ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2014, 3

Galya Clark

Dr. in Modern History,

Norfolk, England

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION IN ENGLAND

Imigration has been one of the most contentious and toxic topics of the contemporary society in the UK for the last few decades. It has been a "hot potato" discussion for ages but interestingly, it was debated in the British press even a century ago. A huge part of the emigration process in England, from the Middle Ages to the Second World War, was connected with the history of Eastern European Jews.

The Medieval England and the Jews

England was a territory of religious – political pressure between the Christian and the Jewish communities in the Middle Ages, where a lot of persecution and cruelty had been described by the chronicles. Especially the 12th and 13th centuries are full of blood and ritual killings, and mutual attacks between Jews and Christians. The Jews were invited into England by William the Conqueror – they came mainly from Rouen in Normandy. The policy of the English kings was different towards them, but in 12th century the money of the rich Jews helped them to have some privileges and good relations with the court of King Henry II. The favourable position of the English Jews was shown, among other things, by the visit of Isaac of Chernigov in 1181. (Chernigov is a town in contemporary Ukraine). Isaac of Chernigov was a Russian-Jewish scholar of the

twelfth century, frequently consulted by his contemporaries on questions of Biblical interpretation. He is probably similar to Isaac of Russia, found in the English records of 1181.

A number of massacres of Jews happened in the time of Richard I. London, Bury St. Edmunds, Colchester, Thetford and York are among the cities and towns where there were serious attacks on the Jews[1]. Many petitions were sent to the King for removing the Jews from the boroughs, and they were expelled from Bury St. Edmunds in 1190, Newcastlein 1234, Wycombe in 1235, Southampton in 1236, Berkhamsted in 1242, Newbury in 1244. Finally they all were expelsed in 1290. The Jews emigrated to countries such as Poland, which was famous as the most tolerant country. There they were protected by law. Their return was in 1655 when Oliver Cromwell formally accepted them back, wanting to attract the wealth of rich Amsterdam' Jews.

Still, the Jewish community was small. In the beginning of 19 century it was less than 10 000 people.

The wave of Russian Jews after the pogroms in the end of 19 century

The first wave of emigrants from the Eastern Europe, speaking Slavic languages, was in the period 1881 – 1914. In those years the Jews in the Russian Empire were under horrible persecutions and religious massacres of a political basis, also known as the Tsarists pogroms. From this time the Russian word "pogrom" went in to the English language and is naturalised with the same meaning.

The pogroms continued from 1821 until the First World War and the Civil War in Russia. Among the cities and towns with pogroms are Odessa (the first pogrom in 1821), Kiev, Nizhni Novgorod, Nikolaev, Kishinev, Alexandria, Zhitomir, Brest – Litovsk etc. The data of S. A. Stepanov, quoted by Dina

[1]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jewsin_England_%281066%E2%80%931290%29

Amanzholova, showed that only in October 1905 the number of the pogroms had been 690 in 102 places[2].

The British Jews started collecting funds to help their Russian brothers, suffering from the pogroms, to emigrate to the USA. Two million Jews left Russia before 1914, about 120 000 of them were established permanently in Britain. The pogroms had been stopped by the Bolsheviks, who were internationalists and atheists, they were against any persecutions on religious basis[3].

Not only Russian, but other East European Jews emigrated in the period 1881 – 1924 via the British ports. Most of them continued their travel to the United States. Many poor Russian Jews escaping the Tsarists pogroms found shelter in the poor area of East End in London. The biggest group of British Jews was from Eastern European origin. In their society were socialists and trotskyists, zionists and anti zionists, orthodox religious and reformist religious Jews, and by profession they have been rag traders, lawyers, boxers, bankers and artists.

The Russian British Jews in the First War time

For the role of the British Jews battalions in the time of the First World War there are quite a lot sources. One of the key articles is in "The Guardian" newspaper of Adam Foulds from 14/03/2014[4]. The author reminds us, that in the time of the First World War anti-German feeling crested in London, East

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[2]https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%95%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B5_%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%8B_%D0%B2_%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8

[3]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_immigration_to_Great_Britain#Immigration_since_1922

[4] **British Jews in the first world war: spirit of the Maccabees. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/14/king-country-jewish-museum-first-world-war-adam-foulds**

End Jewish shops with German-sounding names were attacked. They ‘ve been attacking people, speaking yidish (eastern European language, based on German but with Ivrit letters). Many of those Yidish speakers were Russian Jews but the attackers didn’t know that fact.

