<sup>31</sup> The number and variety of these artists points to a rich environment for Jewish art within the city. A similar trend emerged at Kiev's music school, where 445 of the 895 students were Jewish during the 1912-1913 school year.<sup>32</sup> The desire and ability of so many Jews to pursue careers as musicians highlights the diversity and attractiveness of Jewish cultural life in Kiev. Being an actor or a musician was especially popular among Jews in Kiev because these positions granted performers temporary right of residence.<sup>33</sup> The presence of Jewish artists, musicians, and actors within the city illustrates that Kievan Jews found a way to create an exciting cultural world, despite the oppression they faced.

The Jewish community in Kiev also attempted to have an active press, although the government severely limited its rights. Jewish newspapers were published in English, Russian, and Hebrew, catering to diverse audiences. The Yiddish press in particular had a large audience, and newspapers included: *Folk shtime*, *Das folk*, *Kiever tagblat*, *Yudishe naye leben*, and *Kiever*

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<sup>30</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 342.

<sup>31</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 367.

<sup>32</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 369.

<sup>33</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 369.

wort.<sup>34</sup> In order to publish a Jewish periodical in Kiev, one needed the approval of the local authorities, the Kiev Censorship Committee, *and* the Ministry of Central Affairs in St. Petersburg, so the fact that any newspapers existed is remarkable in and of itself.<sup>35</sup> Meir argues that if a free press is a marker of an open civil society, Kiev's Jewish community doesn't pass the test.<sup>36</sup> However, the fact that Kievan Jews were able to attempt to create their own press base is a testament to the strength and determination of the community, as well as its intellectual spirit.

Equally important as the economic success of Kiev's Jewish merchants and the cultural accomplishments of its Jewish artists was the establishment of Jewish communal institutions. Both Khiterer and Meir highlight the importance of these organizations to the Jewish community in Kiev, and Meir especially is concerned with what they tell historians about Jewish identity and their place in the city's society. The existence of philanthropic organizations within Kiev's Jewish community illustrates their desire and capability to enrich their lives and root themselves within the city. By creating groups designed to improve the quality of life for thousands of Kievan Jews, the community and its leaders were insisting that a good life in Kiev was possible for Jews. Despite the antisemitism they were confronted with, they continued to believe that they had a place in Kievan society.

These organizations were founded to address the social issues that poor Jews were facing at the time, including a lack of healthcare, education, and financial resources. The most important of these institutions included: the Kiev Jewish Hospital, the Zaitsev Surgical Hospital, the Brodsky Artisan School, the Jewish sanatorium in Boiarka, the Jewish Charity Organization

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<sup>34</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 357.

<sup>35</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 357.

<sup>36</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 165.

of the Kiev City Administration, the Boarding House for Jewish Children, Jewish Inexpensive Dining, Jewish kindergartens,<sup>37</sup> the Society for the Care of the Poor Jewish Artisans and Workers, the Kiev Jewish branch of the Society for the Protection of Women, and the Society to Maintain Summer Sanatorium Colonies for the Sick Children of Poor Jews in the City of Kiev.<sup>38</sup> The diversity of the focuses of these organizations illustrates the breadth of Jewish communal life in Kiev, and the lofty goals to which this community aspired. Participating in philanthropy also provided many Jews with an alternate source of Jewish identity, especially given that it was difficult for many to remain religiously observant under government restrictions.

Although these organizations didn't have ample resources to eradicate the social problems faced by Kiev's Jews, they certainly made a difference, and their existence is further testament to the resilience of the city's Jewish community. By establishing these organizations, Jews exhibited their desire to make a home for themselves in Kiev, to take care of themselves and each other, and to show their Christian neighbors that they too were capable of organization and philanthropy. Importantly, these communal institutions often served Christians as well as Jews—the Kiev Jewish Hospital, for example, accommodated many Christian patients.<sup>39</sup> Wealthy Jews also donated to both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, likely to show that their fellow citizens in Kiev that they were invested in their community.<sup>40</sup> The fact that Jewish philanthropy was entwined with that of their Christian neighbors suggests that they didn't exist in isolation from one another.

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<sup>37</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 382-383.

<sup>38</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 220-221.

<sup>39</sup> Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of Jews in Kiev Before February 1917* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 149.

<sup>40</sup> Natan Meir, "Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians in Kiev: Intergroup Relations in Late Imperial Associational Life," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 3 (2006): 488.

In addition to the communal institutions that Jews themselves established, there were also Christian organizations that allowed Jewish membership and participation. The existence of organizations, not founded by Jews, designed for both Christian and Jewish participation, suggests that there was a large degree of acceptance for Jews in Kievan society. One example of this was the previously mentioned Kiev Literacy Society. Libraries and reading halls throughout Kiev also carried Russian Jewish literature, an indication that they had Jewish patrons.<sup>41</sup> The social intermingling of Kiev's Jewish and Christian populations indicates a large degree of acceptance of Jews by the majority—after all, in these situations, non-Jews were choosing to interact with Jews not for financial reasons, but instead in their free time. Jews and Christians also interacted in professional societies and social clubs. Both the Society of Proprietors of Ladies' Apparel, founded in 1906, and the Society of Hairdresser-Proprietors, established in 1906 or 1907, have records of membership that include Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish names.<sup>42</sup> This is especially notable given that these organizations were established after the pogrom of 1905, suggesting that not all Jews were frightened of their Christian neighbors even after such a horrific experience.

Meir suggests that the development of communal institutions was consistent with a broader trend in Russian gentile society, and that it was therefore more the result of a modern Russian culture than a Jewish one.<sup>43</sup> This Jewish adaptation of a Russian practice indicates that Jews were able to absorb elements of Russian society and make them their own. The fact that the Jewish community in Kiev conformed to the broader cultural trends in Russia at the time suggests that they were far from an isolated minority.

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<sup>41</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 195.

<sup>42</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 202.

<sup>43</sup> Natan Meir, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 213.

Jews in Kiev experienced antisemitism at the hands of both the government and the gentile population, but despite this, some were also able to achieve remarkable success in the city. This was also the case for many Jews throughout the Russian Empire. The fact that Jews chose to live in Kiev, and that it continued to be a popular destination for Jews leaving the shtetl, didn't mean that antisemitism there didn't exist—instead, it simply meant that Jews thought the potential benefits outweighed the consequences. This combination of antisemitism and Jewish success diversifies the typical portrayal of Jewish life in late imperial Russia as solely one of oppression.

The Beilis case reflected this context of this Jewish experience in Kiev—antisemitism played an important role, but cannot entirely explain the case's progression. This will be the subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter 2: “There Are Those Who Drink Our Blood”: The Beilis Case and Antisemitism in Late Imperial Russia

In March of 1911, in Kiev, then part of the Russian Empire, a man discovered the butchered body of a Christian boy named Andrei Iushchinskii, just a few weeks before Passover. A whirlwind investigation ensued, and, in a matter of months, the police arrested a Jew named Mendel Beilis for the crime. They accused him of slaughtering Iushchinskii in an act of Jewish ritual murder—a false accusation that’s plagued Jews since the case of William of Norwich in 1144. The state tried Beilis in the fall of 1913, and the case quickly evolved into a debate about Jewish religious practice and the existence of ritual murder, as opposed to whether or not Beilis himself had committed the crime. The jury ultimately acquitted Beilis, but only by a vote of six-to-six, as they agreed seven-to-five with the prosecution’s argument that the killing had been a ritual murder. This chapter focuses on the roles of the Russian government and far right-wing organizations and their respective relationships to antisemitism at the time.

Although Russian Jews had no connection to Iushchinskii’s murder, the Beilis affair provided the government with an opportunity to rally behind antisemitism, an ideology that many bureaucrats supported. While many other government officials weren’t antisemitic themselves, a number of them participated in the case in order to satisfy their antisemitic superiors. Members of the Russian government at all levels contributed to this conspiracy, from the local police to Tsar Nicholas II. While bureaucrats and police officers arrested Beilis and conspired to frame him, the prosecution attempted to prove that Judaism was a violent, mystical religion, and that ritual murder was a real Jewish practice. Government officials were largely uninterested in discovering Iushchinskii’s true killer. Far right-wing political organizations in Kiev were adamant supporters of antisemitism, and provided the ideological force that drove the

ritual murder accusation. Although these organizations were clearly less powerful than the Russian government in shaping the Beilis case, members were able to significantly influence the proceedings, and even triggered the initial investigation into Beilis. The general public's views on the Beilis affair are more difficult to discern, given the lack of documentation and their limited role in the case's proceedings. However, it appears that while some members of Kievan society were antisemitic and supported the prosecution of Beilis, many others believed he was innocent. Taken together, an analysis of the role of the government and far right-wing groups reveals that antisemitism was an important factor in the affair, but doesn't entirely explain why the trial proceeded—personal and political motivations were also important. The idea that antisemitism was important, but not the only important factor, parallels the relationship between Kievan and Russian Jews and gentiles discussed in the previous chapter.

In order to understand the role of antisemitism in the Beilis affair, it's important to first document the events of the case. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1911, a man discovered the body of thirteen-year-old Iushchinskii in a cave, eight days after he had disappeared.<sup>44</sup> The killer stabbed him forty-seven times, a fact that the prosecution later used as “proof” that a ritual murder had occurred.<sup>45</sup> Initially, the police suspected that members of the Iushchinskii family committed the crime, but they quickly cleared their names, and two scenarios of the crime emerged—one in which Jews had killed Iushchinskii, and the other in which a criminal gang, led by a woman named Vera Chebryak, had murdered the boy. Chebryak's son, Zhenya, was friends with Iushchinskii, and rumors quickly spread that the two had recently gotten into an argument, during which Iushchinskii threatened to report Chebryak's gang to the police.<sup>46</sup> Beilis, on the other hand, was suspected not because of any personal connection to Iushchinskii, but because

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<sup>44</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 25.

<sup>46</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 111-112.

members of Kiev's far right-wing groups immediately spread the rumor that a "Yid" had committed the crime. A student at Kiev University named Viktor Golubev, a leader of the Double-Headed Eagle, a far right-wing group in Kiev, used his personal connections with government officials to suggest that the crime was a Jewish ritual murder.<sup>47</sup> Beilis was the only Jew who lived near the crime scene, which was close to both the Zaitsev factory, where Beilis worked, and to Cheberyak's apartment.<sup>48</sup> Later, during the trial, the police coerced a number of witnesses to falsely claim that they had seen Beilis with Iushchinskii prior to the boy's death. The police arrested Beilis on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1911, and he remained in jail until his trial, which began on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1913.<sup>49</sup> The trial lasted for just over a month, ending on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1913.<sup>50</sup>

It quickly became clear that the prosecution was determined to put Judaism on trial, as they suggested that the religion was shrouded in mysticism and relied on blood sacrifices, and the defense responded accordingly. While the prosecution questioned Jews about their religious practices and convinced "experts" to testify that ritual murder existed, the defense provided both witnesses who proved Beilis' innocence and their own experts to deny the accusation of ritual murder against the Jews. The charge itself was split into two parts—firstly, the judge asked the jury to determine where and how the crime had occurred, and secondly, whether or not it was Beilis who had murdered Iushchinskii.<sup>51</sup> The split charge granted the government an inherent advantage—even if Beilis wasn't found guilty, the jury could still agree that the crime had been a

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<sup>47</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 11.

