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“The Truth about Russia,” 1906 February 4.

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Rabbi Gries
At The Temple

Sunday
Feb. 4, 1906.

-THE TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA-

Americans should know the truth about Russia. Controversy is unpleasant, but erroneous statements should not pass unchallenged. A recent interview with one who has traveled in Russia and who has written concerning Russia, and who, by some, might be accepted as authority, attempts to remove misconceptions concerning Russia. The interview seems a defense of Russia and Russian policy, a justification of Russian rule in Finland and Poland, makes sweeping condemnation of the students, defends the Cossacks, and even finds excuses for Russia's crimes against her Jews. Not a word about the other side of the shield, of Russian autocracy, the grand dukes and the bureaucrats, their infamous oppressions and never ceasing corruption. It would have seemed more natural and in better part for an American to have spoken against the oppressor and for the oppressed.

I challenge the statements as they come.

It is difficult to know the truth concerning the Czar, whether he be despot and autocrat or the tool of the bureaucrats, a weak creature trembling for his life. The interview speaks of "the calmness and assurance of the actions of the Czar." "Nicholas is in much the position that Lincoln was during the Civil War." The Civil War was a time of strife and strong passions, but America never knew Russia's high handed violation of justice. Even William Stead, friend and admirer of the Czar, deems as necessary the four fundamental liberties--the liberty of meeting, of press, of association and of person. The Czar Nicholas is unworthy to be mentioned in the same breath with Abraham Lincoln. Read Andrew White's indictment of the Czar, his characteristic indifference to his people and their fate. Autocratic despot or weak creature, he endorsed the policy of Pobiedonosteff, and Von Plehve was his trusted minister.

Karl Blind, the eminent German publicist, holds the Czar responsible. Czar Nicholas, the noble, humane Czar, who not since Kishineff has expressed his abhorrence of the massacres of the Jews nor his rebuke against the responsible officials. And since the awful days of November that witnessed the horrors of Odessa and Kieff and some hundreds of towns and villages, the Czar has personally received Neidhardt, the Governor of Odessa, worthy to be named "Butcher Neidhardt," and has granted him favor and promotion. Imagine Lincoln silent, a living witness to butchery and slaughter and inhumanity unparalleled.

"They talk about the treatment of Finland by Russia. In Poland, as in Finland, the whole disturbance is fomented by a dissatisfied aristocracy. The Polish people are loyal to the Czar." All Poland has been in a ferment. Thousands of the people have paraded her streets with Polish flags and banners. This in spite of the Pope's appeal to the Poles to keep the peace. Sienkiewicz, honored by all Europe, the winner of the Nobel Prize, has spoken for justice for his people. Russia has put Poland under martial law. Russia's promises and guarantee of liberty to Poland have been faithlessly broken.

Finland has been robbed of her constitutional rights. Andrew D. White, Ex-Minister to Russia and to Germany, one of our most distinguished diplomats, one who knows Russia and Europe well, declares Russia's treatment of Finland to be one of the greatest crimes of the century.

"Thus, the Russian people, too, are greatly misjudged. They are a most merciful race. No person has been sentenced to death in the courts for 250 years." We must read again George Kennan and the story of Siberian prisons to discover the quality of Russian mercy. "And the Cossacks are lenient in their treatment of the people. They used no force until the revolutionists had thrown bombs among them." A recent Cleveland editorial says, "Now the world knows the Cossacks for what they are; inefficient, none too courageous, they have proved

themselves to be ruffians of the worst type." The well-known Russian monthly edited by the famous Stasulevich says, "Rifle volleys were poured into unarmed citizens, among them women and children; plunder and pogroms under the protection and cover of the troops. In no war have such abuses of the military power been witnessed as in the actions of our army, especially the Cossacks toward the peaceful inhabitants of Russian Cities and villages." Unspeakable and most revolting have been the inhuman outrages of the "merciful" Russians; not the killing of men, revolutionists fighting the Government, but the slaughter of innocents and the wanton butchery of defenseless men and women, helpless old men, and babes at their mothers' breasts.

