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centuries of scientific and intellectual advances, isolated South Africa remained within the mental constraints of this Reformation-era Church. In the novels that focus on the South African War itself, Afrikaner characters constantly refer to their belief in divine favor in ridding themselves of the British forever. The gods of science and progress may have ruled in Britain in the late nineteenth century. But in the British imagination, the God of prejudice, ignorance and superstition ruled this fictional South Africa.

The value of studying these fictional stereotypes of Afrikaners is that they were created to be everything that British imperialists wished to avoid in themselves. These fictional Afrikaners, a polluted race, served as foils to their virtuous British counterparts. According to the stereotype, Afrikaners are the dark children of Europe who have fallen from the role of superior colonizers, ensnared by the sensuality and savagery which is Africa in the British imagination. Another, stereotype is created by British writers in the process, one which portrays Britons as the ideal tools for the spread of enlightened civilization, equitable race relations, good government, science and capitalism. In the South African War, Britons would themselves be guilty of many of the brutalities that they found repugnant in the Afrikaners. Africans would suffer immensely under British policies and ultimately be sacrificed to the cause of a Union of South Africa. The cult of masculinity and the gentlemanly code would fade before guerrilla warfare, internment camps, burned Afrikaner farms, and the sacrifice of many thousands of native Africans. The fiction of "difference" was to prove a terrific sham.

The Early Years of Zubatov's Experiment in Police-Supported Socialism in Late Imperial Russia

By Theodore Karasik

The Tsarist political police—known as the *Okhrana*—were a major component in preventing revolutionary activity against the Imperial Russian government from 1881 to 1917. The police were involved in major programs aimed at halting revolutionary movements which sought to abolish the monarchy and change the economic and political structure of the country. At times the police suppression of these groups led to violence. The revolutionaries launched reprisals which were equally brutal, including assassinations of top Tsarist officials.

Within the *Okhrana*, Moscow Police Chief Sergei Vasilevich Zubatov, who had been exposed to the events sweeping Imperial Russia in the 1880s, launched "police socialism" in the late 1890s in order to protect the Tsarist system. Known as the *Zubatovshchina*, the program had an immense impact on Russian labor movements in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by influencing the development of nascent and semi-nascent worker organizations. Zubatov's program appeared to be the only "workable" policy that the police had to counteract revolutionary movements among the industrial workers by teaching them that "economic independence" could answer their demands for political reform, thereby deflecting criticism away from the monarchy.

Western and Soviet historians usually pinpoint the *Zubatovshchina's* origins to 1901, leading up to the confrontation between Father Georgii Gapon and the Petersburg authorities in 1905.¹ Other studies concentrate on

¹Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Victoria E. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police: Muscovite, Imperial Russian and Soviet Political Security Operations, 1565-1970* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1970); Walter Sabinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St. Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Donald W. Treadgold, *Lenin and His Rivals: The Struggle for Russia's Future, 1898-1906* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1955); and Bertram D. Wolfe, "Gapon and Zubatov: An Experiment in 'Police Socialism,'" *The Russian Review* (Spring 1948). Kyril Tidmarsh states that the *Zubatovshchina* did begin in the late 1890s but fails to elaborate on the reasons why it started in "The Zubatov Idea," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 19 (1960): 335-346.

"L'affaire Azeff."² Furthermore, Soviet-era research on Zubatov's program focuses on how it affected Vladimir Lenin's revolutionary agenda.³ However, some sources indicate that the *Zubatovshchina* may have started in 1898, three years earlier than suggested by Western and Soviet historians.

Significantly, Zubatov launched his programs in Moscow and Minsk at about the same time in the late 1890s.⁴ But there is a distinction between the two approaches that is vitally important to understand. Even though a majority of Zubatov's Moscow operation promoted lectures and access to reading materials in these early years, few arrests were made by the *Okhrana*. On the other hand, the Minsk campaign featured more typical police activities including large-scale arrests and intensive interrogations. Importantly, Jews were targeted in this scheme by Zubatov.

Two important points are made in this article based on these observations. First, this essay asserts that Zubatov started his program to investigate labor movement strength on the periphery, but it will illustrate how he also used Minsk as a test case for his labor experiment in subsequent programs in Petersburg and Moscow by 1900.⁵ Second, this paper explores how and why Zubatov chose the Jewish revolutionary group in Belorussia as a target in his police campaign. Overall, the article illuminates the early years of Zubatov's background in order to give the reader a better understanding of his approach to (1) labor movements and revolutionaries, (2) the ministerial debate over his programs, and (3) the early years of his experiment and its impact on the periphery.

²L. Bertstein, *L'affaire Azeff, histoire et documents* (Paris: Société des amis du peuple russe, 1909); Richard Deacon, *A History of the Russian Secret Service* (London: Frederick Muller, 1972); Boris Nicolaevsky, *Azeff, The Spy, Russian Terrorist, and Police Stool* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Inc., 1934).

