

2023

The Mysterious Death of Father Gapon



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10/25/2023

Chapter 1

Just Another Name for State Power



At two o' clock on the afternoon of March 27th 1906, just 24 hours before the 36-year old priest Father Georgy Gapon would be murdered by Socialist Revolutionary, Pinchas Rutenberg, Rutenberg's comrade, Nickolai Tchaikovsky arrived the Fifth Avenue apartment of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* author, Mark Twain. Tchaikovsky said that he had come to America to gather funds for the overthrow of the Tsar and the founding of a Russian Republic. His friend, Maxim Gorky, was arriving soon and both men wondered if the celebrated Russian author would lend his support on their American campaign. A lecture and demonstration had been pencilled in for the 29th that month. Twain is said to have assured his visitor that he hated the Tsar and respected the "rebel's cause." He would do everything in his power to assist them but could not make that engagement at such short notice. Instead Twain would do the next best thing. He would compose a message that could be read at the gathering that expressed his sympathies with the revolution taking place in Russia. The tone he set was perfect: a "single family of drones" had ruled by "false promises, by lies, by treachery and the butcher's knife" for their own aggrandizement. It was to be hoped that the "roused nation, now rising in its strength" could an end to the Romanov dynasty and "set-up a Republic in its place."¹ The message was read out as planned by Paul Kaplan of the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom at the Grand Central Palace on the 29th. Over 3,000 men and women had risen to their feet, waved their hats and cheered loudly as Kaplan introduced the author's message and trumpeted the forthcoming arrival of man of the moment, Maxim Gorky.² In an interview with the New York Times conducted at Twain's apartment just 72 hours before Gapon was murdered, Tchaikovsky had ripped into the priest, whose autobiography had just been published to extraordinary fanfare in the US: "Gapon was a man of no political principles", griped

¹ *Innocents At Home, Mark Twain and Maxim Gorky in New York*, Jon Swan, American Heritage, February 1965, vol. XVI, no. 2, pp 58-61

² "'We Want Arms!'", says Tchaykovsky', New York Times, March 25 1906, p.19

Tchaikovsky. He had been little more than an organiser of workmen's clubs for the government. He was an “administrator”, a civil servant, a priest “with all its insincere possibilities.” The events of January 9th 1905 had been a wave that had washed him forward. Whilst the priest understood the psychology of the masses, it was Tchaikovsky’s belief that Gapon lacked any clear idea of how to drive the revolution forward. It wasn’t the cheap platitudes and pacifying sentiments of a priest they needed now, it was weaponry. There was no way religion could help them. In Tchaikovsky’s estimation, religion was just “another name for State power.” To make matters worse, the church’s more ‘honourable’ representative, the priest, had taken the 30,000 roubles intended to cover damages to the workmen's club and absconded. Their handsome Christian Titan had taken the money and run.³ Little of it was true, and it was more than a little curious that Tchaikovsky should refer to the priest in the past tense when according to the official version of events he still had some 72 hours yet to live.

Chapter 2

Gorkymania



Within weeks of Tchaikovsky’s arrival in New York the following week, ‘Gorkymania’ was sweeping through North America like the proverbial runaway train. The Americans found him to be no less a merciless critic of Gapon than his support act, Tchaikovsky. Describing his former friend and ally as a “demagogue” and “adventurer” he repeated Tchaikovsky’s statement that Gapon had been swept along on the wave of a popular uprising. Yes he was warm hearted, yes he had star-appeal but he was by no means an intellectual. Talking to reporters in New York, Gorky painted an unflattering picture of Gapon on the day of the revolution, begging for his help to escape. He also reiterated the entirely fictitious account of taking large sums of money from Russia Okhrana. In the meticulously compiled records of collaborators and infiltrators contained in the archives of the Okhrana, which were opened and examined in 1924, there was not one reference to a

³ “‘We Want Arms’!”, says Tchaikovsky’, New York Times, March 25 1906, p.19

man called Gapon in their pay. Nor did any officer of the secret police claim that Gapon had been his agent.⁴

Gapon finished his public flogging of Gapon with an appeal to the Jewish population of New York, in which he asserted that the future history of Russia would devote some of its most thrilling pages to the Jews. He said that collectively they evinced “superhuman courage in the Russian struggle for liberty.” The virulent spread of anti-Semitism being reported in their daily newspapers had been encouraged by the Tsarist government. The monster they faced was not a malignant tumour at the heart of the Russian people. It was more like a *Zombie Apocalypse*, an infection that might be cured by killing the brain of the *Walking Dead*: the vile, marauding Romanovs.

Twain continued to join Gorky and Tchaikovsky at dinners and functions where it would be advantageous to have them seen with various Americans in respected literary and society circles. Gorky assured them with a smile that he was not an anarchist but a Socialist. He believed in law and order. Gorky’s 22 year-old adopted son was already here. He had made his way through Scandinavia and Canada some months before and was made busy in the mailroom of a magazine owned by Gorky’s ‘foxed-faced’ American sponsor, Gaylord Wiltshire. H. G Wells was another of the writers he met in New York. Wiltshire had organised a dinner in the Englishman’s honour and the poet Edward Markham was there too. On his second night in New York, Gorky was said to be in very high spirits. America, he said, is home as soon as one steps foot on its shores. The romance continued with Twain for weeks but came to an abrupt end when a reporter from the *New York World* revealed that the woman that Gorky was travelling with was not his wife or the mother of his son, but his mistress Maria Fyodorovna Andreyeva, the Russian actress. It was an embarrassing discovery for Twain and a calamitous public relations gaff for Gorky. Writing in *The Future of America* some years later, H. G. Wells shared his astonishment at the immediate change in attitude from the US public: “one day Gorky was at his zenith and on the next day he had been swept from the world ... It was terrifying.” Within hours of the ‘Gorky Scandal’ breaking in the news, he was an obliterated man and impossible to find. A follow-up interview with Gorky’s wife by *New York Herald* didn’t entirely work out as expected. Contrary to their expectations, the novelist’s wife was more shocked to discover that America ‘the land of the free’

⁴ Georgy Gapon and the Russian Social Democrats in 1905, S. I Potolov, 2009

were so conservative and prejudiced in their attitudes that they should be so traumatized by the news he had a mistress. Although it remained unpublished in his lifetime, Twain offered his own witty and ambiguous take on the whole affair in a story called *The Gorki Incident*, which told the story of a ‘savage’, discovered in his inevitable nudity in Tierra del Fuego, who is brought to England and taught to dress, becomes an instant hit in Society circles but when invited to the court of the King, he dresses in his traditional national costume — which happens to be nothing at all.⁵

The arrival of the Jewish Revolutionary Bund’s more mysterious Dr Maxime Gregory aka Samuel Klevansky at the end of April was clearly designed not just to energize the Jews of America, but to provide a last-minute substitute for the disgraced and elusive Gorky. The “young man with a high forehead and piercing, black eyes” was a 27-year old Latvian railwayman who had declared, albeit briefly, the creation of the Baltic Republic in December 1905 — an astonishing feat that the Tsarist government took some weeks and a worrying number of troops to reverse. Triumph over Japan was looking increasingly unlikely and the revolutionaries had made every effort to further compromise the already over-stretched military resources of Imperial Russia. In the last few weeks of 1905 no less than three practically autonomous States had been declared: Finland, Georgia and now, for the time being at least, the Baltic Provinces, an Estonian and Latvian union that would last for a full two weeks with Gregory installed as President. The Republic’s capital was Riga, the very city where Gorky had fled after his much publicised release from jail that February.