"Everybody hates the Jews," says the interview. This is distinctly not true, not even in Russia. The Russians are not overflowing with love for the unfortunate Jews whom Russia herds in her pale and by law makes pariah and alien in their own fatherland. Students and workingmen have offered their lives in defense of the Jew. The League of Leagues passed a resolution demanding equal rights for the Jews, and the Zemstvo Congress unanimously passed a resolution demanding the complete and immediate emancipation of the Jews and the punishment of the officials whose guilt in connection with the outrages had been established. Russia's crimes against her Jews are not born of the hate of the patient peasant and the ignorant Mushik, but born of the Government, of its laws and their administrators, of the police and the military, of the governors and the governor-generals, of the Holy Procurator, Pobiedonosteff, of the Minister of the Interior, Von Plehve, and of the Czar Nicholas.

The interview continues, "They are disagreeable to get along with, and while the people are not anxious to kill them, they resent it if anybody is executed for killing them." These merciful Russians! Rather nameless and shameless brutality than anyone punished for brutal crimes! The Jews in Russia and out of Russia are not perfect beings. They are human; they have faults like

other men. No possible faults can be justification for the massacre of the Jews of Russia. Jews had high standing in Odessa and in Kishineff. They enjoyed the friendship, and in time of need, the protection of Christians, of students and of revolutionists. If they are hated it is not because of social and economic, racial and religious, political and revolutionary causes. They have been infamously and ceaselessly slandered, and have not been protected by the law and the government. Jews, in spite of all their disadvantages, have played honorable part in Russia's upbuilding. They have been good subjects; they have been toilers and artisans, when possible; they have helped to develop her resources, when permitted; they have risen to distinction in science and medicine and art; they have been patriotic; they have fought and died for the flag that would not protect them, Russia's children.

And then most remarkable statement of all, the interview says, "The revolutionists take advantage of this. They set some people on to raid them, then the Cossacks interfere and fire into the mob, and revolutionary capital is made of the slaughter." An explanation of the massacre truly original and naive, ridiculous and false, I believe. The Cossacks fire into the mob who attack the Jews? 'Tis false! They protected the Hooligans in their plunder and outrage and murder. They killed the Jews who tried to defend themselves. The revolutionists start the anti-Jewish riots? The Government and Count Witte charge the Jews with being the leaders and inciters of the revolution. Revolutionists and Jews fought side by side for human rights and human liberty.

The Literary Digest, in a compilation of European press opinions, says, "Practically all are agreed as to the complicity of the officials. Perhaps the massacres were not ordered by St. Petersburg, but the local governors and the police knew when and where they were to take place." The London Times speaks of "the atrocities at the instigation of a desperate officialdom."

Ignatieff began the policy of anti-Jewish riots in 1881. The Jew was made the victim of the agents of autocracy. Krushevan, the one man most directly responsible for Kishineff, is still unpunished and his slanders are published uncensored. The crime of Kishineff was brought home to the very threshold of Von Plehve. Who was the real author of Russia's crimes of 1905?

The attacks upon the Jews are not the work of the revolutionists. They are the counter revolution of the bureaucrats to prove that the constitution and the new liberties are not favored by the people. The Huliganis and the Black Hundred, the loyalists and the patriots are their instruments. Riots and disorder after the granting of the constitution were to be the justification for a reactionary policy.

The Jewish massacres were not spontaneous; they were organized. The onslaughts and massacres took place in three hundred towns and villages on the same day and almost at the same hour. The police did not interfere, the officials helped, the authorities offered no protection. Soldiers and Cossacks were at hand. They joined with the Huliganis in pillage and plunder and in unspeakable brutality. Dr. Dillon, the London Russian correspondent, according to the Review of Reviews, one of the best informed men concerning Russia, and who represented his Journal at the Portsmouth Peace Conference, said in a public dispatch that he had documentary evidence to prove that the massacre was organized.

I have no cause to love the Czar and none to love Russia. The Czars and Russia have been guilty of too many crimes against the Jews, against human right and human liberty. Never in all the history of the world has there been more inhuman savagery. To the recent London Protest Meeting Balfour wrote with reference to Russia: "The treatment of the Jews is the darkest blot on the history of Christendom." And Chamberlain said: "It is an indelible disgrace upon

our Christian civilization."

Other nations may seek friendship with Russia. France may be bound to Russia by an unholy alliance--an unnatural relationship dictated by political necessity. France may yet rue the day. America desires friendly relationship with all; it would have entangling alliance with none. But no political necessity binds us to Russia. The people of America have no real sympathy with the rulers and the ruling policies of Russia. Russia stands for autocracy; America for democracy. Russia for tyranny; America for justice. Russia for despotic power; America for the rights and liberties of men.