³See, for example, A. P. Korelin, "Russkii 'politseiskii sotsializm' (Zubatovshchina)," *Voprosy istorii* (October 1968): 41-58 and V. I. Novikov, "Leninskaia 'Iskra' v bor'be s zubatovshchinoi," *Voprosy istorii* (August 1974): 24-35.

⁴Schneiderman, 69-98.

⁵The Moscow program has been examined extensively in the Russian/Soviet press. See, for example, S. Ainzhaft, "Zubatovshchina v Moskve: (Po neizdannym arkhivnym materialam)," *Katorga i ssylka*, 39, no. 2 (1928): 53-75; N. A. Bukhbinder, "K istorii zubatovshchiny v Moskve," *Istoriia proletariata SSSR*, no. 2 (1930): 169-198; N. A. Bukhbinder, "Zubatovshchina v Moskve. (Neizdannye materialy.)," *Katorga i ssylka*, 14, no. 1 (1925): 96-133; F. Borgadnov-Yevdokimov, "Zubatovshchina v moskve," *Vestnik truda*, no. 9 (1923): 235-240; M. Grigorevskii, "Politseiskii sotsializm v Rossii (Zubatovshchina)," *Obrazovanie* (January 1906): 187-227; G. Kuchin-Oranskii, *Dobrovolcheskaya zubatovshchina* (Moscow: Trud, 1924); M. Ravkovskii, "Zubatov i moskovskie gravyery (1898-1899 gg.)," *Istoriia proletariata SSSR*, no. 2 (1930): 199-232.

Zubatov's Revolutionary Past and the *Okhrana*

Despite having participated in discussion groups during his youth, Zubatov rose swiftly to head the Moscow *Okhrana*. There is a debate over exactly how and when Zubatov became exposed to revolutionary ideas and notions. It is suggested that the *Okhrana* interrogated Zubatov periodically between 1883 and 1886, but the police never formally arrested him because he was an agent of the police.⁶ It is important to understand the debate since it illuminates Zubatov's knowledge of how revolutionary groups operated in Imperial Russia and, subsequently, how these groups played a role in his unusual program in the *Okhrana*.

One unidentified author goes so far as to assert that Zubatov was actually in charge of an active revolutionary circle, and that he was expelled from the Gymnasium as early as 1883 for his revolutionary activities.⁷ The anonymous author states that Zubatov was expelled for his 'liberal ideas,' but gives no evidence to support this assertion.⁸ If Zubatov was a revolutionary of this caliber, he would certainly be an even more valuable asset to the *Okhrana* if the police forced him to become their agent.

The debate over Zubatov's early years occurred at the height of the *Zubatovshchina* in 1903. Zubatov attempted to set the record straight several years after his dismissal. In his later letters to *Byloe* editor V. Burtsev, he maintains that he never led any revolutionary circle, although he admits that he had personal friends among the revolutionaries—including M. R. Gots, who later became one of the founders of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. But the most significant aspect of the link between Zubatov and Gots is that they disagreed over the methods to be used in reforming Imperial Russia.⁹

As it turns out, Zubatov did indeed join the *Okhrana* as an alternative to potential imprisonment or internal exile by the police. He volunteered information to the police about revolutionary students, which subsequently lead to their arrests. In 1885, the young Zubatov was summoned by the Chief

⁶M. Gots, "S. V. Zubatov, (Stranichka iz' perezhitago)," *Byloe*, no. 9 (September 1906): 68.

⁷Unattributed, "Molodyye gody Zubatova," *Osvobozhdeniye*, no. 22 (1903): 393-394. This source provided an alternative view to the events occurring in Imperial Russia during the early years of the twentieth century.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹S. V. Zubatov, "Pisma S. V. Zubatova k V. L. Burtsevu," *Byloe*, no. 14 (1912): 73-74.

of the *Okhrana*, General Berdzhayev, and faced with the alternatives of either internal exile or becoming a police agent. Zubatov chose the latter.¹⁰

Zubatov set out on his new mandate from Berdzhayev. He renewed his contacts with the revolutionaries in 1886, making friends with radical students.¹¹ For four years, Zubatov worked as an *agent provocateur* denouncing key figures in the student revolutionary movement before he officially became an assistant to the head of the *Okhrana* in 1889.¹² Zubatov quickly became a favorite of the internal police, as well as key leaders, with his successful campaign. Being an *agent provocateur* was a valuable lesson for the young Zubatov, who saw the merit of such operations for containing the revolutionary movements.

Once completely indoctrinated into the *Okhrana* and having received a position in intelligence, Zubatov directed the reform of police procedures. Since the *Okhrana* had not been modernized to meet the threat from revolutionary movements, Zubatov's initial innovation was to introduce modern police techniques into *Okhrana* programs, including photographic files and systematic registration of all political suspects.¹³ In addition, new *Okhrana* recruits had to undergo special training in the techniques of conspiratorial work and education in the political doctrines of the revolutionary parties under Zubatov's supervision. His reform efforts within the police organization were extremely successful in the early stages, earning Zubatov praise from his superiors.¹⁴ Clearly, Zubatov appears to have learned quickly how revolutionary movements worked in Tsarist society. He used his background as an *agent provocateur* to prepare the police for his future program.