As a result of the stand that he and his Worker’s Alliance had taken in Latvia, Maxime Gregory had become something of a living legend. Having already rejected the Tsar’s October Manifesto, the son of a wealthy Jewish merchant was in America to solicit funds in his native Yiddish tongue. The Bund were still strong in the country and with the support of people like Gorky they could be stronger still. Whilst stopping short of condoning the author’s promiscuity, he reiterated that Gorky’s relationship with the actress was perfectly acceptable in Russia and had little intention of prying into his

⁵ *Innocents At Home, Mark Twain and Maxim Gorky in New York*, Jon Swan, American Heritage, February 1965, vol. XVI, no. 2, pp 98-101

private affairs. He was rather less neutral about Gapon; as far as Gregory was concerned, the priest was an agent of the Russian Government.⁶

By the time of Gregory Maxime's arrival in New York, Gorky's publicity trip was collapsing with equal intensity and pace. After being rejected by practically every hotel in town, the general perception among New York liberals was that he was a revolutionary, pure and simple. According to statement issued by the Russian Ambassador in Washington, the woman he was claiming to be his common-law wife, the actress Maria Fyodorovna Andreyeva, had been in receipt of revolutionary funds exceeding \$1,500,00 from Russian cotton-king Savva Timofeyevich Morozov of Moscow and known to be a major donator to the RSDLP's Iskra and the Moscow Art Theatre.⁷ At the end of May 1905 Morozov was found with gunshot wounds to the head in Cannes, after returning from a short stay in Berlin. He had been forced to relocate after Tsarist Police discovered the extent of his secret relations with Gorky's mistress, Mme. Andreyeva. A short time before his death this small, stocky and tightly-cut theatre and textile impresario was reported to have insured his life for a significant sum and designated Gorky's mistress Maria Fyodorovna Andreyeva the policy's controlling beneficiary. The three of them were said to be part of a complex love triangle and were trying to work things through with all the various additional parties involved. According to Gorky expert Lidia Spiridonova, Morozov may also have been part of the circle that brought Gorky into contact with Gapon's assassin, Pinchas Rutenberg for the first time, perhaps through Andreyeva herself.⁸

The inclusion of Russian-American theatre mogul Joseph Mandelkern in Gorky's entourage would now make perfect sense, as he had featured prominently in US-Russian cultural exchanges with Morozov's Art Theatre in Moscow. What didn't make a lot of sense was the fact that Cannes would also feature in the series of falls and disgraces that would end in the death of Gorky's star male lead, Father Gapon some 12 months later. More curiously still, at the time of Morozov's death, Leonid Krassin, the head of the Bolshevik's combat organisation and a mutual friend of the group, had arrived in town. He was to stay for just four days and then vanish.

⁶ 'Maxime Comes Here to Aid Revolution', New York Times April 20, 1906, p.20

⁷ 'The Case of Maxim Gorky', Washington Post, April 17, 1906, p.6

⁸ Materiały I Recenzje, Roczniki Humanistyczne, Tom Lxiii, Zeszyt 7–2015, Lidia Spiridonova

Chapter 3

The Events of Bloody Sunday



As astonishing as it is, the vast majority of people know little about the 1905 Revolution in Russia nor the spark that Gapon provided. The basic gist of what people know is this: on Sunday January 9 1905, a handsome young priest led a peaceful demonstration through the streets of St Petersburg to the Winter Palace. In his hands he held a petition that we wished to present in person to the Tsar. The thousands of ordinary workers who marched behind him with their children in tow were looking for reforms — improvements to working conditions, working hours, fairer wages. The only real challenge to the Tsar’s authority were the requests being made that would change the settings of Tsarist rule: the separation of church and state, the greater accountability of ministers, a more lawful administration, free of assembly, freedom of speech and the immediate return and pardon of all political exiles. Even if it didn’t end that way, it had never been Gapon’s intention to start a revolution. If we are to believe the priest’s description of his intent, it was a “dream” that he had. Not a nightmare. His petition had concluded with a pledge of obedience: “Give the order, swear to meet these needs, and you will make Russia both happy and glorious, and your name will be fixed in our hearts and the hearts of our posterity for all time.”

Helen Rappaport’s 2010 book, *Conspirator* provides one of the most chilling and vivid accounts of that day. By the morning of January 22nd 1905 the city-wide strikes among mill and factory workers had drawn in excess of 60,000 to the streets around Nesky Prospekt. They had a labour petition they wished to hand personally to their ‘Little Father’ Tsar Nicholas II. It was a crisp and frosty morning. The churches swelled with heartfelt worship and the frosted domes of the city’s oriental buildings sparkled in the low winter sun of a late Sunday morning. The air was bristling with expectation as the long, solemn column of peaceful demonstrators amassed around Nerva Gate, their inexpensive icons and their portraits of the Tsar cupped like sacraments in their hands. As Rappaport quite rightfully explains, the banners and likenesses of the Tsar were a “deliberate statement of their intentions”. This wasn’t a power grab. It was the humble

plea of a child for more freedom and the simple opportunity to thrive. Like the glorious glazed cupolas all around them, they were here to let in the light of understanding in the dark recesses of the Tsar's heart. They appealed to the Tsar for better conditions, a statutory working day and some basic civil liberties.

But the Tsar was nowhere to be seen that day. On the advice of his Uncle and Military Governor of St Petersburg, the Grand Duke Vladimir, Tsar Nicholas II already decamped to the relative safety of the Tsarskoye Selo outside the city.⁹ Without warning the Duke gave the order to fire on the crowd as it approached. The 12,000 troops surged forward and with swords drawn the Cossacks and Cavalry tore into the crowd. Gapon takes up the story in an account published shortly before his murder in 1906: "The people quickly opened way, rushing to the footpaths on either side ... The Cavalry returned striking at the people with their swords and driving them into the adjoining streets where the soldiers cruelly wounded many and killed some. A small boy who had been wounded was being driven in a sledge, and seeing him, a cry for revenge arose from the crowd." Gapon goes on to explain how news of massacres in adjoining streets had sent the crowd into a "fever of wrath". A member of the fleeing procession remembered that there was an armoury shop in a nearby street and a rush was made for it. The fumbling, petrified storekeeper had turned the key on the Iron Gate and within moments a heap of rusty old swords and ancient Caucasian daggers flooded into the streets and passed from hand to hand and from student to student, like coals into the furnace. But whatever brave attempt had been made to disarm the soldiers, the sheer scale and volume of the mounted cavalry and squadron upon squadron of charging Cossacks cleaved fresh gaping wounds into the procession's futile counter attack. Soon the infantry arrived and fired volley after volley into the crowd. One soldier who had grown bored of simply firing at random into the mass of flailing bodies had asked for a bayonet to add a touch of sport to the day's event. The victim was said to be hardly more than a child. A student, testing the resilience of the soldiers had risen to feet and waved a red flag and cried, "If your conscience permit it — shoot!" A volley of shots rang out and he fell immediately.¹⁰ By the end of the afternoon some 200 men, women and