<sup>48</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 48.

<sup>49</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 77.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 44.

<sup>51</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 217-218.

Jewish ritual murder. In the end, they did just that, acquitting Beilis by a vote of six-to-six, and agreeing with the state's version of the case seven-to-five.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Russian Government, Antisemitism, and the Beilis Case**

Understanding the government's role in the Beilis case and its relationship to antisemitism is especially important given the administration's power. State officials, whether motivated by antisemitism or personal gain, had the most direct effect on the case—government officials, the police, and the legal system were ultimately responsible for arresting, charging, and trying Beilis. While some members of these state institutions were adamant antisemites, others appear to have been willing to accommodate those who were, despite the fact that they themselves did not subscribe to this ideology. In order to fully understand the role of governmental antisemitism in the Beilis case, it's necessary to investigate how this ideology affected individual state officials at all levels of the bureaucracy.

When examining officials throughout the imperial structure, it follows logically to begin with Nicholas II. Nicholas II was friendly with a number of right-wing organizations, despite the fact that political groups were previously outlawed, and that many other government officials, from the tsar's advisers to the Kievan police, considered the far right an unpredictable movement within an unstable empire, especially given their violent tendencies.<sup>53</sup> In the fall of 1906, Stolypin and other government officials proposed a moderation of the current legal restrictions on Jews, expecting the tsar to quickly consent, given their unanimous agreement on this policy. However, Nicholas II rejected these reforms, citing his "inner voices" as the reason for his

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 65.

<sup>53</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015) 108.

decision.<sup>54</sup> The tsar and his administration also participated actively in the dissemination of antisemitic propaganda. Between 1905 and 1916, the government ordered the printing of fourteen million copies of 2,800 antisemitic books and pamphlets, and the tsar himself gave twelve million rubles to publish this kind of literature, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>55</sup>

Nicholas II's advisers updated him on the case regularly, which is indicated by his characteristic check mark, used to designate documents he'd read, found on papers about Beilis.<sup>56</sup> When Grigory Chaplinskii, chief prosecutor of the Kiev Judicial Chamber, told the tsar that "the Yid Beilis" was responsible for Iushchinskii's murder, Nicholas II crossed himself and approved.<sup>57</sup> Cheberyak was so convinced that the tsar would be on her side in the Beilis case that she attempted to pass him a petition pleading her case during his visit to Kiev in August of 1911.<sup>58</sup> As 1913 approached, the tercentenary jubilee of the Romanov Dynasty, Beilis' defense were hopeful that he would be pardoned, since this occasion was often an opportunity for the tsar to free select prisoners. In fact, the opposite was true. 1912 had been a year of unrest for Nicholas II, which made him even more determined to remain steadfast in his principles, including his antisemitism.<sup>59</sup> As the most powerful man in the empire, he allowed the accusation of ritual murder to proceed.

The tactics used by members of the investigative team were a prime example of officials' willingness to throw an innocent man in jail, spurred either by antisemitism or by their hopes for their own career advancement. The police coerced several witnesses they interviewed, often with

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<sup>54</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 118-119.

<sup>55</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), xx.

<sup>56</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 274.

<sup>57</sup> Mendel Beilis, *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 55.

<sup>58</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 115.

<sup>59</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 179-180.

alcohol, and ignored those who suggested that Cheberyak was responsible. The problem of a corrupt Kievan police force preceded the Beilis case. Even before the state threw him in jail, Beilis was afraid of police procedures because of officers' unpredictability and widespread corruption among them.<sup>60</sup> Chaplinskii eventually admitted that the confessions that put Beilis in jail were fabricated, but continued to support the charges against him.<sup>61</sup> Stepan Beletskii, the national chief of police, bribed a doctor to testify that Iushchinskii's body confirmed the state's scenario of ritual murder, and ordered that the jury be placed under surveillance, breaking the law to further the government's antisemitic agenda in this case.<sup>62</sup>

The Minister of Justice, Ivan Shcheglovitov, also played an important role in turning Iushchinskii's murder into an antisemitic legal case. Shcheglovitov had the ear of Nicholas II, and used his power as a government official and his connections with the Union of the Russian People, another far right-wing organization, to strengthen the ritual murder charge.<sup>63</sup> Members of far right-wing groups also appear to have had inside knowledge of the investigation, and developments within the police precinct, as well as personal connections to the police department, which will be discussed later.<sup>64</sup>

However, it's important to note that a number of figures within the legal system didn't believe that Beilis committed the crime. When the jury acquitted Beilis, the police chief himself was pleased,<sup>65</sup> and multiple police reports document dissent among the ranks over the case.<sup>66</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 31.

<sup>61</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 94.

<sup>62</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 205-206, 264.

<sup>63</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 8.

<sup>64</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 135.

<sup>65</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 170.

<sup>66</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 158.

government made an effort to imprison or otherwise discredit anyone within the bureaucracy who was unwilling to support the accusation of ritual murder. Nikolai Krasovskii, the “Russian Sherlock Holmes”, was originally in charge of the investigation, but when it became clear that he was unwilling to help frame Beilis, his superiors decided to dismiss him. They claimed that Krasovskii extorted a small amount of money from a civilian during his time as a police officer, and had him removed from the case.<sup>67</sup> Evgenii Mishchuk, the commander of the investigative branch of the police department, was accused of being a Judeophile because he didn’t support the ritual murder accusation, and evidence suggests that Golubev, an important figure discussed in detail later, was responsible for his removal from the case.<sup>68</sup> Even witnesses who disputed the state’s version of the case weren’t out of the government’s reach. The police arrested Amzor Karaev, a revolutionary assisting the investigation, on trumped-up charges and imprisoned him, refusing to allow him to testify, despite the fact that Peter Singaevskii, a member of Cheberyak’s gang, had confessed to him that he’d murdered Iushchinskii.<sup>69</sup> This trend illustrates the fact that powerful members of the Russian government were willing to manipulate the law in order to charge a Jew with ritual murder.

Perhaps the most important way that the government used antisemitism was through the prosecution’s strategy during the trial. The members of the prosecution, Oskar Vipper, Alexander Shmakov, and Georgy Zamyslovskii constantly attacked Jews and Judaism, trying desperately to convince the jury to be afraid of a religion they knew nothing about. The trial transcripts are riddled with the prosecution’s attempts to prove that ritual murder existed, and that Iushchinskii’s corpse “scientifically” proved he was a victim of it. Although the state only

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<sup>67</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 151.

<sup>68</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 161 & 176.

<sup>69</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 176.

openly attacked “Jewish ‘fanatics’ and unenlightened Jews,” their antisemitic theories were applied to Jews as a whole, as they targeted men like Beilis, who lacked strong religious beliefs and had few ties to the Jewish community in Kiev.<sup>70</sup> The prosecution also suggested that an international Jewish conspiracy was at work, and was using its influence to protect nefarious Jewish rituals, in which Christian children were murdered and drained of their blood.

The prosecution clearly illustrated its antisemitic agenda when interrogating Jews. During the questioning of the Jewish witness Feivel Shneerson, an unimportant figure in the case, Shmakov badgered him about his right of residence in Kiev, since Jews had to have special permission to live in the city. Alexander Zarudny, a member of the defense, requested that Shmakov’s interrogation be noted in the record, saying, “I hope you do not have any doubts that a Jew has a right to live, or perhaps you sometimes question that right too,” to which Shmakov replied, “Every time I speak about a Jew, Mr. Zarudny asks that it be put into the record. Pretty soon the record will be bulging with Jews.”<sup>71</sup> The prosecution also questioned Shneerson about his religious background because he shared his last name with a famous Jewish family, unbeknownst to him, and called into question his “dark complexion.”<sup>72</sup> Although Beilis didn’t testify, he was also subject to jabs about his Judaism. After the judge asked Beilis what religion he belonged to, and he informed him that he was Jewish, the prosecution used his answer against him, saying, “Beilis answered with a defiant shout, ‘I am a Jew!’... It meant, ‘I am a Jew, and I laugh at you Christians. We Jews can do to you what we please.’”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 192-193.

<sup>71</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 85.

<sup>72</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 82-84.

<sup>73</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 155-156.

In order to prove that ritual murder existed and that Judaism was evil, the prosecution summoned numerous witnesses, including a number of antisemites masquerading as “experts” on Judaism. These men testified not to Beilis’ guilt, but to the existence of ritual murder. This cast of characters included Professor Ivan Sikorskii, Father Justinas Pranaitis, and Dmitry Kosorotov, the three experts on Judaism for the prosecution. Sikorskii claimed that given the state of Iushchinskii’s body, riddled with stab wounds, the crime must have been precisely planned, and that Jews had designed the procedure to extract the maximum amount of blood. He never used the word “Jew” in his testimony, instead citing “racial vengeance” and the “vendetta by the sons of Jacob” as motivations for the crime.<sup>74</sup> Nicholas II himself was the one who paid 4,000 rubles to Kosorotov, a professor of medicine at St. Petersburg University, to testify that Iushchinskii’s corpse proved that he was the victim of Jewish ritual murder.<sup>75</sup> Finally, Pranaitis claimed that Jewish doctrine supported ritual murder, claiming that the religion relied on “a dogma of blood,” and that Jews saw non-Jews as simply “animals in the human image,” to whom the laws against murder did not apply. He drew these conclusions from a book written by the discredited monk Neophite, which included a “procedure” for gathering blood.<sup>76</sup> However, the defense openly discredited Pranaitis when they asked him about Jewish principles and texts in Hebrew, none of which he was able to correctly identify.<sup>77</sup> This direct effort by the prosecution to present antisemitic stereotypes as facts through the use of “expert” witnesses illustrates the great degree to which the trial focused on proving the guilt of Judaism as a religion.

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<sup>74</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 38.

<sup>75</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 263-264.

<sup>76</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 39.

<sup>77</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 15.

Another major theme of the prosecution's antisemitic argument was its reliance on the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy organizing to free Beilis. This accompanied a similar argument often made by far right-wing groups in Russia and throughout Europe, discussed later. The prosecution interrogated Baruch Zaitsev, the owner of the factory where Beilis worked and where the state claimed Iushchinskii died, and questioned him about Judaism because he came from a Jewish family, despite the fact that he openly disapproved of traditional Jewish practices.<sup>78</sup> The prosecution also attempted to discredit Stepan Brazul-Brushkovskii, a journalist who assisted Nikolai Krasovskii in an external investigation of Cheberyak, by highlighting the fact that he was, "...married to a Jewess..." and suggesting that this made him part of the international Jewish conspiracy.<sup>79</sup> The prosecution also attacked Beilis' defense team, many members of which were Jewish, by claiming that they were also involved. For example, the state demanded to know what Arnold Margolin, Beilis' former lawyer, had to say about the role his Jewishness played in his involvement in Beilis' case.<sup>80</sup>

The core arguments made by the prosecution emphasized their focus on the notion of an international Jewish conspiracy. In Vipper's closing argument, he directly accused Jews of interfering with the investigation into Iushchinskii's murder, saying, "Jewish functionaries—not Beilis, for he is a person of limited means—unleashed a campaign to confound and becloud this case," and blamed Jews for the false arrests of members of Iushchinskii's family.<sup>81</sup> Zamyslovskii took a similar approach, claiming that, "only Christians are being arrested, while the Jews are untouched," and accusing Mishchuk and Krasovskii of having "closed their eyes to the doings of

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<sup>78</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 76-79.