Police Organization and the Zubatovshchina

Structural Issues

How Zubatov launched his program within the *Okhrana* is important in understanding the power of the secret police in Imperial Russia. In the late

¹⁰Unattributed, "Molodyye gody Zubatova," 393-394.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Tidmarsh, 341.

¹³For more on police techniques under Zubatov, see Leonid Petrovich Menshchikov, *Otkrytoe pismo P. A. Stolypinu, russkomu premer-ministru* (Paris: Impri. A. Gnatowsky, 1911).

¹⁴Schneiderman, 53-55.

nineteenth century, the ministries within Imperial Russia competed fiercely with each other for power, influence, and funds. This struggle involved personalities whose objectives were independent of the Tsar's interests. The police apparatus was no exception to this rule during this difficult period. Sometimes, ministerial rivalries emerged between the *Okhrana's* parent, the Ministry of the Interior, and other ministries, which weakened the government's authority and its ability to monitor the police. Quite simply, the *Okhrana* operated with the most autonomy of any governmental agency.

The *Okhrana* was created in the 1870s and was to be a temporary self-governing section of the gendarmerie in towns and regions where a state of emergency had been proclaimed as a result of revolutionary activity. In the *Okhrana* itself, the best candidates for employment were hired as experts—mainly former revolutionaries—including Sergei Zubatov, who had proven to be valuable to police activity.

The Minister of Internal Affairs was in charge of the *Okhrana*. As of 1896, the actual head of the police was one of the Deputy Ministers of the Interior, but there was a significant problem with the police's position in the governmental structure: the police had far too much power in society. As a result, a clear line of communication did not exist between the governmental elites and the political police. The police acted on their own without much interference from other governmental agencies. This fact also influenced police appointments and responsibilities. In many politically important towns where no separate *Okhrana* sections had been installed, local chiefs of the gendarmerie were made responsible, in their struggle against revolutionaries, to one of the main *Okhrana* offices. For example, the gendarmerie chiefs in the towns of Lithuania and Belorussia, and even of the northern Ukraine, were under the orders of Zubatov.¹⁵

Zubatov's Plans

Zubatov felt that the *Okhrana* should also make policy outside the security service. His idea was to support the working classes as much as politically possible in order to convince them to break with extremist revolutionaries. Zubatov wanted an improvement in the material conditions

¹⁵Pospelovsky, 10-11.

of workers without their participation in politics.¹⁶ About his goals and aspirations, Zubatov wrote,

Right from 1897, I have tried to reconcile them [revolutionaries and loyalists]. With this aim in mind, I have had long conversations with the defendants, befriended them, reported to my chiefs on the results of my talks with them; with the permission of my superiors I have nullified heavy indictments against them, have appealed for reforms. . . . I personally have always believed . . . that the monarchical idea, if properly understood, can give the country all that is needed, so long as the social forces are released. This can be achieved without bloodshed."¹⁷

To make his point, Zubatov seems to have wanted at least a modernized and reformed monarchy. His program was called "Tsar and the People."¹⁸

In his private conversations . . . Zubatov tried to convince them that Tsarism had nothing against the economic struggle of the proletariat, that workers could quite as well achieve real improvements of their lot within the autocratic system, that . . . "the monarchist idea, if correctly understood, can give the country everything it needs, as long as the social forces are related; this then could be achieved without any bloodshed and other abominations."¹⁹

¹⁶D. Svershkov, *Na zare revolutsii*, 3rd edn. (Leningrad, 1925), 63, in Pospelovsky, 36.

¹⁷S. V. Zubatov, "Pis'ma S. V. Zubatova k V. L. Burtsevu," 76-77.

¹⁸A. Spiridovich, "Zubatovshchina," *Mladorosskaia iskra*, No. 34 (15 November 1933), from the Hoover Institution Archives, B. 1. Nicolaevsky Collection, Box number 203, Folder 20.

¹⁹N. A. Bukhbinder, *Zubatovshchina i rabocheye dvizheniye v Rossii* (1922), 4; and "Pis'mo Zubatova o Zubatovshchine," *Vestnik evropy*, No. 3 (Saint Petersburg, 1906), 434-435.

Zubatov sought a peaceful solution to the country's crisis. His idea that the monarchy could remain in place put him in a group of Russian politicians seeking relative calm and stability, while allowing economic strikes.

The Elite Response to Zubatov

Trepov and the Grand Duke Sergei

Prominent Tsarist personalities played a critical role in the *Zubatovshchina's* beginning. The deputy minister of the interior, General D. F. Trepov, who was appointed chief of police for Moscow in 1896, the year Zubatov became head of the Moscow *Okhrana*, became a close collaborator with Zubatov and had considerable influence in Petersburg. Trepov's support for Zubatov in a venture that gave greater freedom is surprising, given his reputation as a tough official and the "virtual dictator" of the country.²⁰ Trepov examined in detail materials on the labor movement since much of the information came from Zubatov himself.²¹ As such, the two men appeared to have a close, professional relationship.