⁹ *Conspirator*, Helen Rappaport, Hutchison, 2009, p.107-109

¹⁰ *The Story of My Life*, Georgii Apollonovich Gapon, Chapman and Hall, 1905

children lay dead with thousands more critically wounded. The peaceful demonstration, organised at least in part by Aleksei Lopukhin had given Russia its Peterloo bloodbath.

In the midst of his despair someone grabbed him by the arm and dragged him away into a small side street. His rescuer, who describes as the “engineer of a large factory” who was Pinchas Rutenberg — a man who he remembered as having taken an especial interest in the particulars of the petition and any “definite plans” in the event of a serious “collision” with the military.¹¹ In three minutes Rutenberg had stripped the priest of his characteristic garb and replaced with a simple disguise. Within moments Gapon was being led to the home of Maxim Gorky, who Rutenberg knew well. His hair had been cut, his beard shaved off and the cassock in which he had strode so heroically forward had been sheepishly ditched for a suit. Gorky was said to have been excited by Gapon’s arrival, embracing him firmly and beginning to cry. The writer then pressed him to stay with and ride it out. There would be a secret meeting of intellectuals a little later in the day and there was talk of arming the people. Gorky immediately got to work on drafting an appeal that could be read at the meeting. After the meeting they were hustled into a side room by Rutenberg where the three of them discussed the question of weapons and organizing a counter-uprising.¹² It was also from Gorky’s apartment that the pair plotted their escape across the Russian border to Finland. From Finland they would travel to Switzerland and from Switzerland they would travel to Paris and from Paris they would slip into London, the Priest promising to return once his safety could be guaranteed.¹³

For Gapon and many of his assembly that day, there was no more God, no more Church and no more Tsar. A wanted man he fled to Geneva to meet with Lenin and discuss the purchase of arms with Japan’s Colonel Motojiro. In the end, the poor charismatic champion had either been radicalised by his own failed dreams or by the failure of Lopukhin to wake him from them in time — which may well have been his intention. Within weeks of the massacre a state of martial law had been declared and Lapoukhin was dismissed from his post. The massacre had provided the trigger for the wave of revolution that followed and which would culminate in Russia’s First State Duma, the

¹¹ *The Story of My Life*, Gapon, p. 174

¹² *My Life Story*, Georgi Apollonovich Gapon, E.P Dutton, 1906, pp.210-215

¹³ *The Story of My Life*, Gapon, p.255, p. 247

more democratic form of government that Lopukhin and his fellow Liberals had favoured from the start.

Chapter 4

The First Reports of Gapon's Death



As Gorky's New York fairytale began to fall apart, the first reports of Gapon's death began to emerge in the press. Within 72 hours of the first report on the 'Gorky scandal' on April 15th, the *New York Times* was running a story on Father Gapon's disappearance. He had been last seen about a week ago, around the time of Gorky's arrival in New York, and his anxious wife now feared foul-play. Responding to enquiries from the press in Saint Petersburg, the Police were insisting he had not been arrested and that they knew nothing about his whereabouts.¹⁴ Four days later, the full truth was laid bare in John Dover Wilson's miraculous exclusive for the *Manchester Guardian*: *Father Gapon's End: Hanged Secretly by the Revolutionaries*.¹⁵

The news was followed by a series of claims and counter-claims. *Secret Guardian* correspondent, David Soskice had swiftly dismissed Wilson's claims as being the nonsense of an irresponsible journalist. By this point in time, Gorky had ditched his courtship with the press and was ramping up his appearances among US Socialists at the various lecture halls and meeting rooms of Boston, New York and Chicago. In an address to the Russian Social Democrats at the Grand Central Palace on the 25th, Gorky finally tackled "The Jewish Question." His biggest gripe was with Count Witte who said that if Jews were to be promised a place in the First Duma, they were not to have a voice in the affairs of the Russian nation, only in their own unique ethnic affairs. There was no way for the Jews to move forward. Their place in the intended Duma was practically worthless on this basis alone. The man chairing the event that day was Meyer London,

¹⁴ 'Father Gapon Disappears', *New York Times*, April 19, 1906, p.11

¹⁵ 'Father Gapon's End: Hanged Secretly by the Revolutionaries', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 April, 1906, p.6

the former Talmudic scholar and American Socialist who eventually succeeded in his ambitions to become a member of the U.S House of Representatives.¹⁶

Just 24 hours before Gorky appeared at the Grand Central Palace, a rumour was circulating in the press that Gapon had not been murdered by Revolutionaries but had fallen into the hands of the Holy Synod, the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church. A report in the *New York Times* painted a rather sorry picture; the high priests had condemned him for forsaking the priestly order and confined to indefinite exile in one of its many gloomy monasteries.¹⁷ A few days later Charles E. Hands the *Daily Mail's* war correspondent in St Petersburg assured his readers that the priest was living quietly at Kukokola in Finland.¹⁸

By April 30th, the name of Maxim Gorky's friend, Pinchas Rutenberg was beginning to appear in connection with Gapon's murder. The *Times of London* was the first to print the name, courtesy of a tip-off to its correspondent Robert Archibald Wilton in St Petersburg. Wilton, the son of a British mining engineer employed in Russia had just been pulled poached by *The Times* from Gordon Bennett Jnr's Paris-based *New York Herald*. In later years Wilton would become known as a notorious anti-Semite who would propose that the execution of the Romanov family was part of a 'blood libel' ritual murder by a Jewish faction of Lenin's Bolsheviks in Ekaterinburg.¹⁹ It's only fair to point that the evidence had been solicited by the White Russian General Kolchak who attributed the tyrannical spread of Bolshevism to the Jews and looked to the likes of Churchill for support during Russia's ensuing counter-revolution led by the 'White Russian' Tsarists. Wilton, who would re-join the *New York Herald* in the 1920s would also be a key witness in the trial of former Kishinev Police Chief and Gapon's ally in St Petersburg, A. A Lapukhin, who was being prosecuted for the part he was alleged to have played in the whole Yevno Azef affair (an agent provocateur for the Russian Secret Police). Joining Wilton on the stand that week would be Miss Russell, the governess who had accompanied Lapukhin's missing daughter during their two month stay in