<sup>79</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 165.

<sup>80</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 72.

<sup>81</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 160-161.

the Jews.”<sup>82</sup> In suggesting that a Jews across the world were conspiring to prevent the secret of ritual murder from being discovered, the prosecution appealed to the idea that the fate of all Russian gentiles was at stake, and that if the jury didn’t convict Beilis, they would be giving Russia to the Jews. Vipper ended his closing argument by saying, “Russia looks to you for an affirmative sentence... And may almighty God be your guide.”<sup>83</sup>

Since the prosecution put Judaism on trial, instead of Beilis, the defense was compelled to respond to those charges with their own arguments defending the religion. Prior to the trial, Margolin formed a committee of Kievan Jewish leaders to fight for Beilis. They recruited Oskar Gruzenberg, a famous Jewish lawyer who had previously defended another Jew against a ritual murder charge.<sup>84</sup> The defense also provided their own experts on Judaism, as they crafted a defense designed to counter the slander spouted by men like Pranaitis. Rabbi Jacob Mazeh, the chief rabbi of Moscow, disproved Father Pranaitis’ claims using Jewish religious texts.<sup>85</sup> Father Alexander Glagolev, a Kievan professor and leading Christian authority on Judaism, and Professor Ivan Troitskii, an expert on Judaism from the St. Petersburg Theological Seminary, also denied claims of ritual murder.<sup>86</sup> That two of them were Christian scholars may have added credibility to their statements with the jury.

Visily Maklakov and Gruzenberg both delivered impassioned closing arguments that rebutted the prosecution’s antisemitism. Maklakov simultaneously defended Judaism and separated Beilis from the state’s condemnation of Jews. This indicates that the lawyer thought it

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<sup>82</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 204.

<sup>83</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 167.

<sup>84</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 132.

<sup>85</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 152.

<sup>86</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 39.

was necessary to counter all of the prosecution's arguments, in the case that the jury believed the antisemitic propaganda they preached. Gruzenberg, on the other hand, directly countered the accusations of ritual murder, and presented a proud, personal defense of Judaism. He testified that if ritual murder existed, then he would have abandoned his religion, and that no Jew would have ever supported this practice. He also highlighted the fact that the prosecution had spent most of the trial discussing Jewish religious practices, saying, "The presiding judge explained to you that the Jewish religion per se is not on trial, the court being only concerned with individual fanatics... Yet what did we examine, what did we discuss these last three days? We delved into the Bible, the Talmud, the Zohar, books that were not authored by fanatics."<sup>87</sup>

Gruzenberg, on the other hand, directly countered the accusations of ritual murder against Jews, and presented a prideful defense of Judaism. He testified that if ritual murder existed, then he would have abandoned his religion, and that no Jew would have ever supported this practice. He also highlighted the fact that the prosecution had spent most of the trial attempting to prove that all Jews were guilty, saying, "The presiding judge explained to you that the Jewish religion per se is not on trial, the court being only concerned with individual fanatics... Yet what did we examine, what did we discuss these last three days? We delved into the Bible, the Talmud, the Zohar, books that were not authored by fanatics."<sup>88</sup>

In addition to the innumerable references to Judaism and its practices, both real and imagined, the prosecution ignored all evidence that Cheberyak and her gang killed Iushchinskii. Despite the fact that a number of witnesses identified Cheberyak as the likely suspect, the

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<sup>87</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 190.

<sup>88</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 190.

prosecution treated her as a reliable witness, even painting her as the victim during the trial.<sup>89</sup>

One of Cheberyak's neighbors testified that she had heard a scuffle in Cheberyak's apartment, including the screams of a child,<sup>90</sup> while a friend of Cheberyak's admitted that when she slept over at her apartment that night, she thought she felt a body at the bottom of the bed.<sup>91</sup> One child who was playing with Iushchinskii at the time he was supposedly kidnapped testified that Cheberyak had tried to intimidate him into supporting her version of the story during the trial.<sup>92</sup> The evidence against Cheberyak was much stronger than that against Beilis. A number of the prosecution's most important witnesses, including the Shakhovskayas, a couple who claimed that they had heard that Iushchinskii was with Beilis before his death, admitted to having been plied with alcohol or otherwise coerced by the police, and recanted on the stand.<sup>93</sup> Despite all of this, the prosecution continued to accuse Beilis of murder while supporting Cheberyak, a further testament to the state's dedication to antisemitism over the facts.

Outside of the prosecution, the judge, Fyodor Boldyrev, was also complicit in the government's antisemitic scheme. Prior to the trial, Boldyrev was a rightist, and Beletskii and Chaplinskii promised him a promotion for a "successful" performance, which he ultimately received.<sup>94</sup> The government also warned Boldyrev that favoring the defense would have negative repercussions for him.<sup>95</sup> Boldyrev directed the court proceedings in a way to benefit the prosecution and even delivered a "closing argument" of his own, prior to allowing the jury to

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<sup>89</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 124.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 95-98.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 98-99.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 144.

<sup>93</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 219.

<sup>94</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 8.

<sup>95</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 128.

deliberate. At the end of the trial, he said, “There are those who drink our blood. You must not take into consideration any of the things that have happened here: Neither the witnesses who wanted to whitewash Beilis, nor the experts who stated that the Jews do not use Christian blood, nor the stories of Vera Cheberyak’s guilt. You must disregard all this testimony. You must think of one thing alone: a child, a Christian child, has been murdered.”<sup>96</sup>

The final way in which the government used antisemitism in the trial was through the rigging of the jury. Before the trial began, there was an explicit call for only pro-government citizens to serve as jurors, and no members of the intelligentsia were accepted.<sup>97</sup> This increased the likelihood that the jury would favor the prosecution. Researchers later discovered that the government also monitored the jury when they left the courtroom, listening to them in order to adapt the prosecution’s strategy accordingly. Indeed, the fact that the jury was made up of so many peasants didn’t escape Beilis himself, who worried that their social standing made them sympathetic to antisemitism.<sup>98</sup> Seven of the twelve jurors, an incredibly high percentage, were members of the Union of the Russian People, which brings the reader to the next subject—the role of far right-wing organizations in the case.<sup>99</sup>

### **The Far Right, Antisemitism, and the Beilis Case**

Historically, far right-wing organizations in European countries have often relied on antisemitism and the resentment of ethnic minorities to rally followers to their cause, and this was certainly the case in the Russian Empire. Cities with large ethnic minorities, like Kiev, were

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<sup>96</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 162-163.

<sup>97</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 10.

<sup>98</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 111.

<sup>99</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 10.

especially susceptible to the influence of the far right.<sup>100</sup> The guiding principle of the conservative right in Russia was called “Official Nationality,” a concept created by Nicholas I’s Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov. The three tenets of this ideology were Orthodoxy, autocracy, and Russian nationality.<sup>101</sup> The importance of both Orthodoxy and Russian nationality worked against Russian Jews, as many gentile Russians saw them as both a religious and ethnic minority, and therefore antithetical to Official Nationality. In addition, Jews were strongly associated with the revolutionary left, as they were disproportionately represented among these ranks—given their frustration with the government over experiences of discrimination and economic privation.<sup>102</sup> Far right-wing organizations relied on these negative associations with Jews, and fostered a climate of antisemitism by exploiting the resentments of the poor peasantry and blaming Jews for Russia’s problems. The Jewish question was distinct from the national minorities question, given the “power” of Jews in Russian society, and with the prevalence of economic problems in the empire, it was easier for the far right to gain popular support for their antisemitic ideas.<sup>103</sup>

The two most important right-wing organizations in Kiev during the Beilis case were the Union of the Russian People and the Double-Headed Eagle, the former of which dominated the far right throughout the empire prior to the revolutions of 1917. The URP, which emerged after the October Manifesto and the legalization of political parties in 1905, openly declared that

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<sup>100</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 99.

<sup>101</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 18.

<sup>102</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 92.

<sup>103</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 73.

antisemitism was part of its platform, and relied heavily on its populist appeal.<sup>104</sup> The URP argued that there were ethnic differences between Jews and gentiles, and attacked the social and economic roles that Jews played in Russian society.<sup>105</sup> Jewish newspapers in Kiev between 1908 and 1911 also reported that members of the URP acted as antisemitic vigilantes, attacking Jews throughout the city.<sup>106</sup> The Double-Headed Eagle, while a smaller organization, played an active role in the Beilis case and in the city of Kiev. Beilis wrote that even before his experiences, the police allowed members of the DHE to do as they pleased in the city, although his own neighbor, whom he was friendly with, was also a member.<sup>107</sup> As will be discussed in the following sections, both the Double-Headed Eagle's newspaper and one of its leaders, Golubev, were instrumental in building the case against Beilis. However, it's important to note that the far right was less influential in the Beilis case than the government, given their respective levels of power.

Members of far right-wing organizations in Kiev were the first to accuse Jews of murdering Iushchinskii, indicating their level of involvement in the case from the very beginning, as well as their reliance on antisemitism. At the boy's funeral, Nikolai Pavlovich, a member of both the URP and the DHE, distributed antisemitic leaflets, as members of the far right quickly realized that the case provided the perfect opportunity to attack Jews.<sup>108</sup> The far right has a history of using funerals to broadcast their political opinions, even prior to

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<sup>104</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 59.

<sup>105</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 76.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>107</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 36.

<sup>108</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 13. Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 85-86.

Iushchinskii's murder.<sup>109</sup> They've also historically relied upon incendiary fliers and antisemitism to recruit supporters.<sup>110</sup> The defense demanded the inclusion of these leaflets in the court record during the trial, but the prosecution protested and Boldyrev denied the defense's request.<sup>111</sup> After Iushchinskii's death, word spread quickly throughout the city that Jews were responsible for the crime, allowing the far right-wing to plant this seed in the minds of both the general population and government officials.

Antisemitic violence in Kiev, triggered by the ritual murder accusation against the Jews, began on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1911. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1911, the far right claimed that the government had failed to investigate Jewish suspects in the case, and submitted a statement to the Duma for its support and approval.<sup>112</sup> This proposal lost only by a narrow margin, and the URP considered it a victory for their cause. In response, the tsar sent a Justice Ministry official, Alexander Liadov, to Kiev to diffuse the tension caused by the far right, and turn Iushchinskii's death into a case of ritual murder.<sup>113</sup> The fact that the government was willing to accommodate far right-wing groups has a few important implications for the role of antisemitism in the Beilis case. Firstly, it suggested that the government either shared or didn't object to the far right's antisemitic ideas. Secondly, it proved that the far right was powerful enough to be obeyed by the state. Finally, it makes it clear that the government didn't craft the idea to frame Beilis alone. The far right provided the initial antisemitic spark, but the government was also interested in pursuing these charges.