The Grand Duke Sergei, Governor-General of Moscow, also helped a great deal in the promotion of Zubatov's venture. Trepov and Zubatov convinced him that this was the only realistic way towards peace and order in Russia. One document may illustrate what Trepov and Zubatov desired. In 1898, Trepov presented his memorandum—prepared by Zubatov—to the Moscow governor-general, the Grand Duke Sergei:

As long as the revolutionaries preach pure socialism, it is possible to deal with them by means of pure repression, but when they begin to make use of . . . the defects of the existing legal order, repression loses its effect. . . . If lately revolutionary agitators have become active in the sphere of the existing laws and order and are exploiting the defects in our system of factory administration, then . . . the police must watch the situation in the industrial enterprise vigilantly, and [take care] of everything that is

²⁰Ascher, 246.

²¹Schneiderman, 61-62. See also M. Grigorevskii, "Politseiskii sotsializm v Rossii (Zubatovshchina)," *Obrazovanie* (January 1906): 190.

directly related to the personality and everyday practices of the worker.²²

Consequently, Zubatov received the authority to enact his program without interference from other governmental agencies or officials.²³

Witte

In opposition to Trepov and Zubatov—as well as the Grand Duke—was the Minister of Finance, Sergei Witte. Although he approved of Zubatov's mutual-aid society activities, he protested their mediatory activities in labor disputes.²⁴ Witte sought to hold the Ministry of the Interior responsible. In his memoirs, the finance minister put the blame for the development of Zubatov's organizations on Minister of the Interior I. L. Goremykin. In fact, Goremykin was removed from his post as Minister of the Interior in 1899—when Zubatov was only just beginning his venture—and was replaced by D. S. Sipyagin, during whose term of office Zubatov's experiment was most developed. Yet, Witte's attack on Goremykin illustrates how early the *Zubatovshchina* began.

Witte's only tool against Zubatov's organizations was the Factory Inspectorate. According to Bonnell, the Factory Inspectorate was charged with examining and approving wage rates and rules of internal factory order, adopting measures to prevent disputes and misunderstandings between factory owners and workers, and initiating court action against those who violated the rules.²⁵ Specifically, Witte stated in his memoirs that he supported the Factory Inspectorate when it came up against a Zubatov organization and its supporters:

Zubatov's ventures . . . caused great sensation in Moscow. The Factory Inspectorate struggled against

²²B. M. Frumkin, "Zubatovshchina i evreiskoe rabochee dvizhenie," *Perezhitoe*, 3 (1911): 202-203. Other sources touch on the relationship between Zubatov, Trepov, and Grand Duke Sergei. See the materials in the article *Zubatovshchina*, as found in Hoover Institution Archives, B. I. Nicolaevsky Collection, Box number 203, Folder 20; and Grigorevskii, "Politseiskii sotsializm v Rossii (Zubatovshchina)," 190.

²³I. V. Shtein, "Neudachnyi opyt (Zubatovshchina)," *Istoricheskii vestnik*, no. 129 (July 1912): 227.

²⁴"Zapiska ministra finansov o razreshenii stachek," *Samoderzhanviye istachki* (Geneva, 1902), 14-36, as quoted in Pospelovsky, 50.

²⁵Bonnell, 25, fn. 9.

them. I supported the Inspectorate but was unable to liquidate them in any significant way. [Grand Duke Sergei] did whatever he liked.²⁶

Consequently, the *Zubatovshchina* may have resulted simply from interministerial rivalry between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior for leadership in industrial labor issues and negotiations. For instance,

the Ministry of Finance . . . was the closest to the capitalist idea—the Ministry of Internal Affairs stood closest to the elements of feudal gentry and could sometimes sacrifice some capitalists' interests for the sake of the interests of the police-feudal system.²⁷

Ultimately, the Ministry of Finance did not possess a set, single policy on the labor issue. Changes of policy occurred not only with the appointment of different ministers with alternative ideas but also sometimes for short periods during the term of office of one single minister. The same could be said for the Ministry of the Interior. The one constant factor was Sergei Zubatov.

Witte could only ignore the *Zubatovshchina* for so long. Only in 1902 did he express his feelings about the police operation—some four years later. He made this comment after Minister of Interior D. S. Sipyagin's death:

After Sipyagin was killed and replaced by Plehve, during my first conversation with the latter I drew his attention to the dangers of the *Zubatovshchina*. He told me that he would himself go to Moscow . . . to settle the question; he then called the Zubatov venture a harmful and stupid experiment. However, Zubatov was soon to become the central figure in the Department of Police . . . and the whole secret service was to be concentrated in his hands.²⁸

²⁶S. Yu. Witte, *Vospominaniya*, Vol. 2 (Moscow, 1960), 217-218.

²⁷S. Ainzhaft, *Zubatovshchina i Gaponovshchina* (Moscow, 1925), 36.

²⁸Witte, 218.

This begs the question: Why did Witte wait so long?