¹⁶ 'The Jewish Question Discussed by Gorky', *New York Times*, April 26, 1906, p.11

¹⁷ 'Fate of Father Gapon', *New York Times*, April 24, 1906, p.8

¹⁸ *Daily Mail*, April 27, 1906, p.7

¹⁹ *The Last Days of the Romanov*, Robert Wilton, Thornton Butterworth Ltd

London and Bexhill in 1907.²⁰ The day would also be marked by the discovery of Gapon's body in the house in Oserki. It was generally understood that the Police had known about its location for some time and a considerable amount of discussion has taken place over the years that has focused on the delay in the broader scope of a Police conspiracy. But both the timing of Gapon's death and the discovery of his body some three weeks later had been very well judged; his death had come some two weeks before the convocation of Russia's First Duma on April 27th and the 'discovery' that he was dead some three days later on April 30th. As expected, the Police waited another several days before confirming it with the press. If an announcement had been made prior to the opening ceremony of the First Duma, a violent reaction from the workers could have jeopardised the whole thing. The entire spectacle had been conceived by the Tsar and his ministers to defuse the worker rebellion and de-legitimise a revolution. Those who had carried out the execution just two weeks before the Duma's launch at the end of April had clearly been eager to ignite a violent reaction and see the whole thing fall apart. This could have been the Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic extremists who had instructed their members to boycott the assembly or it could have been the far-right organs of Tsarist power who were determined to preserve the existing autocracy — or even elements within both groups working together.

The appearance of Rutenberg's name in The Times of London was accompanied by another story. Reuters had received a despatch from Gapon's solicitor Sergei Pavlovich Margolin in St Petersburg saying he had in his hands a letter from Berlin in a woman's handwriting. Accompanying the letter was £190.00, a small pocket book owned by Gapon and a key to his safety deposit box in the bank vaults of the Crédit Lyonnais. The message had instructed the solicitor to act according to the directions provided, but no instruction had been provided. The pocket book contained a receipt signed by the person whose name begins with the letter 'M' and dated April 8th, the date on which Gapon had last been seen. A follow up message read that Father Gapon's mistress had informed his solicitor that the priest had spent February in Saint Petersburg where he was visited by a "young Jewess" and had been joined by several of his associates from the Putilov Workers Assembly. The young woman telling the story had journeyed to Finland in early March and had been joined by Gapon a week or so later, accompanied by the

²⁰ 'The Tsar's Spy', London Daily News, April 15, 1909, p.5

‘young Jewess’. According to the report by Reuters, the priest and the ‘young Jewess’ had left for an undisclosed location and he was never seen again. The workmen were now anxious to see if the £2,000 they had entrusted the priest with had been deposited in the Crédit Lyonnais. Dead or not they wanted their money.²¹ As a matter of course Gapon’s solicitor Sergei P. Margolin headed to Berlin to track down the source of the letter. A few days later he too was dead.

The story was interesting on a number of counts. The letter had been mailed from Berlin. The venerable Jewish novelist S. An-sky, who had co-authored of Gapon’s appeal on behalf of the Jews to the peasants and workers of Russia during the height of his fame in London, had re-located to Berlin towards the end of 1905 and it was Berlin that his good friend Maxim Gorky had escaped to after leaving Riga around this time. The *New York Times* by contrast had given the ‘Young Jewess’ mentioned by Reuters an actual name: ‘Holstein’. It was claimed that ‘Holstein’ had been a member of the revolutionaries associated with Pinchas Rutenberg (known as ‘Martini’) and the Putilov section of the Worker's Assembly. It is believed that she too had mysteriously vanished a short time later. The report in the *New York Times* appeared to suggest that the priest had been lured from Finland to the summer house in Oserki by the young Jewess — ‘an agent of the Reds’ — and that Gapon’s papers had then been forwarded to his lawyer by the Holstein woman.²² Inevitably the story evolved, and before long it was alleged that Rutenberg had been in love with the young Jewess and murdered Father Gapon in a fit of jealous rage. The story had first been circulated in the *Novoe Vremya* and differed little in its basic claims from the story told by Rutenberg himself a little time later. There were, however some notable omissions. The later version of the story didn't feature the young Jewess named Holstein and Rutenberg would claim that the death sentence had been passed by the Central Committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and not as the earliest reports suggested from the irate members of the Worker’s Tribunal acting autonomously. A few days after the first letter had been mailed to Gapon’s solicitor, another letter arrived, and again it was mailed from Berlin. In what was described as a “long preamble justifying the execution” it reported how the Workmen’s Tribunal had

²¹ Manchester Guardian, April 30, 1906, p.6

²² ‘Believe Gapon Dead’, *New York Times*, April 30, 1906, p.6; ‘Gapon Lured to Death’, *Washington Post*, April 30, 1906, p.1

incontestable proof of Gapon's secret relations with the Secret Police.²³ Three years later the story would change again. This time the kill-order would come from the Tsarist agent provocateur and Socialist Revolutionary traitor exposed by literary sleuth Vladimir Burtsev in London, Yevno Azef. But as Azef had disappeared by this point, he wasn't able to confirm the story either way. The city he fled to was Berlin.

There were other discrepancies too. The story being told by local police was that Gapon had been killed at another location and then transported to the house and his whole execution staged. There was also strong support for Gapon coming from within the Worker's movement. It was claimed that a number of resolutions had been passed by Russia Workers and Revolutionary organs pledging faith in Gapon's actions. There were even said to be sub-committees of the Socialist Revolutionary Combat Organisation who were planning to avenge Gapon's death. They were more of the opinion that it was the Tsarist government that had murdered the priest.²⁴

On May 4th Gapon's lawyer issued a statement saying that he had proof that Gapon had NOT been murdered by Revolutionaries.²⁵ Ivan Narodny who had assisted Maxim Gorky on his fund-raising tour of America issued a similar statement: he had not been killed by Russian anarchists. On the contrary, he was alive and well in Switzerland. He added that only last Monday a friend in Washington DC had received a cable dispatch from Father Gapon.²⁶ As tales of his miraculous resurrection and certain death ebbed and flowed with all the capriciousness of Schrodinger's Cat, the Attorney and Examining Magistrate returned from visiting the offices of the Crédit Lyonnais in St Petersburg with the news that the sums of money present in Gapon's account did not exceed 14,500 roubles, contradicting any claim that he had been in receipt of huge sums of cash. The only other credit worthy of note was £560 in Bank of France notes.²⁷ The findings coincided with news that after a thorough examination of the body, there was no evidence of strangulation. It was concluded that he was murdered elsewhere and that his body was carried to the house. The body had also been positively identified as

²³ 'Tribunal Justifies Gapon's Execution', New York Times, May 2, 1906, p.4

²⁴ New York Times, May 3 1906

²⁵ 'Says Gapon Has Not Been Slain', New York Times, May 4, 1906, p.5

²⁶ 'Gapon in Switzerland', Washington Post, May 7, 1906, p.3

²⁷ 'Father Gapon's Wealth', The Observer, May 13, 1906, p.6

that of the priest. The villa had been rented by two men on April 8 for the entire summer and a deposit had been paid by an as yet unknown man from St Petersburg, who after visiting the house on several separate occasions in the company of a young workman, had disappeared on April 11, taking the key with him. It was felt that Gapon's corpse had been brought to the house on April 10th.²⁸ Why Rutenberg moved the date of the assassination back to March 28th in later interviews isn't known, but the view of the coroner and the evidence provided to Gapon's solicitor in the form of letters and receipts, not to mention the account provided by the woman who let the house, seemed to suggest that the time of death occurred between April 9th and April 10th.