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<sup>109</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 93.

<sup>110</sup> George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge, 2015), 53.

<sup>111</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 51.

<sup>112</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 13. Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 33-35.

<sup>113</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 36-37.

The far right-wing relied heavily on the press to spread their antisemitic message during the investigation and the trial. Members of the far right published a number of newspapers, and used these media organs to perpetuate the myth of ritual murder. On the same day that Iushchinskii's body surfaced, ritual murder charges appeared in the DHE's newspaper, highlighting the speed with which these organizations sought to blame Jews for the boy's death.<sup>114</sup> The newspaper *Zemshina*, a publication owned by Nikolai Markov, a member of the Duma and the URP, published an article entitled, "A Ritual Murder," which accused Hasids of killing Iushchinskii.<sup>115</sup> Far right newspapers also focused on the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy, which the prosecution later relied heavily on. When the police initially investigated Iushchinskii's family, far right newspapers accused the authorities of being controlled by Jews, whom they believed were conspiring to disguise their shared guilt.<sup>116</sup>

The existence of an international Jewish conspiracy, acting to protect Beilis, was one of the far right's primary antisemitic arguments. This was a stereotype that long predated the Beilis case, making it a societal concept that the far right could call upon in its effort to convince both the general population and government officials that Jews were responsible for the crime. The popularity of this idea was illustrated by the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1903, which many believe Pavel Krushevan, a devoted Black Hundred, authored.<sup>117</sup> The power of this stereotype lay in its ability to play upon people's fears and resentments, making them more willing to discriminate against Jews. The far right implied that the fate of Russia, and all gentile Russians, was at stake in this case.

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<sup>114</sup> Mendel Beilis, *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 17-18.

<sup>115</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 22.

<sup>116</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 161 & 203.

<sup>117</sup> Anatol Shmelev, "Hoover Institution Acquires Papers Of Pavel Krushevan And Elena Kontsevich," *Hoover Institution*, 12 December 2017.

The far right portrayed Iushchinskii as a martyr, a Christian boy murdered for religious purposes.<sup>118</sup> This image appealed both to gentile Russians' fears that their own children would be the Jews' next victims, and to their faith, one of the core principles of Official Nationality. Interestingly enough, this mirrored the case of William of Norwich, in which another Christian boy who died was painted as a martyr because he was thought to be the victim of ritual murder. As a young Christian, supposedly killed by Jews because of his religion, Iushchinskii served as a compelling figure for support of the far right's antisemitism, strengthening the faith of those who already subscribed to these notions, and garnering the support from the general public by tapping into this centuries-old belief.

Perhaps most importantly, the far right found a receptive audience among government officials. The fact that the imperial government sent Liadov, a Justice Ministry official, to placate the far right indicates that these political organizations wielded significant power in Russian society. A prime example of this trend in the Beilis case was Golubev, whose role in the accusations against Beilis was previously discussed. Golubev continued to pursue antisemitic measures after convincing the government to investigate Beilis, petitioning the governor of Kiev to expel approximately 3,000 Jews from the city, and threatening violence against Jews if his demands weren't met. He also had connections to Shcheglovitov and Zamyslovskii, the former of whom praised Golubev for his, "loyalty and patriotism in the pursuit of common objectives," after this petition, but advised him, "not to rush things."<sup>119</sup> This suggests that the far right and the government had shared objectives, but that the government tended to take a more cautious approach. While the far right didn't possess the same amount of power in the Beilis case as the

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<sup>118</sup> Mendel Beilis. *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*, eds. Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein (Chicago: Beilis Publishing, 2011), 155.

<sup>119</sup> Ezekiel Leikin, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial That Shook the World* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 51.

government, it's important to document the ways in which these political organizations *were* able to influence the investigation. Members of the far right were the first to call Iushchinskii's death a ritual murder, and their antisemitism continued to influence the prosecution's arguments throughout the trial.

## **Conclusions**

The Beilis case was a blatant example of state-sponsored antisemitism, in which the Russian government argued that Jewish ritual murder was real. However, antisemitism wasn't the only factor in the progression of the case. Government officials at all levels of the bureaucracy, with the support of far right-wing organizations and ideology, tried to convict a Jew for a fabled religious practice in order to revive a dying empire. Members of the government cooperated either because they were antisemitic themselves, or wanted to please those who were. The far right, on the other hand, was devoted to antisemitism, but wielded considerably less power than the government. Their active role in Beilis case stemmed from their ideological reliance on antisemitism, and the importance of the resentment of ethnic minorities to their vision of the ideal Russian Empire.

The cooperation between these two groups made it possible for an innocent man to be framed for murder, illustrating not only the power of antisemitism in Russia during the early twentieth-century, but the equally important power of personal motivations as well.

Antisemitism was incredibly important to the case, but it's unable to entirely explain why and how the persecution of Beilis progressed. This is the same trend found in Jewish life in Kiev and Russia more broadly during this period, as discussed in the previous chapter—the combination of antisemitism with a notable lack thereof. In this way, the Beilis case was representative of the Jewish experience in Kiev and Russia during the late imperial period.

In order to fully understand the importance of the Beilis case and its implications, the following chapter will examine the international response to the affair, among prominent Jews and in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.

### Chapter 3: Shock and Awe: The Response to the Beilis Case in Great Britain and the United States

In order to fully understand the impact of the Beilis case and its role in Jewish history, historians must address the response it received internationally, among both Jews and the Western press, governments, and publics. In this chapter, the reactions of these groups in the United States and Great Britain will be analyzed. Both prominent Jews and Jewish groups advocated for Beilis, seeing his persecution as representative of the discrimination they all faced internationally and throughout history. The press, government, and general population also protested the case, suggesting broad support for Beilis and opposition to antisemitism throughout the Western world. However, antisemitism was far from a strictly Russian phenomenon, and also played an important role in Jewish life in both Great Britain and the United States.

Many of the richest and most powerful Jews across the world were concerned about the Beilis affair because they perceived it as a threat to their own safety as members of the Jewish community. But prominent Jews weren't the only ones who organized in Beilis' defense—many everyday Jews also protested the charges against him. Between 1911 and 1913, Jews tried to protect Beilis from the Russian government's antisemitic conspiracy. They understood that although the Beilis case was taking place in Russia, a state-sponsored blood libel could spread beyond national borders. This fear of the dissemination of the ritual murder accusation suggests that Jews *throughout* the Western world experienced antisemitism, and saw these outlandish claims as a real threat to their own lives. They acted in defense of Beilis not out of the kindness of their hearts, but because they understood how the accusations against him were also ones that threatened themselves.

Equally important as the reactions of Jews across the world are the reactions of the government, the press, and the public in Western society outside of Russia. For the purposes of this study, the United States and Great Britain will provide two representative studies of the Western reaction to the Beilis case. These two countries were chosen based on their importance on the international stage, as well as the researcher's linguistic abilities. However, it's important to note here that protests against the proceedings of the Beilis case, by both Jews and non-Jews alike, also took place in the following countries: Canada, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey, and Palestine.<sup>120</sup>

After researching the responses of the press, the government, and the public in both of these states, it appears that many Americans and Britons who knew about the case disagreed with it, with some even actively protesting against it. The press actively covered the case, the public protested, and both of governments expressed discontent over its progression. However, antisemitism was also present in each of these countries, despite the fact that it was less prevalent than in Kiev and the Russian Empire. This suggests that Jews in Russian and other Western societies shared similar experiences during this period—although subject to antisemitism, they were often able to survive and even thrive in these environments, and also found considerable tolerance within the surrounding gentile population. This is important given the stereotype that Russian Jewish life was governed by antisemitism, more so than anywhere else in the Western world at the time.

Scholarship on the international response to the Beilis case has been limited, but can be found in broader works on prominent Jews and Jewish life in each of these countries. Recently, in 2017, Jonathan Dekel-Chan published a chapter on the international reaction to the Beilis

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<sup>120</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 178-179, 181-182, 187, 197, 201, 253, 256, 258, 260.

affair in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, a book jointly edited by Dekel-Chan, Eugene M. Avrutin, and Robert Weinberg. *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild*, by John Cooper, discusses the roles of Lucien Wolf and Nathaniel Rothschild in Great Britain extensively, while Frederick Giffin focuses on American responses to the Beilis case in his article “American Reactions to the Beilis Case.” Albert S. Lindemann also addresses the international response to the affair in his book *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs, Dreyfus, Beilis, and Frank, 1894-1915*. Finally, the American Jewish Year Book, a major primary source document for this project, also contains extensive coverage of developments during the case and the international community’s response, among both Jews and non-Jews.

### **Organized Outrage: The Jewish Response to the Beilis Case**

After Beilis was arrested, prominent members of the international Jewish community quickly mobilized to support him, utilizing both their financial resources and their ability to influence public opinion in an attempt to sway the case in his favor. This trend was especially present in Great Britain, and the United States. This rapid response from important Jews across the world indicates their sympathy for Beilis given the Jewish nature of his persecution—suffering from an accusation based in religious and racial hatred that many of them had experienced themselves. More importantly, this response indicates that they saw the case as a threat to international Jewry, which suggests that despite the ludicrousness of the affair, for Jews at the time, it wasn’t outside the realm of possibility that a similar event could occur outside of Russia. They believed that there would be negative consequences for *all* Jews if Beilis weren’t acquitted. Indeed, by the end of the trial, in the eyes of the international Jewish community, Beilis had become more of a symbol of the persecuted Jew than an individual. This is illustrated

by the painful deterioration of relations between Beilis and international Jewish organizations after the conclusion of the trial in 1913.

The Beilis case wasn't the first instance of international Jewish advocacy, but instead one of many examples of intervention against antisemitism in the modern era. The first major transnational Jewish defense campaign began in response to the Damascus Affair of 1840, another incidence of blood libel.<sup>121</sup> In 1860, the Alliance Israélite Universelle became the first transnational Jewish organization to advocate for Jews abroad.<sup>122</sup> Both of these events indicate that international Jewish intervention was a relatively new phenomenon, of which the Beilis case was a part. Western Jews were especially involved in advocacy efforts in Russia and Eastern Europe, given the region's reputation for antisemitic policies. Western European Jews, joined by larger organizations at the turn of the century, provided assistance to their coreligionists in a variety of ways, including material relief, political advocacy internationally, and attempts to weaken antisemitic policies through financial transactions.<sup>123</sup> These Western Jews often faced difficulties in advocating for their Eastern counterparts during this period, given that they had to try to win public support while their respective countries oppressed ethnic groups of their own.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 188.

<sup>122</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 188.

<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 191.

<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 192.