Plehve

Only after Zubatov's venture began to spin out of control did Minister of the Interior von Plehve respond to the crisis—some three years after the project started. Furthermore, it is reported that Plehve protected Zubatov from other governmental officials—including Witte—during that period not only because he had appointed Zubatov to his position²⁹ but also on account of Plehve's professional relationship with Jewish Independent Leader Manya Vilbushevich, who was a Zubatov agent.³⁰ He apparently agreed to allow the *Zubatovshchina* to develop as a result of his own strategy to please Grand Duke Sergei, who had influence with Tsar Nicholas II.

At the same time, once the Zubatov movement began to creep away from central control in the early 1900s, Plehve took the opportunity to begin a campaign against them, especially against Zubatov's recruitment of Jewish *agent provocateurs*. The Interior Minister did not want to make any concessions to the Jews since this policy did not fit in with the general framework of the anti-Semitic policies of Nicholas II, which Plehve was putting into operation throughout Imperial Russia.³¹ Plehve's plan consisted of pogroms against Jews and the forced russification of other national minorities, and floggings and shootings of unruly peasants and factory workers. Consequently, government policy toward the labor movements was based on ethnic considerations, resulting in multiple policies with negligible effectiveness.

Lower Ranking Officials

Large numbers of lower ranking officers disagreed with Zubatov's plan. Although Zubatov was a trusted and important figure in the Ministry of

²⁹S.V. Zubatov: *Po novym' dokumentam'*, as found in Hoover Institution Archives, B.I. Nicolaevsky Collection, Box number 203, Folder 19; *Zubatovshchina*, as found in the Hoover Institution Archives, B. I. Nicolaevsky Collection, Box number 203, Folder 20.

³⁰For more on Vilbushevich, see below. Interestingly, Plehve instructed Vilbushevich to implement Zubatov's program in Vilno. It is unknown why Plehve was so involved in this part of Zubatov's operation. See Edward H. Judge, *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia, 1902-1904* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1983), 133-148.

³¹Pospelovsky, 54. For additional information, see Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber, eds., *The European Right: A Historical Profile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

Internal Affairs, his labor projects in the beginning found almost no support at all, either among the central offices of the Ministry or the police themselves. Even the judicial system attempted to stifle his plan. Archival evidence suggests that Zubatov came under fire for his program as early as 1898 when the Moscow Chief Prosecutor criticized him for handling state crime cases with relative laxity.³² Only very few—probably those individuals who had had access to the revolutionary fervor sweeping the country—appreciated the possible value of his plan to divert the activities of the dissatisfied worker elements to economic ends. According to a document by the Special Department of Police,

the attitude of the Department towards [Zubatov's activities] was limited to: 1) non-opposition to workers' attempts to organize themselves into societies of mutual assistance with purely economic aims, and, in some instances, to the issuing of respective instructions to local authorities; and 2) to offering assistance to certain individuals, personally known to Zubatov, in the carrying out of such attempts; . . . assistance thus offered could be of a moral nature—gaining for them the favor of higher administrative officers—as well as of material nature—providing financial subsidies for the organizers.³³

This document points to a very cautious and moderate approach by the police to Zubatov's venture. The main point in the text proves to be the support for individuals who acted as agents of the police.

Case Study on the Periphery: Zubatov's Jewish Workers' Program in Minsk

Zubatov's program in Minsk is an important example of a government policy being tested on the periphery before being allowed to spread to other

³²Jonathan W. Daly, "On the Significance of Emergency Legislation in Late Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review*, 54 no. 3 (Fall 1995): 619.

³³"Istoriya legalizatsii rabochevo dvizheniya. Spravka osobovo otdela departamenta politzii," as found in "K istorii zubatovshchiny," *Byloe*, no. 1 (July 1917): 86.

parts of Imperial Russia. Zubatov saw to it that he had key elements in place before he launched his program. First, he saw to it that he had a good understanding of the workers' grievances among the Jewish population. Second, he sought to appoint key allies in important police posts. Finally, Zubatov recruited agents to form and nurture workers' organizations whose agenda countered other revolutionary groups.

Jews

Zubatov started his program not only to investigate Jewish labor movement strength on the periphery but also to use Minsk as a test case for his labor experiment. The workers themselves were part of an ethnic-religious group that faced tremendous hurdles in Imperial Russian society. The economic situation in the predominantly Jewish industrial areas of Minsk, and other clusters of the Jewish workers in western Russia and Poland, was quite difficult. No doubt their objections went beyond those of the Russian laborers, due to the wide legal limitations put forth by the Tsarist government on the Jewish population. Yet, even the Jews were ready to react positively to Zubatov's offering of a legal and loyal workers' movement in the late 1890s.

The background of the Jewish artisans is important to understand since they faced both isolation from larger factories and additional governmental pressures. The situation in the North-Western *krai*, where the Jewish labor movement was concentrated, was quite different from other districts where most of the Russian working class was found. In Imperial Russia as a whole, large factories existed which employed hundreds of thousands of workers. However, in Belorussia small enterprises and workshops were predominant, with skilled and literate Jewish artisans. Because of the legal limitations imposed on them by the Tsarist government, Jews were deprived of the right to acquire land for cultivation and had limited access to state educational facilities. As a result of these hardships, the Jewish population became revolutionary much earlier than some of the other ethnic groups in Imperial Russia.