In light of this discovery, John Dover Wilson of the *Manchester Guardian* updated his account of Gapon's death, quoting the same source: Gapon had not been hanged from the ceiling. The rope around his neck had been tied to a large hook in one of the walls. No mention was made of the body having been moved to the house from another location. Instead the source reiterated how Witte's secretary Ivan Fedorovich Manasevich-Manuilov, the son of a Jewish official exiled to Siberia for fraud, had boasted of how Gapon had shared a trove of important secrets with them about the revolutionaries. Manuilov however, was hardly a reliable source and there was much value to be had in supporting such a rumour: the Revolutionaries would panic and the panic might naturally engender further tensions and divisions, and a complete overhaul of existing practices. There was absolutely nothing to be gained from defending Gapon.

As it turns out, the entire story that had been handed to Wilson at the *Manchester Guardian* had been written-up originally by Manuilov at the *Novoe Vremya* — although it's not clear whether Wilson simply lifted it for the *Manchester Guardian* or had secured it from another source. By 1906 Manuilov had been dismissed from his post in the Secret Police Department after he was found to be at the centre of large embezzlement scandal. During the war in 1916 he was arrested and sentenced to death for being involved in the sale of German War bonds. As a result there are two obvious questions: was Manuilov a reliable source and if he was a reliable source then how did he get the detail wrong about the hanging?

²⁸ The Washington Post, May 14, 1906, p.1

Chapter 5

Manuilov & Rachkovsky



As a journalist in Paris, Manuilov had found himself in the employ of Vladimir Burtsev's nemesis, Pyotr Rachkovsky, the notorious chief of Russia's Secret Police in Europe.²⁹ It was also Manuilov, by this time a very able and experienced intriguer, who had played a central part of Gapon's alleged plans to re-start the Worker's Assemblies under the patronage of Count Witte. After the Kishinev massacre of 1903 it had been Manuilov who had carried out orders to straighten out the narrative in English, French and German papers using a combination of bribes and persuasion.³⁰ His time in Paris would inevitably have brought him into contact with Times of London journalist, Robert Wilton, the first man to name Pinchas Rutenberg as the assassin at that time working for *New York Herald*. Extraordinarily enough, Wilton had been brought specifically across to *The Times* as a replacement for its St Petersburg correspondent Dudley Disraeli Braham who had been expelled from Russia in 1903 for telling the truth about the Kishinev Massacre and finding himself embroiled in the fall-out of the fraudulent 'Kishinev Dispatch' that had implicated von Plehve and Lopukhin in the region's aggression against the Jews.³¹ Wilton's appointment had been based on two assurances: the first was that Russia would drop all charges against Braham and the second, that Wilton would be well received. Given the pronounced anti-Semitic bias of Wilton, it seems reasonable to infer that his role as Braham's successor had the full support and backing of Rachkovsky and his man, Manuilov.³² Given that Braham had not been linked directly with the publication of the invented 'dispatch' by The Times of London, it possible that Russia was exploiting the situation to install a more suitable correspondent to sanitise and improve its news-flow to Great Britain. Should everything

²⁹ Vladimir Burtsev – a liberal revolutionary who styled himself as a Revolutionary Sherlock Holmes. He was responsible for uncovering dozens of agent provocateurs and informers for the Russian Secret Police (the Okhrana).

³⁰ *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906*, Charles A. Ruud, University of Toronto Press, 1982, p.215

³¹ 'Kishineff Massacres', *Westminster Gazette*, 6 June 1903, p.6

³² *Windows on the World*, Robert W. Desmond, University of Iowa Press, 1980, p.33

go to plan, the negative ‘fake news’ charges that had been brought against D. D. Braham, would effectively make way for more positive ‘fake news’ from Wilton. Not that any of it would end well for Manuilov. By 1916 Manuilov had found himself acting as Secretary to Rasputin and on the fringes of a plot by Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich Romanov and the British Secret Service to have him ‘removed’ from the team of influencers operating within the inner circle of the Tsar. It was determined that Manuilov, like Rasputin, was in the pay of the Germans and was subsequently arrested. He’d been using his privileged entanglement in various schemes and plots to extort large sums of money for personal use.

The trial that followed revealed the true scale of corruption within the Tsar’s inner circle, the Duma and the Secret Police. The next move was rather more extraordinary. After the Tsar had been toppled and the former-Socialist Revolutionary Kerensky had won his place as leader of the Provisional Government, Manuilov was released from prison. The man who had perhaps done more than most to sharpen the nation’s aggression against the Jews was released by a man that was currently being celebrated globally for their liberation in Russia. The tale later told by Robert Wilton of *The Times* wasn’t true. In that version of events a “wild eyed soldier” soldier had “burst” into his cell screamed “are you for the Revolution?” and let him go. The truth of the matter was that no one was entirely sure why he had been let go. In last weeks of December 1917, Robert Wilton of *The Times* was reporting on the indefinite postponement of his trial as a result of several important witnesses failing to show.³³

The idea of such a high-value individual and enemy of Kerensky’s government being released on the whim of one prison guard even during the chaos of the revolution seemed remote to say the least. Why historians have not made more of this rather unusual episode, isn’t immediately obvious. *The Daily Telegraph*’s correspondent, E. H. Wilcox certainly thought so. In fact he devoted a whole chapter to the so-called ‘Manuilov Scandal’ in his 1919 book ‘Russia’s Ruin’, claiming the whole fantastical story “occupied a definite place among the events which brought about the overthrow of the Tsar.” According to Wilcox, the London Press had printed a short telegram on March 6th 1917, just two days before the Revolution announcing that the blackmailer Ivan Manasevitch Manouiloff had been sentenced to 18-months imprisonment. It was added that the case raised a host

³³ ‘The Trial of Stuermer’s Private Secretary’, Justice, January 4, 1917, p.5

of further questions and that it would be necessary to revisit it in the days and weeks to come. But the promise was never kept. The furious pace of events between February and April meant there was “no time to pick up the threads”.³⁴ How such an ‘enemy of the people’ had been brought to trial under the repressive Tsarist government and freed under the Kerensky government never seems to have been adequately explained. Perhaps his sympathies were never really that clear. However, his various intrigues in Italy and the various oblique allusions made by Zeev Jabotinsky to Manuilov being a ‘convert’ go some way toward suggesting this infinitely fluid character may have already switched sides by this point.³⁵