Interesting stories are “hidden” in the Jewish Museum in London. Their percentage for volunteering in the British army was very low, which allow the critics to blame them that they are not patriots. In such way“The Daily Mail” blamed the British Jews that they prefer to have a good life of parasites instead to fight and die for the country. The claim for their good life is not justified because very often the Jews were living in a poor conditions and in poor areas such as the East End in London. When the compulsory recruitment started, a lot of Jews went to fight in the British Army. They have a feeling of gratefulness towards Britain, because it was a state offering them justice, religious liberty and superiority of the law. After the beginning of the war, many Jews wanted to help the country, which welcomed them after the persecutions in Russia.

With the outbreak of the war came the sense for many Jews that an obligation now had to be fulfilled. As one Jewish recruitment poster put it: "Since the days of Oliver Cromwell Great Britain has meted out the fairest treatment politically, socially, and in every way to Jews. Now is the time for Jews to reciprocate and show the old spirit of the Maccabees is not dead. Every able bodied unmarried Jew between 19 and 45 should join the British Army."

In 1916, conscription was instituted and with it calls for the creation of a specifically Jewish legion intensified. These were led by two Zionists, Chaim Weizmann and Ze'evJabotinsky, who rebelled against the officially neutral position of the World Zionist Congress. Both wanted Jews to have a part in fighting the Ottomans in Palestine with the hope of gaining a stake in the post-war peace there. Weizmann was born in Belarus. By the outbreak of the war, he was a British citizen and senior lecturer in chemistry at the University of Manchester and a leader of the British Zionist movement. It was his scientific

work that brought him into a position of influence. He invented a method of industrial fermentation that could create large quantities of acetone, an essential ingredient in the production of cordite for explosives. First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill and minister of munitions, David Lloyd George both worked with Weizmann to make this a reality on a large scale. As a result, Weizmann's contribution to the allied war effort was enormous and during this time he had the somewhat sympathetic ear of senior cabinet ministers.

One of the soldiers in the Jewish Legion was the poet and artist Isaac Rosenberg. He was born in East End of London from parents who were Russian imigrants. Adam Fouls is writing that Rosenberg enlisted because of a poverty that finally overwhelmed his moral judgment that war was no solution to anything, a view inherited from his parents: "My people are Tolstoyans and object to my being in khaki." Other famous Jew – Gertler , also was a "pasifist", as he put it, and opposed to the war's "wretched sordid Butchery"[5].

After the war, the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen was formed in part to insist on the facts of the Jewish contribution, to brandish the Victoria and Military Crosses in the faces of the Mosleyite fascists and their antisemitic fantasies of Jewish wartime betrayal.

Eastern European refuggies from the Second World War and the communist regims

[5] *Ibid.*

When the Second World War ended in 1945, it was quickly recognised that the reconstruction of the British economy required a large influx of immigrant labour. The Royal Commission on Population reported in 1949 that immigrants of 'good stock' would be welcomed 'without reserve', and potential newcomers from the Caribbean and elsewhere soon became aware of the pressing needs of the labour market in the UK[6]. ***(6)***

The appeal for new workers was, however, aimed primarily at white Europeans, who had dominated immigration to Britain during the century before the Second World War and still played an important role after 1945. Even in the 1970s the Irish remained the largest immigrant community in Britain. In the years immediately after the war, new arrivals came from all over Europe. These included a small number of German prisoners of war, a larger number of refugees from the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (130,000 Poles arrived during the first few years after the war, and 14,000 Hungarians after the failure of the 1956 uprising in Hungary), substantial numbers of Irish and Italian labourers, and a wide variety of displaced persons from refugee camps throughout Europe[7].

Ralph Miliband

One of the most interesting imigrant case is with the father of the contemporary labour politicians Ed and David Miliband – Ralph Miliband[8].