Consequently, in 1897, the Social-Democratic Jewish workers' groups united to form the General Jewish Workers' Union in Russia, Poland, and Lithuania known simply as the Bund. The Bund Central Committee became the organizing and political center for these trade unions. This event alarmed

the *Okhrana*. During a discussion with Zubatov, G. K. Semiakin, a high official of the Department of the Police, confessed that the department lacked reliable information on the Bund. "Despite my poverty, I would give twenty-five rubles to the one who would tell what kind of a thing this 'Bund' is."³⁴

The fact that the Jewish workers were being oppressed by the Tsarist government, not only as workers but also as a religious-ethnic group as well, made them more vulnerable to Zubatov's political propaganda. On the one hand, the Russian government was concentrating its efforts against Polish nationalism and tolerated Social-Democratic movements in this geographic area as a means of reducing the efforts and gains of the Polish separatists who had contacts with the Jewish revolutionaries. On the other hand, the Russian police had for a long time considered the Jews to be too meek and humble by nature to get involved in mass clandestine activities.³⁵ Zubatov challenged this notion. The *Zubatovshchina* was based on the notion that workers (i.e., the Jews) were motivated entirely by enlightened self-interest. Since their aim was to better their material and cultural conditions, they would, if allowed to pursue these aims in peace, remain disinterested in politics.³⁶

Zubatov and the Jews

Zubatov's interest in the Jewish question had begun in his student days when he had friends among the Jewish radical youth. While in the *Okhrana*, he devoted much study to the problem. According to a colleague in the *Okhrana*, Zubatov considered the Jewish question a "temporary phenomenon, which must be resolved by following the example of Western European governments, that is, all restrictive laws against the Jews must pass into history."³⁷ As such, Zubatov helped to support the Jewish movement in Belorussia:

He stood for the improvement of the status of the
Jews in Russia, wanting to abolish some of the legal

³⁴Schneiderman, 218-219.

³⁵A. Morskoi, *Zubatovshchina. Stranichka iz istorii rabochago voprosa v Rossii* (Moskva: Tipografiia t-va I.D. Sytina, 1913), 108. See also A. Spiridovich, Box number 203, Folder 20.

³⁶Erza Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 140.

³⁷Schneiderman, 235.

limitations to which Jews were being submitted; and it was thanks to his secret assistance that the first Congress of Russian Zionists met in Minsk.³⁸

Zubatov's approach to the Jews differed from that toward the Moscow labor groups. As far as the Jews in the North-Western *krai* were concerned, Zubatov had hoped to use their already established trade unions and the Bund itself. His aim was to convert to his economic and political program those elements which opposed the new policy of the Bund to politicize its trade unions. His goal was simple: Zubatov wanted to splinter the movement through arrests and interrogations and ultimately support the creation of an alternative organization. In 1900, he confided to his superiors that many Jews, seeing nothing to be gained for themselves in political revolution, were abandoning politics in Russia for the national idea of Zionism. He argued that this ferment inside the Jewish community was useful to the *Okhrana*.³⁹ In the beginning the plan appeared to have worked. On their return from interrogation, the released prisoners split into groups who either opposed or supported the Bund.

The Bund's response to Zubatov's campaign was particularly sharp as they recognized its potential impact on the unity of the Jewish labor movement. By August 1900, the Bund Central Committee issued a proclamation on Zubatov and the *Zubatovshchina*:

Every revolutionary who enters into relations with Zubatov . . . harms the workers' cause. . . . We must neither talk with Zubatov, nor make any statements to him, nor write to him, nor borrow money from him. . . . Those who do not submit directives will be considered to be traitors and provocateurs.⁴⁰

As it turns out, the memorandum had little effect due to the *Okhrana's* successful penetration of their organization. Bund members began to drift away. Some of them formed the Jewish Independent Labor Party—exactly what Zubatov had hoped would happen.

³⁸*Krasnaya nov'* (1923): 6-7, and *Byloe* (1918): 13-14, as quoted in Pospiclovsky, 70-71.

³⁹D. Zaslavsky, "Zubatov' i Manya Vilbushevich," *Byloe*, 31 No. 3 (March 1918): 119-121.

⁴⁰Frumkin, 205-209.

In the summer of 1901, the alternative Jewish organization became quite active in economic independence issues. The group issued the Manifesto and the Program of the Jewish Independent Labor Party which illuminated their views and mitigated some of the Bund's political goals. They also petitioned the Minsk Gendarmerie for permission to hold workers' meetings similar to those taking place in Moscow, and they sent another petition to the Minsk governor asking him to ratify the draft Statute of the Minsk Artisans' Club. They planned a workshop for the unemployed, a legal newspaper in Yiddish, together with other legal publications on labor problems, and a system of legal aid for the workers. By August 1901—soon after they had begun forming their separate organizations—the Independents had six craft unions under their control.⁴¹ Ultimately, the Bund, when faced with the Jewish Independent Labor Party, became paralyzed through internal fighting and fragmented.