The bewildered young Wilson endeavoured to undo some of the damage that had been inflicted on his reputation by providing the *Manchester Guardian* with an update from official police sources. There had been a return train ticket dated April 9th found in Gapon’s pockets. The sheer number of blows to the head and body, and other injuries like stab wounds and his eye being gorged out, showed that the man had been murdered and then made to appear as if he’d been hanged.³⁶ Two days later the Manchester newspaper ran a story inspired by a story that had come into *The Tribune*. According to *The Tribune*, a gentleman had called at the offices of the paper and had given them an assurance that Gapon was alive and well in London. They had even arranged an interview. Before the interview could take however, the surprisingly buoyant Gapon had disappeared. *The Tribune* was satisfied with the bona-fides of the gentleman, who held a ‘quasi-official position in London’. The statement was alleged to have been backed-up by letter received from an ‘M. Nikolaevich’ in Hampstead. *The Tribune* had duly contacted their correspondent in St Petersburg, David Soskice. Seeking clarification, Soskice duly contacted Gapon’s lawyer Sergei P. Margolin who confirmed that the body he’d identified in the morgue was that of his client, Georgy Gapon. The evidence had showed that his murderers had bound the arms of their victim and “knocked him senseless” and then hanged. Soskice had said he had been assured that the villas where the murder took place had been the scene of no fewer than fourteen acts of violence over the years, and that the villa had belonged to a relative of an officer currently serving in

³⁴ *Russia’s Ruin*, E. H. Wilcox. Chappell & Hall, 1919

³⁵ ‘An Odessa Odyssey’, Barry P. Scherr, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1, Spring 1911, Cambridge University Press, pp. 109-110

³⁶ ‘Father Gapon’s Death’, *Manchester Guardian*, May 15, 1906, p.12

the St Petersburg Police. The prevailing belief in St Petersburg, Soskice went on, was that the Secret Police had been responsible.³⁷ The *Manchester Guardian* concluded that there clearly a determined effort to persuade the public that Gapon wasn't dead. That it was balanced by an equally determined effort to prove it was the work of Rachkovsky and the Secret Police passed by without mention. One thing was certain at least, between them *The Tribune* and the *Manchester Guardian* had managed to create an enduring state of confusion among the British left-wing public. Any attempt to shape public reaction through opinion-pieces and editorials would have laid themselves open to ridicule and disreputability on a long-term basis.

By mid-June *The Tribune* were reporting an announcement by the Russian Government that Rutenberg's guilt had been firmly established and that his accomplices were already in custody. The toxic nature of the various claims seems to have stymied the tide of stories for a time, and it was only the shameless persistence of *The Daily Express* — obviously experiencing a slow news week — who made any attempt to revive it. The new(ish) story that was to emerge in August that year was that the death of Father Gapon was due “not so much to his having betrayed the secrets of the revolutionary party to the Police as to jealousy.” During his travels around Europe, it was now being alleged that Gapon had encountered a beautiful Jewess who had worked as an intermediary between him and the revolutionaries. His killer Rutenberg had also been in love with the girl and upon learning that the pair had arranged a lover's meet, had lured the Priest to Oserki and bludgeoned him to death.³⁸ It was a curious take on the tale but not altogether unlikely. The Socialist Revolutionaries had issued a similar statement, claiming that Gapon's assassin had acted autonomously and that the motive had been a personal one. Entries found in the records of the Okhrana by historian Walter Sablinsky appear to confirm this. In a flurry of messages between the Paris office of the Okhrana and the Tsar's private secretary in May that year, they said it was clear that Rutenberg had murdered the priest out of personal vengeance and not at the behest of the Socialist Revolutionary Party who would have deemed his death unnecessary.³⁹ When the Central Committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party did eventually sit to review the circumstances of Gapon's death and the alleged treachery of the double-agent Azeff, it

³⁷ ‘Gapon Tragedy’, *Manchester Guardian*, May 17 1906, p.12

³⁸ ‘Father Gapon's Murder’ *Manchester Guardian*, Aug 11, 1906, p.6

³⁹ *The Road To Bloody Sunday*, Walter Sablinsky, Princeton University Press, 1976

concluded that “murder of Gapon was carried out without the knowledge and consent of the Central Committee as a body”.⁴⁰ He was ejected from the party shortly after.

In December 1906, David Soskice at *The Tribune* provided an update on the investigation into Gapon’s death launched by Russian Police. Communicating with S. D Kvashnin-Samarin, the legal counsel representing Gapon’s widow, Soskice had learned that there existed “quite a number of conspiracies, independent of each other” to murder Gapon and that those who had carried it out had “only forestalled their rivals.” Soskice and Kvashnin-Samarin — a S. D Kvashnin-Samarin, a Narodnik of 1860s and former president of the Tver Gubernia Zemstvo Board — ultimately shared the view that any forthcoming trial would inevitably reveal a number of political revelations about Count Witte, and these may have been initiated by rival members of the Government and Tsar's entourage. As a Narodnik, the nationalistic and intellectual wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the views of Kvashnin-Samarin would have sat quite comfortably alongside those of Soskice.

Up until the review of Gapon’s death launched by the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1909, Pinchas Rutenberg had said very little about the part he had played in Gapon’s death. The only real exception was an interview that he provided to the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper in November 1907. Twelve months before he had been in London, but as soon as extradition arrangements were initiated, Rutenberg had fled to Italy. In Italy he would join his old friend Maxim Gorky, recently back from New York and now in Capri, and it was there that the pair would remain until 1915. It was at this point in Italy’s history, when it rejected its alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary and entered the war alongside the Allies, that the pair’s mutual friend, Zeev Jabotinsky dispatched Rutenberg on a mission to America to initialise the formation of a Jewish Legion and a Jewish Congress with Chaim Zhitlovsky.⁴¹ The ensuing report by the *Corriere della Sera*, fleshed out a few of the details hinted at in the letter to Gapon’s lawyer Sergei P. Margolin. It was a story that would be fleshed out with further details in a series of interviews Rutenberg conducted with *Byloe* in 1909. But there was one notable exception: in *Byloe* Rutenberg says that he too had been under suspicion of being an agent for the Secret Police and that his decision to murder Gapon had arisen in

⁴⁰ Zakliuchenie Sudebno-Sledstvennoi Komissii Po Delu Azefa, Paris 1911, p.97

⁴¹ ‘Hebrews to Meet Tonight’, Philadelphia Inquirer, August 30, 1915, p.8

part through his desperation to prove his innocence to his peers. However, his claim that he gone to the house in Ozerki with two Socialists and two workmen “chosen by their respective associations” not only contradicted the findings of the Socialist Revolutionary committee reviewing the subsequent treachery of Azef, it also contradicted his series of interviews for *Byloe* in which he claimed to have first sought the permission of the Revolutionary Committee. Rutenberg claimed that on discovering that none of its members had been available had gone to Azef who had authorized the execution himself. When the news of this came out in 1909 Azef vehemently denied doing anything of the sort, but the combined evidence provided by ‘Revolutionary Detective’ Vladimir Burtsev and the former chief of Police, A. A. Lopukhin had, by this time, made any denials invalid. By the time that Rutenberg was making his claims about Azef, the ground had already been taken from beneath his feet. Azef was already persona non-grata. Rutenberg had simply provided Burtsev, who had been investigating Azef for some two to three years after an alleged tip-off from an Okhrana agent, with what Burtsev wanted to hear. Rutenberg had seen his opportunity and heaped the entire responsibility of Gapon’s murder on the first real plausible scapegoat. Again, it was a classically timed manoeuvre and just slotted in neatly with a developing narrative.