The persecution of Beilis seemed to suggest another wave of oncoming governmental antisemitism to Russian Jews,<sup>125</sup> and similarly, Western Jews saw it as a call back to action.<sup>126</sup>

Jews in Great Britain were especially important to international advocacy efforts for Beilis. Lucien Wolf and Nathaniel Rothschild, also known as Lord Rothschild, were among the greatest British Jewish activists for Beilis, and had both advocated for Russian Jews prior to the case. Wolf was a multilingual Jewish journalist interested in foreign affairs, who became involved in advocacy for Jews internationally decades earlier.<sup>127</sup> Rothschild was a member of one of the most powerful Jewish families of the modern era, whose status and financial resources made him an important ally for Beilis to have.

Of the two men, Wolf was the primary organizer behind the efforts to support Beilis. He believed that a strategy of moderation worked best in advocating for Russian Jews, both before and during the Beilis case. In October of 1913, Wolf wrote to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and suggested that he thought it would be best if they refrained from making public appeals to the government about the Beilis affair.<sup>128</sup> Such a statement suggests that he was wary of embarrassing or angering British officials, and believed that persuasion would be a more effective strategy than shame. In 1912, Wolf began a campaign against passport discrimination regarding foreign Jews traveling to Russia.<sup>129</sup> That same year, the Beilis case inspired Wolf to found a weekly journal, *Darkest Russia*, designed to inform the general public in Great Britain,

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<sup>125</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 189.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 192.

<sup>127</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 253.

<sup>128</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 193.

<sup>129</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 278-279.

Europe, and the United States about oppression in the Empire.<sup>130</sup> Wolf believed that this publication agitated both British and Russian diplomatic officials, and provided information for other larger newspapers looking to cover antisemitic events like the Beilis case, taking place in Russia.<sup>131</sup>

Wolf understood the importance of public perception of the case, and seeking both Jewish and non-Jewish support. In May of 1912, he initiated a written protest against the accusations levied at Beilis, in the process campaigning for the signatures of Jews and non-Jews alike.<sup>132</sup> In 1913, Wolf took inspiration from the German Jewish leader Paul Nathan, and also found experts to support Beilis' case in Britain. He obtained medical opinions, including one from Sir James Crichton-Browne, the President of the Forensic Medicine section of the International Medical Congress, stating that the forensic evidence didn't suggest ritual murder.<sup>133</sup> He also sought out scholarly opinions to discredit the accusation, convincing noted Hebrew scholars Samuel Driver and A. E. Cowley of Oxford to argue against the existence of ritual murder, based on their extensive knowledge and experiences.<sup>134</sup>

One of Wolf's most important campaigns was his effort to gain the papacy's support for Beilis, a project on which he worked closely with Lord Rothschild.<sup>135</sup> Rothschild and his family, while less influential in British Jewish efforts for Beilis than Wolf, had contributed to international Jewish advocacy for decades prior to the Beilis case. In 1899, the Vatican newspaper perpetuated blood libel in another violent murder case. In order to stop the ritual murder accusation being spread, Rothschild personally contacted the papacy.<sup>136</sup> Lord Rothschild

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<sup>130</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 291-292.

<sup>131</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 292.

<sup>132</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 293.

<sup>133</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 297.

<sup>134</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 297.

<sup>135</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 299.

<sup>136</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 286-287.

wasn't the only member of his family to advocate for his fellow Jews. In June of 1908, Leopold de Rothschild asked the King of England, Edward VII, to discuss the oppression of Russian Jews with Nicholas II at an upcoming meeting. Edward VII refused, claiming that it wasn't "constitutionally correct" for him to advise the Tsar on domestic affairs.<sup>137</sup> The English Rothschilds also conducted a monetary boycott of the Russian Empire during these years.<sup>138</sup> As the head of the London branch of the Rothschild family, Lord Rothschild played the most important role during the Beilis case.<sup>139</sup>

Rothschild's most important contribution to Beilis' defense was his participation in the campaign to convince the papacy to discredit the ritual murder accusation. In the fall of 1913, Wolf decided that obtaining a reproach of blood libel from the Pope would help Beilis' case with the general public, and enlisted Rothschild to help, given his family's influence on the international stage. On October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1913, the men wrote to Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, the Vatican's Secretary of State. They requested not that the Vatican make a statement condemning the charges against Beilis, but that instead it certify papal bulls rejecting the existence of ritual murder as a whole.<sup>140</sup> Although Rothschild sent the letter to the Vatican, it was Wolf who drafted it.<sup>141</sup> This cautious approach to advocacy was characteristic of Wolf's intervention in both the Beilis case and for Russian Jewish rights.

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<sup>137</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 255-256.

<sup>138</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 255.

<sup>139</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 194.

<sup>140</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 194.

<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 195.

Wolf's and Rothschild's efforts proved worthwhile when the Cardinal wrote back, confirming that a previous encyclical from Pope Innocent IV discredited all claims of Jewish ritual murder, including the one against Beilis.<sup>142</sup> The daily newspaper the *Standard* published this papal statement, allowing it to reach a wider public audience.<sup>143</sup> The fact that the Pope himself disagreed with the notion of ritual murder lent non-Jewish credibility to the denial that it existed. Although Wolf wrote the letter himself, it's important to note the essential role that Rothschild's influence played in the success of this campaign. The Rothschilds' influence was still unrivaled in comparison to the status of American Jews at the turn of the century.<sup>144</sup> Both Wolf's meticulous planning and Rothschild's international reputation were necessary to this attempt to garner public support for Beilis. Wolf and Rothschild also continued to work together to campaign for Jewish rights in Russia after the Beilis case.<sup>145</sup>

However, it wasn't only prominent British Jews who played an important role in advocacy for Beilis—numerous British Jewish organizations also rallied in support of the cause. In October 1913, in London, representatives of Jewish trade unions began to plan a protest against the Beilis case, inviting several non-Jewish British organizations to join them.<sup>146</sup> At their second meeting, with twenty-five organizations represented, the representatives decided that instead of a demonstration during the trial, they'd organize a labor protest.<sup>147</sup> As part of this demonstration, Jewish workers were asked to “down tools,” while employers should close their businesses for the day. This coordination between so many organizations, and their willingness

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<sup>142</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, “A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair,” in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 194.

<sup>143</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, “A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair,” in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 194.

<sup>144</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 286.

<sup>145</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 286.

<sup>146</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 266.

<sup>147</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 266-267.

to make personal sacrifices to support Beilis, is a testament to the connection they felt to his persecution. The same month, the Jewish community of Glasgow, Scotland forwarded a public protest signed by magistrates, members of the town council, and university personnel to the Russian ambassador in London.<sup>148</sup> On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1913, the English Zionist Federation held a protest at Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street.<sup>149</sup> Such public and organized protests as these indicate the fortitude of the British Jewish community.

Jews in the United States were equally outraged by the Beilis affair, and also organized in support of his innocence, and for the broader rights of Russian Jews. Jacob Schiff, a prominent Jewish-American banker, was primarily responsible for American support of Russian Jews prior to the affair. One of Schiff's most important accomplishments was his campaign in 1911 calling for the termination of the Russo-American Commercial Treaty of 1832, in response to the Russian Empire's antisemitism.<sup>150</sup> Schiff argued that terminating the treaty would incline Nicholas II to reverse his antisemitic policies, including the existence of the Pale of Settlement, and end discrimination against Jewish tourists looking to visit Russia.<sup>151</sup> Louis Marshall, a prominent lawyer and founding member of the American Jewish Committee, helped rally support for the termination of the treaty.<sup>152</sup> Again, Although President Taft squabbled with Schiff over this idea, in December of 1911, the overwhelming majority of Representatives in the United

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<sup>148</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 267.

<sup>149</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 301.

<sup>150</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 122.

<sup>151</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 192.

<sup>152</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 192.

States House voted to terminate the treaty, and threatened to end trade with Russia completely.<sup>153</sup> By convincing the American government to publicly threaten Russia over its treatment of Russian Jews, Schiff and Marshall maximized their ability to advocate for their coreligionists overseas.

However, Schiff didn't limit his advocacy efforts to negotiations with the government. As antisemitism in Russia experienced a resurgence, Schiff played an integral role in facilitating Russian Jewish immigration to the United States, especially through the southern port of Galveston, Texas. The Galveston Plan, as it was known, provided a new frontier for Jews entering America, combating the overcrowding of cities like New York, and countering stereotype of Jews as an urban people, unfamiliar with working the land.<sup>154</sup> Schiff's multi-pronged approach Until 1912, Lord Rothschild and Baron Edmond de Rothschild also donated to this project, illustrating the interconnectedness of the international Jewish community and its advocacy efforts during this period.<sup>155</sup> Although the leaders of each of these campaigns are discussed here, none of them worked in isolation.

Jewish religious organizations were especially active in protesting the antisemitic charges against Beilis, including their leaders—American rabbis. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1913, the United Orthodox Rabbis of America decided to cooperate with the American Jewish Committee and protest the case.<sup>156</sup> On October 8<sup>th</sup>, in Chicago, twenty-two rabbis took an oath denying the ritual murder accusation at the Ohave Sholom Synagogue.<sup>157</sup> On November 5<sup>th</sup>, the Orthodox Rabbis

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<sup>153</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 192.

<sup>154</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 259.

<sup>155</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 260.

<sup>156</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 135.

<sup>157</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 135.

of the United States and Canada approved a protest resolution.<sup>158</sup> The willingness of Jewish religious leaders to protest an international political incident illustrates the way in which many Jews felt that the ritual murder accusation threatened their religion itself. Although there are too many to detail here, one or more Jewish groups protested against the Beilis case in each of the following states: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Texas.<sup>159</sup>

Unfortunately, despite Beilis' acquittal, his relationship with the international Jewish community ended tragically. Immediately following the trial, many Jewish organizations wanted to wash away the stain of the ritual murder accusation, and saw the silencing of Beilis' story as an important part of this process. In December of 1913, the *New York American* offered to publish Beilis' memoirs, but Wolf wrote to his American counterparts and advised them not to allow this to happen.<sup>160</sup> Although Beilis could've profited from telling his story, both financially and psychologically, his individual needs were considered less important than those of the international Jewish community.

After the trial, Beilis initially received numerous offers of financial support from Jews across Europe, Palestine, and the United States.<sup>161</sup> However, many of these donors withdrew these charitable offers, and, as a result, Beilis threatened to perform in vaudeville shows about his life to support himself.<sup>162</sup> The American Jewish Committee and many other members of the

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<sup>158</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136.

<sup>159</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136-137.

<sup>160</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 194.

<sup>161</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 197.

<sup>162</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 197.

international Jewish community, including Wolf, wanted to draw attention away from the ritual murder accusation, and were horrified by the prospect of Beilis in performing his story. In order to stop him, both American and European Jewish organizations agreed to pay for Beilis to live in Palestine, far from Western eyes.<sup>163</sup> Beilis continued to fight with these groups for financial support for a decade, at which point the American Jewish Committee refused to assist him any further.<sup>164</sup> Once Beilis was no longer a representative of his coreligionists, supporting him became infinitely less important to the international Jewish community. Dekel-Chan argues that dealing with Beilis was so difficult that it made the American Jewish community reluctant to provide financial support to Eastern European Jews in the future.<sup>165</sup>

The international Jewish community's frustration with Beilis, and their lack of sympathy for him after the trial, suggests that they viewed him more as a symbol of the Jewish experience of oppression than as an individual victim. Leaders of the international Jewish community were concerned with stopping the spread of the ritual murder accusation, even after the case ended. Their refusal to allow Beilis to perform his story illustrates their fear of reviving the blood libel story on the international stage. While both Jewish individuals and organizations in Great Britain and the United States provided support for Beilis, they did so not out of selflessness, but instead out of the fear that they too could become the victims of such antisemitism.