Vasilev's Role

Zubatov fully realized that Minsk was one of his most strategic areas, primarily because that was where the Bund first came to his attention. Besides being the site of the congress of the RSDWP and the seat of the Bund's Central Committee, Minsk had been an important center of revolutionary and labor activity for years.⁴² Five months elapsed from the time Zubatov's agents began to trail the Bundists until the Bundists' arrests. Zubatov held off on making arrests while intelligence flowed into his office about the Jewish workers.⁴³

As Zubatov accelerated his campaign with arrests, he needed political allies in the police to support his program. He gained the confidence of Gendarmerie Captain Nikita Vasilevich Vasilev, who was transferred from Moscow to Minsk, and took charge of political investigations there either near the end of 1899 or the beginning of 1900. In Minsk the local police and gendarmerie came completely under his control. Vasilev organized a whole network of secret agents, carried out wide-scale searches and arrests, and had

⁴¹Pospelovsky, 114-115.

⁴²Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 121.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 81.

all detainees transferred straight to Zubatov in Moscow.⁴⁴ The results were sometimes mixed:

In June 1900, released Bundists began returning from Moscow. . . . Some of them immediately pointed out how dangerous Zubatov was for the labor movement. Many arrived simply very depressed . . . others returned deeply impressed by Zubatov's ideas.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Zubatov allowed Vasilev's influence and power to grow. In a letter to the Police Department dated 23 June 1901, Zubatov gives a clear illustration of Vasilev's role in acting as a negotiator in labor relations:

In May, a metal-workers strike took place in Minsk. . . . Vasilev said he would receive representatives of the metal-workers and of the employers together. The group . . . headed by Manya Vilbushevich, tried to convince the workers that the intervention of Vasilev in the strike would be very useful. . . . Finally the workers themselves elected representatives to be sent to Vasilev.⁴⁶

This act made Vasilev very popular among the Jewish workers. When a dispute arose between shop assistants and their management, a great number of workers wanted to join the Independents. The shops assistants' union belonged to the Bund. In order to avert a strike,

Vasilev sent personal invitations to all shop assistants, asking them to go to a conference in the Paris Hall. Four hundred people gathered there. Vasilev made an impassioned speech on the harmfulness of illegality . . . and promised to see to their dispute. . . . His speech was very much

⁴⁴Morskoi, 111.

⁴⁵Frumkin, 112.

⁴⁶Pospiclovsky, 115-116.

applauded . . . [and] another meeting was arranged, where Vasilev was to act as arbitrator.⁴⁷

Such a move on Vasilev's part is fascinating, given the police official's interference in issues of labor and management. For one, the Ministry of Finance surely did not appreciate Vasilev's role in assisting the workers. Employers had to make concession after concession to the strikers, but Vasilev recognized the importance of Zubatov's movement even if it ran counter to the interests of other governmental agencies. Vasilev wrote to Zubatov about the success of the *Zubatovshchina*:

Continuing your project, dear Sergei Vasilevich, we . . . can see its positive results. The Independents are successfully absorbing the social-democrats and the revolutionaries; and the working masses, except for the few unsettled or lazy ones, are joining the ranks of the economists.⁴⁸

Recruitment of Manya Vilbushevich

One of the more interesting aspects of Zubatov's work was the recruitment of *agent provocateurs*. For the *Okhrana*, the main goals included either police penetration of an anti-Tsarist organization, or the formation of an anti-Tsarist group. Significantly, Zubatov's tactics worked on some individuals in the Jewish movement. In 1898, during the mass arrests carried out on the Vilno Bund, Zubatov interrogated Manya Vilbushevich. This early contact contributed significantly to the *Zubatovshchina's* development. Vilbushevich was reportedly influential among a dissenting faction of Bundists from Minsk. This faction, in its opposition to the Bund Central Committee, had the support of the bulk of the industrial workers. It demanded the return to agitation and promoted educational and economic aims.

⁴⁷N.A. Bukhbinder, "Nezavisimaia evreiskaia rabochaia partiia: Po neizdannym arkhivnym dokumentam," *Krasnaia letopis'*, no. 2-3 (1922): 213-217.

⁴⁸"Iz perepiski okhrannikov, Pis'ma L.A. Ratayeva—S. V. Zubatovu,'" *Golos minuvshevo*, No. 1 (1922): 54.

Vilbushevich illuminated the Zubatov idea for supporting the monarchy in one of her letters to him, even though support for such an idea appeared weak. She wrote,

That powerful, magnificent theory of Tsarism which was created by you can only be understood by a few ideologues: the crowd will not be carried away by that splendid dream. The government is only guided by repressive measures.⁴⁹

Despite worker ignorance on such issues, Vilbushevich soon became an informant directly to Zubatov. Over a period of a few months, she became so embittered against her former Bund intellectual colleagues that she betrayed them to Zubatov and proclaimed her allegiance to the Tsar, according to Zubatov:

Yesterday Manya Vilbushevich told me everything about everyone involved in the Minsk liquidations. . . . I informed her about the Grodno liquidation, and she said that we had managed to arrest only workers, missing the *intelligent*. . . She is pleading for the workers (particularly the young ones), who are being led astray by the leaders, she begs me not to arrest the former, wherefore she has named the guilty ones. . . According to her view point the guilty ones should have given themselves up to the police as soon as they saw that the innocents had been arrested. As they did not do so, she has betrayed them with a clear conscience and intends to say so openly in Minsk as soon as she has returned there. She is not asking for any concessions and intends to endure the whole sentence. . . *she has become a convinced monarchist. . . and intends to carry on the struggle against unreliable elements.*⁵⁰

⁴⁹Zaslavsky, 120.