Chapter 6

An Elemental Force Developing



The definitive account of how Rutenberg first ensnared and murdered Gapon made its first cautious appearance in the French journal, *L’Humanité* before morphing into a thigh-slapping, barnstorming epic in Burtsev’s *Byloe* in the summer of 1909.⁴² By November 1909, Rutenberg was embarking on his first trip to New York, where he would repeat the entire macabre account for Herman Bernstein at the *New York Times*. The story, split rather sensationally into a holy trinity of dramatic parts — The Here, The Traitor, The Death — remained vaguely consistent throughout although it is nothing short of remarkable to think that the starchy British Press, both Liberal, Left Wing and Conservative were framing the brutal and essentially needless murder of a priest as part

⁴² *Byloe*, no.11-12, July-August, 1909, pp. 29-115

of ‘thrilling’ tale of daring-do, rather than the squalid act of messy, personal vengeance that it was.

Rutenberg’s account for the *New York Times* commenced with some broad assertions about the power of influence Gapon commanded over the workers: “I saw an elemental force of the events that were developing, all the powerlessness of the revolutionary parties and the intellectuals to exert any influence upon these events ... one thing was clear. Under the leadership of the priest the starving exhausted working people, with the dark and solemn resolution that it is “impossible to live any longer this way;” with the naive confidence in the success of the last means, were going to the Tsar to ask for bread and liberty.” Rutenberg says he after drafting the petition, he next sees Gapon on the morning of January 9th, the day of the protest, and asks the priest, who is “pale faced and confused” if he had any “practical plan.” He had none. Rutenberg then proceeds to demonstrate how he tried to offer practical help and claims that it was at his suggestion that they should raid the gun-shops and arm the people. He says his offer was accepted. A street-map with key positions the troops would take was then produced. Rutenberg was making effort to have the reader believe that he was prepared in a way that Gapon was not. He was not only beefing up his role in the revolution, he was highlighting the complete indifference that Gapon had shown to ensure the safety of his workers. He was also sending a signal out to prospective groups that he was a more than capable strategist. As Gapon grows increasingly pale and weak, it’s Rutenberg who digs deep into emotional reserves to make the effort to warn the people. He tells them that the soldiers may not let them pass to the Winter Palace, and provides some tips on how to make their way around the streets to avoid the worst of the volleys. The subtext here is that Gapon, contrary to what he’d claimed in press interviews was deliberately squaring up for violent and armed protest but was doing absolutely nothing to protect them; that he was, to all intents and purposes, leading them like lambs to the slaughter — perhaps even deliberately: “Liberty or death!”, he cries. It’s with these words that Rutenberg achieves two things; he severs the priest from the few remaining Liberals who were still prepared to believe he was a robed and heroic titan of peaceful reform and parliamentarianism, and reinstates him within the trammels of disastrous military

history. He was another General Custer at Little Big Horn, another Napoleon at Moscow.⁴³

There then follows a graphic account of the cavalry and the Cossacks tearing into the people with swords slashing wildly in all directions, and the explosion of wanton chaos that sweeps through the streets. Leaving behind the blood and the corpses and the groans of the wounded, Gapon becomes “seized with a nervous fever.” His concern isn’t for the workers lying dead and broken around him but for his own wellbeing: he is frightened of being arrested. Rutenberg leads him to the house of a friend, and that friend was Maxim Gorky — the same author who arrived in the United States within days of Gapon’s murder some 12 months later. His hair had been shorn, he’d been swapped into some other clothes, and according to Rutenberg’s account at least, was switching between moods of vanity and indifference when safe, and hunkering nervousness when in danger.

On the night of the demonstration he was alleged to have sat in Gorky's study and asked: “What is to be done, Alexey Maximovich?” Gorky had tried to console him and told him that it was necessary to go ahead till the end, even if death seemed practically ensured. A decision was made to get a message across to the workers, a formal proclamation of sorts, but the words that he had composed were deemed so unsuitable that Rutenberg was forced to rewrite them. However, Gapon had liked his expressions so much that he signed fifteen blank sheets of additional paper and suggested that Rutenberg should finish it. The picture that Gapon’s former friend was painting was of a man seriously out of his depth and being overwhelmed and incapacitated by a deluge of important decisions: “he fell from one awkward position into another, and I had to disentangle him”, wrote Rutenberg. Despite his misgivings, and contrary to everything he had claimed so far, he reasserts his loyalty to Gapon by saying that he was sincere to the cause at this time and cared little for his own “greatness.” The sympathy he’s soliciting from the reader, however, is not for Gapon but for himself. He wants to be seen as the loyal and trusted friend who would remain faithful till the end, in spite of the evidence. On the one hand, the narrative that he is crafting is murdering Gapon all over again, and on the other he is presenting himself rather gallantly as an unquestioning

⁴³ ‘How Father Gapon was Led to His Death’, Pinchas Rutenberg, translated by Herman Bernstein, New York Times, November 7, 1909

friend and disciple, who was prepared to go along with Gapon's wish to "unite and organize all the revolutionary forces" of Russia, France and Britain around him.⁴⁴

It was at this point, Rutenberg says that they parted ways. The next part of the story shows the relatively quick spread of his vanity and his enlistment into the Socialist Revolutionary Party (something that did not and could never have happened). It shows the priest being seduced by fame and twisted by all the glorious possibilities and opportunities that easy money could bring. "Unheard of sums paid him for his manuscripts" and even a certain English Princess was falling over herself to meet him. Theatre and circus posters announcing his arrival in towns and cities throughout Paris and London were being pasted in the streets, paving the way for his "performances." Gapon was seen to be positioning himself at the centre of the Revolutionary universe, appointing himself leader of all men.