### **Plenty of Publication: Press Coverage of the Beilis Case**

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<sup>163</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 198.

<sup>164</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 198.

<sup>165</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 197.

Press coverage of the Beilis case was surprisingly extensive, illustrating its significance on the international stage. Articles about the Beilis appeared repeatedly in newspapers in over half a dozen countries, including the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Turkey, and Romania.<sup>166</sup> There are likely many more countries where the Beilis case made the news, but not all of those records have been preserved. Although not all responses of the press will be analyzed here, it's important to note the prevalence of press coverage of the case worldwide, as it indicates the importance of the affair internationally, even in nations with small Jewish populations. This coverage, in combination with the number of countries in which protests against the Beilis case took place, suggests that the Beilis case was far from a solely Russian affair. Prominent Jews internationally appear to have had a significant role in garnering the affair such extensive international media attention.

Major newspapers in cities across America provided readers with updates on the case between 1912 and 1913. A breakdown of the number of newspapers in America that published articles about the Beilis case, by state, is as follows: one in Arizona, one in California, two in Connecticut, three in the District of Columbia, two in Florida, two in Idaho, four in Illinois, three in Indiana, three in Iowa, three in Kansas, two in Louisiana, two in Maryland, four in Michigan, fifteen in Minnesota, two in Mississippi, seven in Missouri, two in Nebraska, one in New Mexico, two in New York, three in North Dakota, four in Ohio, one in Oklahoma, four in Oregon, one in Pennsylvania, three in South Carolina, six in South Dakota, two in Tennessee, one in Texas, two in Utah, two in Vermont, one in Virginia, two in Washington, and two in Wisconsin.<sup>167</sup> In fact, only twelve of forty-eight states provided no coverage of the case. This lengthy list of newspapers covering the Beilis case in states across the country illustrates how

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<sup>166</sup> RG 116, Boxes 4-7, YIVO Archives, New York.

<sup>167</sup> "Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers," Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

widespread knowledge of the affair became. It made the news outside of major cities and states with large Jewish populations, supporting the theory that large numbers of non-Jewish Americans were interested in the progression of the affair.

American press coverage of the case began as early as May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1912<sup>168</sup> and continued through 1915. After the trial, media references to Beilis included a comparison between Beilis' case and that of Leo Frank,<sup>169</sup> discussed later, and a review of a play based on Beilis' life.<sup>170</sup> Although the American media was not immediately aware of what was happening in Russia, they covered the most important years of the case, and the continuing references to Beilis after 1913 suggest that he didn't immediately vanish from the public American mind. Surprisingly, some American newspapers even sent reporters to Kiev in order to cover the case. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1913, *The Tacoma Times* published an article from one of their staff correspondents on the ground, Mary Boyle O'Reilly, entitled, "In a Lonely Hilltop Wife and Babes of Poor Mendel Beilis Await With Aching Hearts."<sup>171</sup> Sympathetic human interest pieces on Beilis like these indicate the American press' support for his cause.

The American Jewish Committee also used the press to help influence public opinion surrounding the case. A central example of this strategy was the publication of "An Open Letter to the Tsar," a plea written by American clergymen, which chided Nicholas II about antisemitism in Russia. It was published in the New York newspaper, the *Independent*, in September 1913.<sup>172</sup> This editorial was subsequently reprinted in several other American newspapers, as well as

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<sup>168</sup> "'Ritual Murder' Case Stirs All Russia," *Sun* (New York, NY), May 26, 1912.

<sup>169</sup> Mary Boyle O'Reilly, "Parallel of Mendel Beilis and Leo Frank Cases—'Both Jew Persecutions!'" *Day Book* (Chicago, IL), April 24, 1915.

<sup>170</sup> "Bernard Shaw in Yiddish," *New-York Tribune* (New York, NY), December 19, 1915.

<sup>171</sup> Mary Boyle O'Reilly, "In a Lonely Hilltop Wife and Babes of Poor Mendel Beilis Await With Aching Hearts," *The Tacoma Times* (Tacoma, WA), October 13, 1913.

<sup>172</sup> "The Open Letter to the Tsar—As Received By Other People," *The Independent* 76, 1913: 258.

internationally.<sup>173</sup> Readers wrote to the *Independent* about the letter from as far away as London, and Paris. Russian censors blacked out the letter in publications within the Empire, obviously perturbed by such challenging of Nicholas II's authority.<sup>174</sup> In this case, Jewish organizations, the press, and non-Jews in America all worked together to support Beilis, illustrating the importance of all three of these groups in advocating for him.

Great Britain's press similarly provided extensive coverage of the Beilis case, contributing to the support for his cause in the Western world. Newspapers in London that published articles about the Beilis affair include: *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Graphic*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily News*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Londoner General –Anzeiger*, *Londoner Zeitung*, *Morning Post*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Standard*, *Morning Post*, *Observer*, *Spectator*, and *Times*.<sup>175</sup> Newspapers outside of London that also covered the case include: *Manchester Courier*, *Manchester Guardian*, *New Witness*, and *Westminster Gazette*.<sup>176</sup> As in the American case, the wide variety of newspapers covering the Beilis affair suggests widespread interest in his fate.

It wasn't only the amount of coverage that the Beilis case received in the British press that was significant, but also the contents therein. In October 1913, the *Manchester Guardian* printed a protest against the Beilis case translated into Esperanto, also signed by representatives of several Slavic nations, further illustrating the reach of the affair internationally.<sup>177</sup> The British press also kept up with public meetings about the case, as events like the English Zionist Federation protest garnered coverage in newspapers like the *Daily Mail*.<sup>178</sup> British newspapers appear to have recognized the importance of covering both developments in the case and protests

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<sup>173</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half-Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 196.

<sup>174</sup> "The Open Letter to the Tsar—As Received By Other People," *The Independent* 76, 1913: 258.

<sup>175</sup> RG 116, Box 4, Folder 41, YIVO Archives, New York.

<sup>176</sup> RG 116, Box 4, Folder 41, YIVO Archives, New York.

<sup>177</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 267.

<sup>178</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 301.

against it. Although an antisemitic letter notably appeared in the editorials of the *Morning Post*, it was later discovered that the opinion piece originated in St. Petersburg, not Great Britain.<sup>179</sup>

The newspaper coverage in both of these countries was similar in its extent, indicating that the case qualified as an important international event, earning continuous coverage in the Western newspaper world. This widespread, sustained interest in the case suggests that Jews weren't the only group that understood the importance of the Beilis case. The press' interest in Beilis reflects the fact that both the government and the general public in each of the countries were also dealing with the affair.

### **Popular Protest, Official Hesitation: Governmental and Public Responses to the Beilis Case**

Just as important as the reactions of the international Jewish community and the press are the reactions of the government and public in Great Britain and the United States. While the United States government protested the charges levied against Beilis, British officials balked at the thought of challenging Russia in an age of unstable empires. However, the prevalence of public protest against the progression of the case indicates that many in the Western world was disturbed by the extreme antisemitism they saw taking place in Russia between 1911 and 1913. Although the United States government had a much stronger reaction to the affair, in both the American and British cases, there was some hesitation surrounding how to negotiate with Russia and whether or not their respective nations should intervene. Additionally, as will be discussed later, antisemitism was also present in each of these countries, paralleling the trend of antisemitism and Jewish life coexisting, as was found in Kiev and the Russian Empire.

The United States government took several steps against the persecution of Beilis, although there was some disagreement among officials over what the American government's strategy should be. The radical left favored the complete termination of political relations with

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<sup>179</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 306.

Russia, but the moderate majority preferred to use persuasion to convince the Russian government to drop the case.<sup>180</sup> Unsurprisingly, the United States Congress also supported the more moderate approach. However, two resolutions concerning Beilis were introduced—one by Senator J. Hamilton Lewis in the Senate, and Representative Adolph J. Sabath of Illinois in the House. On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1913, Representative Sabath introduced a Joint Resolution, H.J.R. 141, stating that “the principles of justice and the interests of civilization” required that the charges against Beilis be withdrawn.<sup>181</sup> On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1913, Senator Lewis introduced another resolution, S.R. 198, similarly expressing the United States’ disapproval of the ritual murder charge, and calling for American officials to attempt to negotiate with the Russian government.<sup>182</sup> The fact that there were multiple federal resolutions supporting Beilis illustrates the strength of political protest against the case in the United States.

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1913, in Cleveland, Ohio, the local Independent Order of B’nai B’rith, a Jewish organization, urged their political representatives in both the House and the Senate to support Senator Lewis’ resolution.<sup>183</sup> Even on the local level, American Jews realized the importance of gaining their political officials’ support for Beilis. However, on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1913, President Woodrow Wilson decided that he wouldn’t attempt to influence Russia’s pursuit of the case, citing both the possibility of Beilis’ acquittal and the fear of worsening relations with Russia as deterrents to the United States’ intervention.<sup>184</sup> Although there was widespread American political support for both Beilis and Russian Jews as a whole, the president himself was still reluctant to risk disturbing relations with the Russian Empire.

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<sup>180</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, “American Reactions to the Beilis Case,” *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 91.

<sup>181</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 135.

<sup>182</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 135.

<sup>183</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136.

<sup>184</sup> “Wilson Decides Against Protest,” *Rock Island Argus*, (Rock Island: RI), October 23, 1913.

However, American political actions against the Beilis case were not restricted to the federal government, also occurring on the state and local levels. This illustrates the widespread nature of protest against the affair in the United States. On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1913, the New York State Assembly adopted a resolution, introduced by a Jew named Aaron J. Levy, requesting that the Secretary of State find a way to guarantee Beilis a “fair and impartial” trial.<sup>185</sup> In November 1913, the Board of Cook County Commissioners in Illinois adopted their own resolutions of protest against the case.<sup>186</sup> This activism at the local level for an international case comes as a surprise, given that international events tend to be considered federal affairs. The fact that multiple United States government officials publicly expressed American disdain for the ritual murder charge, and even tried to prevent the case’s progression, speaks to the existence of support for Beilis within the United States.

Although Beilis was arrested in 1911, public American protests didn’t gain popularity until 1913, shortly before the trial began. This was especially surprising given that the United States was home to the world’s second-highest Jewish population at the time, after Russia itself.<sup>187</sup> According to Giffin, the country was distracted by the 1912 presidential election, the Leo Frank case, and Schiff’s campaign to repeal the United States’ 1832 trade deal with Russia.<sup>188</sup> This increase in protests against the affair correlates with the rise in American press coverage of the case, occurring from 1912 through 1913. It seems likely that as more Americans became aware of the Beilis case, they took increased action against it.

Once American protests began, they were numerous and took place across the country. Americans placed most of the blame for the antisemitic proceedings on Nicholas II, and,

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<sup>185</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136.