⁵⁰N. A. Bukhbinder, "Evreiskoe rabochee dvizhenie v Minske (1893-1905 gg.): Po neizdannym arkhivnym materialam," *Krasnaia letopis'*, no. 5 (1923): 134-135, emphasis added.

Once converted, Vilbushevich convinced some of her colleagues and aides in the Bund to become Zubatov agents. With her help, they were converted by Zubatov, and upon returning to the North-Western *krai* after their release, they worked to protect the monarchy. In 1902, Vilbushevich's colleagues, A. I. Chemerissky and G. I. Shakhnovich were dispatched from Minsk to Vilno to organize labor organizations.⁵¹ Thus, Zubatov and Trepov—thinking that the *Zubatovshchina* was a success—allowed the program to proceed, ultimately leading to disastrous results. The *Zubatovshchina* began to spread throughout Belorussia and then on to Ukraine through Vilbushevich's recruits.

Conclusions

Overall, this article explores the early years of the *Zubatovshchina* and its use on the periphery, specifically in Minsk. Zubatov was a unique individual who attempted in his own way to reform Imperial Russia. He began to listen to the arguments of the revolutionaries and of the economically and socially dissatisfied workers, and to learn from them how to reform the country. Importantly, Zubatov's doctrine called for economic rights and preserving the Tsarist regime. On the one hand he started establishing alternative political organizations, and on the other, he hired revolutionaries and other political police in Minsk to implement his program.

Zubatov's experiment on the periphery preceded his other activities in different areas of Imperial Russia. Zubatov sought to strengthen his organization in Minsk by building up supporters before spreading out to other Jewish groups in neighboring towns. As it turns out, Minsk was a major success for Zubatov before 1901. He succeeded in creating an alternative to the Bund simply based on the fact that the Jewish community worked in small workers' guilds and workshops rather than factories, and was therefore outside of the Factory Inspectorate's control. His program then went on to such towns as Vilno, Kovno, Grodno, Belostok, Vitebsk, Dvinsk, Gomel, Bobruysk, Kiev, Poltava, Kremenchug, Ekaterinoslav, and Odessa.⁵²

However, after Minsk, Zubatov's program began to fail because he

⁵¹Pospelovsky, 93. It is important to note that this act could have been launched by Plehve. See Judge, 134.

⁵²S. Melgunov, "Iz perepiski okrannikov. Pis'ma L.A. Rataeva—S. B. Zubatovy," *Golos minuvshogo*, no. 1 (June 1922): 59.

lacked the support of both police and Tsarist officials. Minsk was outside of Zubatov's jurisdiction. Many local officials failed to support Zubatov's program or to understand the nature of the revolutionary movements in their region.⁵³ Another explanation may be the level of Jewish influence in these other regions. Quite simply, the same ethnic mix found in Minsk did not exist in other parts of Belorussia or Ukraine. The movements after Minsk grew quickly out of control, and very rapidly spread to the surrounding cities and towns within the North-Western *krai* where other workers began to organize themselves for strikes. Zubatov's fate was sealed at this point.

Zubatov also faced hurdles from the government in his reform effort. Specifically, bureaucrats sought either to neutralize or stop his program. Sometimes they succeeded; at other times they failed. Minister of Finance Witte acted slowly on the Minsk operation until it was well under way. Plehve, though, seemed to take a tough stand yet at the same time continued using agents. Other local officials fought Zubatov as well. His subsequent failures in Vilno and Odessa to convince local police officials to support his doctrine illustrate that his capabilities only reached as far as his administrative duties allowed. Finally, managers and employers regretted Zubatov's actions since strikes disrupted their production cycles. For them, the Factory Inspectorate failed to perform a role.

Finally, police agents such as Vilbushevich played a critical role in the Minsk operation by spreading Zubatov's message. But an important point needs to be addressed that has cropped up earlier in this paper. Although it was not easy to do so, revolutionaries such as Vilbushevich may have been able to penetrate the *Okhrana* (i.e. like Azeff). To what degree did Vilbushevich's access to Zubatov and Trepov—some of the highest ranking police officials—represent a counter-operation on the part of the Jewish movement? It is possible that Vilbushevich played a larger role than is recognized by most historians given her relationship with Zubatov. Only through more archival research can the truth behind Zubatov's early years be fully recovered and told.

⁵³In Kiev, General Novitsky refused to accept Zubatov's methods. See Pospelovsky, 122.