In 1940, when the Nazis invaded Belgium, Ralph arrived in England with his father. He was born in Belgium to a family of Polish emigrants from the working class. He learn to speak English and study at the London School of Economics, quickly he was included in the politics of the left wing and made

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6 Postwar immigration. The National Archives. ***http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/brave_new_world/immigration.htm***

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Miliband

personal announcement for the cause of Marxism in front of Carl Marx' grave. After serving in the Royal marines in the time of the Second World War, Ralph Miliband was established in London and was naturalised as a British citizen in 1948. In the 60s he was an important member of the new left movement in Britain. Miliband was critical of the rulers in SSSR and the Eastern block. He published a few important books for the Marxist theory and critical of capitalism.

Looking to find relatives

Another interesting emigrant story from the 40s is about the life of a Czech family from Prague[9]. T.G.S. Dunsby "Erhard & Trudi Robitschek.) The author knew them personally and was trying to find out more for their previous life and to find their Czech relatives.

Both Czech Jewish refugees, find shelter in the house of his grandad. T.G.S. Dunsby was a small boy at that time and remembers them. When he grew older the grandparents told him that they were Jewish refugees from a country called Czechoslovakia and that they had offered them sanctuary in their home. This meant very little to T.G.S. Dunsby but sounded quite romantic to him.

They had fled Czehoslovakia in 1938 (it is not clear when exactly: before the Nazis occupied the country or afterwards. The sources are different) and they arrived in Norfolk. "I admire my grandparents for taking them in to their home in Norwich", write T.G.S. Dunsby. Erhard Robitschek was a doctor in law in Prague University and by profession a barrister. He arrived penniless with his wife Trudi and they were "found" in a restaurant in Cromer by a former editor of "EDP" newspaper. Trudi was doing the washing up, and Erhard was playing the violin to customers.

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9 *"B-MeVoices" magazine* (Issue 2, Summer 2014), 25

Trudi also worked in hospitals and later was offered a job in the newspaper office. Erhard joined the British Army. Erhard later became an interpreter at the Foreign Office as being a linguist and Russian speaker he was much more use than being a private in the Army. According to other source he was suffering from a disease and that's why he didn't stay long as a private in the Army. He had a good sense of humour and used to tell how he was working in the Pioneer' Corps, which his health didn't allow, for example to sweep the canteen. After he had been invited to be a translator, his family found a new life in Norwich. Being cultured and educated people, Robitschek enjoyed the Norwich' society life, visiting the local theatres, galleries and museums. After the war Erhard became a history teacher at the Earlham Boys School. Some data says that he was a lecturer in Norwich University in languages. He was a member of The History Association and was interested in music. Trudi become a popular member of staff at the newspaper offices, working as a librarian, telephonist and copy typist. She also was involved with helping at the Castle Museum and at the BBC after she retired. She volunteered in the museums and the Red Cross. Trudi was interested in art and especially by glass. Robitschek didn't have any children. Trudi retired after 30 years in the newspaper. Both were naturalised as British citizens and were proud that they were accepted in this country. A wonderfully renovated house in Gildencroft street, became their home. T.G.S. Dunsby was there a few times as their guest together with his mum for tea and biscuits, and their house was full with interesting things.

Erhard died in 1966 at 61 years, Trudi – in 1974 (she commited suicide). T. Dunsby doesn't know anything for their previous life before 1938 and would like to discover more for them. Robitscheks were lucky to escape from the Nazi's but probably their families did not escape.

Bulgarian immigrants

A true Bulgarian community in the United Kingdom was formed relatively recently as compared to Bulgarian communities in other countries in Western

Europe. Few Bulgarian students enrolled at British universities before World War II; political and economic emigration was also scarce. It was only around 1944–1945 that a more apparent circle of Bulgarian political emigrants was formed in the United Kingdom.

During the Cold War, when Bulgaria was a socialist state,, the Bulgarian community in the United Kingdom numbered some 3,000–4,000, mostly in England[10].

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THE EURASIAN GEOPOLITICAL VECTOR

IN THE POST-COLD WAR GLOBALIZATION

www.viaevrasia.com

ISSN (online) 1314-6645

[10] Postwar immigration. The National Archives.