<sup>186</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136.

<sup>187</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 337.

<sup>188</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, “American Reactions to the Beilis Case,” *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 89-90.

according to Giffin, the “overwhelming majority” thought Beilis was innocent.<sup>189</sup> Some of these protests attracted famous activists like Jane Addams, who spoke at a rally in Chicago, Illinois on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1913.<sup>190</sup> Even Christian religious leaders also protested the persecution of Beilis. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1913, in Los Angeles, California, Christian ministers from several denominations held their own demonstration against the trial.<sup>191</sup> The willingness of Christian leaders to support Beilis exhibits how broadly support for his case ranged among the American population. Popular participation in these protests emphasizes that the Beilis case was not just important to Jews.



Figure 1: An example of a protest in Chicago, Illinois, written about in the *Lake County Times*, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1913.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>189</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 92.

<sup>190</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 91.

<sup>191</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136.

<sup>192</sup> "Chicagoans Ask U.S. to Join Protest to Czar in Ritual Case; Seek Government Influence Against Persecution," *The Lake County Times* (Hammond, IN), November 3, 1913.

Another method of protest took the form of written statements—petitions and resolutions authored by non-Jewish organizations, decrying the ritual murder accusation and calling for the United States government to act against such charges. Resolutions and appeals to the American and Russian government poured in from many different non-Jewish organizations, including: the New York Esperantists, the American Association of Foreign Language Newspapers, the House of Deputies of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago.<sup>193</sup> Again, the wide range of groups who participated in written activism against the case highlights the extent to which the non-Jews in the United States cared about what happened to Beilis, and challenging the antisemitism espoused by the Russian government.

The Russian government certainly was aware of what was happening in America. The Russian ambassador in Washington, Boris Bakhmetev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg, S. D. Sazonov, and the Minister's executive assistant, A. A. Neratov, wrote to each other extensively about the outcries against the case in the United States.<sup>194</sup> Initially, Bakhmetev attempted to blame American Jews for the negative reaction to the case, pointing fingers at the "Jewish press" and "American Zhidi."<sup>195</sup> However, he was eventually forced to admit that Christians were also protesting the persecution of Beilis.<sup>196</sup> Despite their obvious discomfort, officials in St. Petersburg didn't attempt to "correct" foreigners' perceptions of the case, as they saw it as a strictly Russian affair.<sup>197</sup> They refused to accept American petitions supporting Beilis, including one signed by seventy-four clergymen.<sup>198</sup> Although the Russian government was

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<sup>193</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 136-137.

<sup>194</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 91-92.

<sup>195</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 91-92.

<sup>196</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 91-92.

<sup>197</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 91-92.

<sup>198</sup> Frederick C. Giffin, "American Reactions to the Beilis Case," *Social Science* 55, no.2 (1980): 92.

disturbed by the foreign response to the Beilis case, it maintained its claim to sovereignty over its internal affairs.

The British government also took a stand against the Russia over the Beilis case. However, according to Levin, the British government was relatively reluctant to respond to the affair, given its alliance with Russia at the time—a position that France also found itself in.<sup>199</sup> After the turn of the century, Great Britain's Liberal government sought to improve relations with Russia in order to counter the strength of the German-Habsburg alliance.<sup>200</sup> After all, the British's first foreign policy priority was its own international standing. The Anglo-Russian Convention, on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1907, saw Great Britain and Russia divide influence over Afghanistan, Tibet, and Persia, creating a mutually beneficial diplomatic relationship, which allowed Russia to receive loans from Britain, and inclined the latter state to ignore the antisemitic discrimination of the former.<sup>201</sup> Although British Jews like Wolf and the Rothschilds exerted some influence among the elites of Great Britain, including the King himself, the oppression of Jews was only one of many concerns of the British government, and didn't wholly determine its decisions. As is often the case in human history, the nation's broader political goals outweighed its concern for human rights in other countries.

One of the most influential figures in determining this policy of British moderation was Sir Edward Grey, Great Britain's Liberal Foreign Secretary, both before and during the Beilis case. Grey was relatively inexperienced, and favored addressing the nation's practical concerns in a world of competing empires.<sup>202</sup> However, both politicians and members of the broader

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<sup>199</sup> Edmund Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 162-163.

<sup>200</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chan, "A Half Full Cup? Transnational Responses to the Beilis Affair," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chan, and Robert Weinberg (Indiana University Press, 2017), 193.

<sup>201</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 255.

<sup>202</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 254.

public protested his moderation. In October 1913, in London, the Parliamentary committee of the Independent Labor Party passed a resolution decrying the case and asking Grey to express the public and governmental British displeasure with the case to the Russian government.<sup>203</sup> The International School of Philology, Science, and Art, in Nottingham, also requested that Grey use his political influence to force the Russians to withdraw the “fearful and unsubstantiated charge” against Beilis.<sup>204</sup> The willingness of politicians and educators to stand up for Beilis indicates that the case was an important issue to influential groups in British society.

Despite the British government’s reluctance to protest the persecution of Beilis, the public continued to express its disapproval of the case. In May 1912, Wolf’s statement of protest was signed by over two hundred public British figures, in an expression of their dismay over the persecution of Beilis. The signatories included important British figures like the Archbishops of Canterbury, York, and Westminster,<sup>205</sup> as well as A.J. Balfour, Lord Rosebery, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, and Bernard Shaw.<sup>206</sup> The fact that such influential Britons participated in public protest against the case indicates the strength of national support. In July 1913, in London, a group of European doctors presented the findings detailed in their book, *Der Fall Juszczynski*, which contained medical opinions discrediting the charge of blood libel and supporting Beilis’ and the Jews’ claims of innocence.<sup>207</sup> This academic support for Beilis, in addition to the support of popular cultural figures, added another dimension to British protests against the case. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1913, a working class demonstration was held in Trafalgar Square, organized by the Beilis Protest Committee. Although initially organized by Jews, approximately 15,000 people

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<sup>203</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 266.

<sup>204</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1914-1915), 267.

<sup>205</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 79.

<sup>206</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 293.

<sup>207</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 296.

attended the rally.<sup>208</sup> This popular participation in such a demonstration suggests broader support for Beilis among everyday Britons.

The Beilis case continued to be a sensitive subject for the Russian government on the international stage even after the trial ended. In the United States, Russian government officials attempted to prevent *The Chicago Examiner* from publishing Beilis' memoirs.<sup>209</sup> In England, they tried to halt the production of a film about the case, *The Fate of Mendel Beilis*, considering the option of buying it for destruction for \$11,000.<sup>210</sup> These efforts to prevent Beilis' story from being heard by wider Western audiences illustrates the Russian fear of the Empire being painted in a negative light. Although many Russian officials may have believed that the rest of the Western world shouldn't interfere with their internal affairs, they were very much concerned with the preservation and advancement of the Empire's status.

### **A Universal Problem: Antisemitism in the United States and Great Britain**

However, this outraged response to the Beilis affair in Great Britain and the United States is somewhat surprising, given the international prevalence of antisemitism at the time, including in both of these countries. The rise of nationalist movements across Europe fueled the spread of this ideology, as well as other forms of racial and ethnic hatred, during the early years of the twentieth-century. Lindemann, an expert on antisemitic legal cases during these years, highlights the tendency of Jews across the world to begin to learn about how to fight antisemitism within their own countries as early as the 1870s.<sup>211</sup> Although Russia is often thought of as the worst place for Jews at the turn of the century, the following pages challenge that claim by highlighting occurrences of antisemitism throughout the rest of the Western world.

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<sup>208</sup> John Cooper, *The Unexpected Story of Nathaniel Rothschild* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 301-302.

<sup>209</sup> "Czar's Aid Balked in Battle on Beilis Film," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), January 24, 1914.

<sup>210</sup> "Czar's Aid Balked in Battle on Beilis Film," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), January 24, 1914.

<sup>211</sup> Albert S. Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank) 1894-1915* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 176.

Ritual murder accusations and other unfounded criminal charges against Jews were not uncommon internationally between 1880 and 1920. Blood libel was especially popular in East Central Europe during these years. In 1882, an accusation of ritual murder emerged against thirteen Jews in Tiszaeszlár, Hungary, when a fourteen-year-old girl disappeared—an event that ultimately became the Tiszaeszlár Affair.<sup>212</sup> Another case of blood libel appeared between 1891 and 1892 in Xanten, Germany, where locals accused a Jewish stonecutter and butcher, Adolf Buschof, of murdering a five-year-old boy.<sup>213</sup> In 1899, in Polná, a village in Austrian Bohemia, a Jew named Leopold Hilsner, a glovemaker, was accused of brutally killing a nineteen-year-old girl.<sup>214</sup> Finally, in 1900, in Konitz, Germany, the community accused a Jewish butcher, Moritz Lewy, of murdering an eighteen-year-old boy, Ernst Winter. Ultimately, the jury convicted Lewy, not for murder, but for perjury.<sup>215</sup> The prevalence of similar ritual murder accusations during the same period highlights the fact that in many ways, Beilis' situation wasn't unique. These cases each had much in common with the Beilis affair, suggesting that Russia was far from the only Western state experiencing episodes of extreme antisemitism during this period.

Around the turn of the twentieth-century, the United States experienced a massive increase in Jewish immigration, with two-and-a-half million Eastern European Jews arriving between 1881 and 1924.<sup>216</sup> With an increase in Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, as well as that of many different ethnic groups from other countries during this time period, racial and

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<sup>212</sup> Hillel J. Kieval, "Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, 2010, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tiszaeszlár\\_Blood\\_Libel](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tiszaeszlár_Blood_Libel).

<sup>213</sup> Hillel J. Kieval, "Blood Libels and Host Desecration Accusations," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Blood\\_Libels\\_and\\_Host\\_Desecration\\_Accusations](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Blood_Libels_and_Host_Desecration_Accusations).

<sup>214</sup> Hillel J. Kieval, "Hilsner Affair," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hilsner\\_Affair](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hilsner_Affair).

<sup>215</sup> Hillel J. Kieval, "Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, 2010, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tiszaeszlár\\_Blood\\_Libel](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tiszaeszlár_Blood_Libel).

<sup>216</sup> "From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America," Library of Congress, February 18, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html>.

ethnic resentment, nationalism, and xenophobia spread rapidly throughout the nation. Many of the country's most prestigious universities implemented antisemitic Jewish quotas in the first half of the twentieth-century, including: Harvard University,<sup>217</sup> Columbia University,<sup>218</sup> Yale University,<sup>219</sup> Princeton University,<sup>220</sup> Brown University,<sup>221</sup> and Stanford University.<sup>222</sup> These programs limited the enrollments of Jews in an effort to prevent them from being overrepresented in academia and other professions. In ways like this, antisemitism permeated the daily lives of Jewish Americans.

Antisemitism in the United States during this period also included a notable criminal case against a Jew—another one in which no physical evidence tying the accused to the crime existed. In 1913, in Atlanta, Georgia, a Jewish factory manager, Leo Frank, was accused of raping and murdering a thirteen-year-old girl named Mary Phagan. The only evidence against him was the testimony of the factory's janitor, who many now believed committed the crime himself.<sup>223</sup> Frank was ultimately found guilty, and although Georgia's governor stayed his execution, a mob kidnapped him from jail and publicly lynched him near Phagan's home.<sup>224</sup> The use of lynching, a form of murder usually reserved for African Americans in the South, highlights the racial othering of Frank as a Jewish man in the United States. Despite the fact that this case wasn't a

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<sup>217</sup> Stephen Steinberg, "How Jewish Quotas Began," *Commentary*, September 1, 1971, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/how-jewish-quotas-began/>.

<sup>218</sup> Stephen Steinberg, "How Jewish Quotas Began," *Commentary*, September 1, 1971, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/how-jewish-quotas-began/>.

<sup>219</sup> Dirk Johnson, "Yale's Limit on Jewish Enrollment Lasted Until Early 1960's, Book Says," *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 4, 1986.

<sup>220</sup> "Student Claims Princeton Has Jewish Quota," *The Crimson* (Harvard, MA), March 14, 1972.

<sup>221</sup> Amy Sohn, "Probing Brown's Dark History," *The Forward*, November 10, 2006, <https://forward.com/culture/8366/probing-brown-s-dark-history/>.

<sup>222</sup> Kate Chelsey, "Faculty, Staff and Students Recall the Evolution of Jewish Life at Stanford," *Stanford University*, January 21, 2011, <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2011/january/history-jewish-life-012111.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, "Leo Frank Case," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, May 14, 2003, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/leo-frank-case>.

<sup>224</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, "Leo Frank Case," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, May 14, 2003, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/leo-frank-case>.

traditional ritual murder charge, it carries the same undertones, and provides another example of a brutal murder of a child, for which a Jew was accused without any actual evidence.

Although the charges against Frank didn't involve ritual murder, there are several parallels between this case and Beilis'. In both, there was a non-Jewish suspect, tied to both the crime scene and the victim, who was cast aside after the discovery that a Jew could be blamed for the crime. Additionally, antisemitism played an important role in both cases, but each also progressed because of the surrounding political climate. That the Frank case didn't involve a ritual murder accusation, despite the fact that it relied heavily on antisemitism, can be explained by the absence of blood libel in American culture, as opposed to its storied history throughout Europe. Although Frank was accused of rape and murder, not a ritual killing, racism and ethnicity still played an incredibly important role in the case, as it did in Beilis' the very same year.

Antisemitism was also present in Great Britain around the turn of the century. The emigration of Russian Jews, seeking an escape from antisemitism there, led to a large increase in Britain's Jewish population between the end of the nineteenth-century and the early twentieth.<sup>225</sup> Of the Jews who moved to London, many settled in the East End, making them a visible minority within the city.<sup>226</sup> Unsurprisingly, this rapid influx of immigration triggered an outbreak of antisemitism, often violently led by the British Union of Fascists.<sup>227</sup> During 1911 and 1912, the same years in which the Beilis affair was occurring, a number of antisemitic incidents also appeared in Great Britain. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1911, two hundred young men attacked Jewish-

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<sup>225</sup> "The World in a City: East End Jews," BBC, February 18, 2018, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig\\_emig/england/london/article\\_2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig_emig/england/london/article_2.shtml).

<sup>226</sup> "The World in a City: East End Jews," BBC, February 18, 2018, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig\\_emig/england/london/article\\_2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig_emig/england/london/article_2.shtml).

<sup>227</sup> "The World in a City: East End Jews," BBC, February 18, 2018, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig\\_emig/england/london/article\\_2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig_emig/england/london/article_2.shtml).

owned businesses in Tredegar, South Wales, in an event known as the Tredegar Riots.<sup>228</sup> Over the following nights, Jews were attacked in ten other mining villages in Great Britain. The violent nature of these antisemitic outbursts suggests that even extreme cases of discrimination against Jews could be found outside Russia during this period.

In 1912, two major antisemitic scandals appeared in Great Britain—the Marconi Scandal and the Indian Silver Affair. In the Marconi Scandal, the Postmaster General, a Jew named Herbert Samuel, was accused of awarding a contract on too favorable terms to the Marconi Company, a Jewish business.<sup>229</sup> The Indian Silver Affair provided a similar set of circumstances, in which Ernest Franklin, a Jewish banker, suggested to Sir Felix Schuster, a Jew who was the Chairman of the Financial Committee of the Council of India, that there would be a payoff if his firm was awarded a government contract.<sup>230</sup> Right-wing groups were especially interested in portraying this incident as proof of an international Jewish conspiracy. Both of these events indicate the suspicion surrounding Jews and their business dealings, the same concept of economic antisemitism that could be found in Kiev.

Instances of antisemitism in Great Britain and the United States illustrate that this ideology was alive throughout the Western world, not just in Russia. Especially notable are the similarities between the Beilis case and the Frank case, both of which saw a Jew tried for a gruesome murder despite a complete lack of evidence tying him to the crime. Although antisemitism was worse in Russia, it was certainly not a uniquely Russian phenomenon. The existence of antisemitism alongside the acceptance of Jews and advocacy for Beilis in both of

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<sup>228</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 79.

<sup>229</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 79.

<sup>230</sup> William D. Rubenstein, Michael A. Jolles, and Hilary L. Rubenstein, *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 448.

these countries reflects a similar pattern of Jewish life found in Kiev and Russia at the time—simultaneous acceptance and discrimination.

## Conclusions

The international Jewish community's rush to defend Beilis suggests that Jews across the world saw this blatant case of antisemitism as a threat to their own lives. This in turn suggests that antisemitism as a whole was seen as a threat by Jews *globally* after the turn of the twentieth-century, even those living in Great Britain and the United States. The role of antisemitism in late imperial Russian society, as exhibited by the Beilis case, was extreme, but also representative of a broader international trend. Antisemitism was present in both British and American societies, and far from a solely Russian phenomenon. The international Jewish community's treatment of Beilis after the trial suggests that they saw him as a representative of Jewish victimhood, more than an individual.

However, the outcry from the governments, press, and general public in the United States and Great Britain illustrates that antisemitism, to the extent that it was present in Russian society, wasn't a universally accepted ideology, and that the global Jewish experience wasn't *defined* by discrimination. Despite the fact that each of these Western countries had their own problems with antisemitism, many members of these societies were outraged by such a blatant example of ethnic persecution, and actively protested against it. However, the reluctance of the British, and even American, governments to challenge Russia over this incident suggests that national political priorities still held more sway than international human rights.

Although the Russian case is certainly exceptional, this mix of antisemitism and acceptance of Jews appears to have been a broader global trend, as is exhibited by the combination of antisemitic events with the outcry against the Beilis case in Great Britain and the

United States. The compulsion felt by Jews across the world to defend Beilis suggests that despite its extreme nature, the case was seen as a threat to Jews internationally, furthering the argument that the Beilis case wasn't seen as a completely foreign occurrence. This examination of the international response to the affair is both disheartening and encouraging. While Jews across the world were in the throes of antisemitism, the outcries of those who fought against the Beilis case were a powerful signal that many refused to accept such blatant discrimination.

### Conclusion: Challenging Traditional Views of Jewish Life in Late Imperial Russia

Studying the Beilis case, its historical context, and the international response to it, contributes to historians' understanding of antisemitism in Kiev, Russia, and the world at the beginning of the twentieth century. While initially, the case may seem to be a product wholly of antisemitism, the ability of Jews to succeed in Kiev prior to 1911, as discussed in the first chapter, suggests that the story is not so simple. Jews in Kiev were simultaneously oppressed and successful, and the Beilis case illustrates that while antisemitism was a powerful force in late imperial Russia, it wasn't the sole factor in determining the progression of the case or the outcome of Kievan Jews' lives. The international response to the trial, specifically in Great Britain and the United States, suggests that the Western world was deeply disturbed by such an outrageous allegation of ritual murder. However, incidents of antisemitism in these countries, as well as the reluctance of their governments to act against Russia, reveals that the same mix of antisemitism and acceptance of Jews could be found in both the British and American contexts as well. This challenges the traditional notion that Russia was uniquely antisemitic.

Despite the fact that the ritual murder accusation against Beilis may seem outlandish to contemporary readers, it's important to remember that antisemitism, and even blood libel, have yet to be extinguished, even a century after the Beilis case. In December 2017, Russia's Federal Investigative Committee announced that they were investigating the murder of the Romanov family as another "ritual killing."<sup>231</sup> An accusation of ritual murder in the twenty-first century proves that the blood libel myth is far from extinct. Antisemitism also lives on in Russia more broadly, with President Vladimir Putin recently suggesting that Jews, "not even Russians...just with Russian citizenship," could be responsible for the interference in the United States'

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<sup>231</sup> Eugene M. Avrutin, "Jews Watch Out: Russian Officials Have Revived the Ancient Blood Libel Against Jews," *History News Network*, December 3, 2017, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/167601>.

presidential election in 2016.<sup>232</sup> This othering of Russia's Jewish population as somehow non-Russian illustrates their continued alienation from mainstream Russian society.

Antisemitism is resurging across the Western world, not just in Russia, as populism and nationalism experience an international revival. According to the Anti-Defamation League, antisemitic incidents in the United States increased fifty-seven percent between 2016 and 2017, totaling 1,986 reported antisemitic events.<sup>233</sup> These incidents culminated in August of 2017, when members of the alt-right gathered at a Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where they repeatedly chanted, "Jews will not replace us!"<sup>234</sup> A similar trend appeared in the United Kingdom, where 1,382 hate incidents were reported, and there was a thirty-four percent increase in physical assaults against Jews.<sup>235</sup> The country's Labour Party has also come under fire for being antisemitic, forcing its leader, Jeremy Corbyn, to apologize for its views in March of 2018.<sup>236</sup> This rise in antisemitism, as well as other forms of racism and bigotry, reminds historians that it's just as important as ever to try to understand the development of these ideologies, and their role in our societies.

This project contributes to historians' understanding of Jewish life in late imperial Kiev and Russia, an experience often thought of solely as a negative one. It's also a testament to the strength and resilience of Kiev's Jewish community, and Beilis himself, countering the stereotype of Jewish passivity in the face of oppression. Through its examination of the international context, it challenges the stereotype that Russia was a uniquely hostile environment

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<sup>232</sup> Avi Selk, "Putin Condemned for Saying Jews May Have Manipulated U.S. Election," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), March 11, 2018.

<sup>233</sup> "2017 Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents," Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/2017-audit-of-anti-semitic-incidents>.

<sup>234</sup> Joe Heim, "Recounting a Day of Rage, Hate, Violence, and Death," *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), August 14, 2017.

<sup>235</sup> Nadia Khomami, "Antisemitic Incidents in the UK at All-Time High," *Guardian* (London), January 31, 2018.

<sup>236</sup> "UK Labour Leader Apologizes for Anti-Semitism in His Party," *Reuters*, March 25, 2018.

for Jews, as the British and American contexts suggest that the Jewish experience similarly involved both antisemitism and acceptance throughout the Western world.

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