In February 1906, some six month months after the 'last date' of his European Tour, Gapon had paid a secret visit to Rutenberg in Moscow. He had something very important to tell him. They were to go to the Yar restaurant in Moscow where they could talk. Fearing arrest if seen in public, Rutenberg at first said no, but Gapon assured him he had nothing to be fear. In other accounts Rutenberg would say that Gapon had come to see him in Finland, so the revision here may be a significant one. Despite the certainty of a heavy Police presence and the creeping shadows of Okhrana spies, Rutenberg says he agrees to meet the priest and promises not to breathe a word of what he tells him to rest of the revolutionaries. And what he tells him is quite astonishing.⁴⁵

Enlisting Rutenberg into his confidence by praising for his loyalty and fidelity, Gapon tells him that he has been privately working with Witte's secretary Ivan Fedorovich Manasevich-Manuilov, the son of a Jewish official also working as correspondent for the newspaper, *Novoe Vremya* and as agent for the Secret Police who had worked for Rachkovsky in Paris. According to Rutenberg, the man who had introduced Manuilov to Gapon was Gapon's press secretary, Matushensky. Manuilov and Witte were said to be seeking Gapon's support in reviving the Worker's Assemblies as an alternative to the

⁴⁴ 'How Father Gapon was Led to His Death', Pinchas Rutenberg, translated by Herman Bernstein, New York Times, November 7, 1909

⁴⁵ 'How Father Gapon was Led to His Death', Pinchas Rutenberg, translated by Herman Bernstein, New York Times, November 7, 1909

radical revolutionary movements that Gapon had moved across to in Europe. Again it was with one condition: there were to be no unauthorized demonstrations and strictly no Socialism. Rutenberg's narrative becomes rather compromised at this point, the sequence of dates and events resisting any attempt to arrange them in a plausible, logical order. Rutenberg wants us to believe that in February 1906 Father Gapon was trying to recruit him as an agent for Manuilov who was said to be running Gapon through his press agent, Matushensky. But by February 1906 Matushensky was already under investigation for embezzling worker funds. He also wants us to believe that Gapon was attempting to recruit him on the basis of his loyalty and fidelity to the Revolutionary cause. But therein lays the problem. If Rutenberg was so committed to the revolutionary cause then why was he being recruited as a potential informer? Surely he would be the last person the priest would approach. Far better to have selected someone whose fidelity to the cause had been challenged or complicated as much as his own. Attempts by Manuilov and Matushensky to revive the workers assemblies had dated back to early November, shortly after the Tsar had published the October Manifesto which pledged the formation of the Duma, and a whole new era of civil rights for ethnic Russians — peasants and workers alike — and the loosening of certain restrictions for a narrow group of Jews such as those studying law or embarking on other routes of assimilation. The new Minister of the Interior Pyotr Durnovo wanted the Assemblies closed and Prime Minister Witte had wanted them re-opened. As a result, Durnovo's right hand man and the new Assistant Director of Police, Pyotr Rachkovsky had his acolyte, Manuilov broach a scheme to Father Gapon who was assuring the triumvirate that he'd lost faith in the Revolutionary movement and was once again desirous of seeking change through professional and peaceful means. To cut a long and faintly implausible story short, Rutenberg says he had gone along with the scheme for the sake of learning more and entering the confidences of Rachkovsky and the Secret Police. He was looking to become a triple agent.

Again, the narrative was not making a great deal of sense. Rachkovsky was alleged to have been doing Durnovo's bidding and Durnovo had very much liked to see the Workers Assemblies closed. Yet here was Rutenberg asking us to believe that Rachkovsky was recruiting Gapon to spearhead the Assembly's revival and "legalise"

the movement completely — the complete antithesis of what Durnovo had been demanding.⁴⁶

The middle and clearly more explosive part of Rutenberg's narrative is his account of the various conversations that were alleged to have taken place between Gapon and Rachkovsky — and which Rutenberg was able to recount in astonishingly great detail. First they had discussed the fairy godmother and godfather of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, Madame Babushka and Viktor Chernov. Then they had discussed Rutenberg and his relationship the SR's Combat organisation and it was at this point that Rachkovsky had suggested that Gapon should recruit him also. Gapon's reply was that it would cost at least 100,000 roubles. They had been looking for more information about a plot to murder the Tsar, Witte and Durnovo and thought Rutenberg would make a suitable provocateur. Rutenberg said he couldn't believe what he was hearing and had little option to play along with it, until he could inform the Central Committee. He told Gapon he would consider it and set-off immediately for St Petersburg, seeking instruction from its senior members. Arriving in St Petersburg he found no one, and sought out Azef in Seversk. It was here that he told Azef everything. Azef is alleged to have told him that he should not wait for authorisation and execute Gapon as soon as it was conceivably possible.

Azef's preferred idea was for Rutenberg to lure Gapon and Rachkovsky to a meeting and kill them both in the act of conspiracy. If their bodies were discovered together the Revolutionary Central Committee would have little option but to believe the charges he brought before them and that Gapon had betrayed them all. Rutenberg makes some attempt to arrange this, but is thwarted by the creeping suspicions of Gapon. Instead, he arranges the meet at the summer house in Oserki and places the workmen in an adjoining room so they can overhear the priest's confessions. On Tuesday March 28th Gapon arrived at the house and entered in frank discussion with Rutenberg about their arrangement. After becoming somewhat jumpy Gapon is said to have stumbled across one of the workmen who attempts to pass himself as a servant. Pushing him against a wall, the priest checked his pockets and found a revolver. Rutenberg says he feigned surprise and took the gun from Gapon's hands. At that moment he stepped back and

⁴⁶ 'How Father Gapon was Led to His Death', Pinchas Rutenberg, translated by Herman Bernstein, New York Times, November 7, 1909

swung open the door to reveal the workmen who had been listening. Everything was clear. They knew all his plans. Gapon was bound and subsequently hanged. No mention was made of the vicious beating that was alleged to have killed him, or the gorging out of his eye. It was a grossly sanitized version that wouldn't have looked out of place in a best-selling ripping yarn.⁴⁷

The fact that the conversation with Gapon is alleged to have taken place at the end of February when the investigation into Matushensky had already been launched and the rumours about Gapon's duplicity had already started to spread inclines me to think that much of what Rutenberg tells *Byloe* and the *New York Times* is to all intents and purposes a pack of lies. And why Rutenberg had suddenly brought forward Gapon's death by some fourteen days to March 28th remains a mystery. In the account he'd provided in Italy in November 1907, Rutenberg had claimed that the priest had been killed some two weeks before Police had discovered his body. The date for that was April 30th. Even allowing for the Russian Old Style (Julian) calendar the March 28th would be April 10th in England and the train stub from St Petersburg found in Gapon's pockets was dated April 11th. If Gapon had died on April 12th which was suspected by Police this would have made it March 30th on the old style calendar. In the West this would have been around Easter, the day of the Last Supper to be more precise. What better day to avenge a betrayal? I say this not to cause offence but because there are several times when Rutenberg's narratives draw upon Christian imagery that's not always in the best taste. His account of cutting Gapon's hair during their escape is a case in point: "I offered to cut his hair. He did not object. The workmen who had just experienced all the horror together with us stood around us at a great sacrament, receiving from me tufts of Gapon's hair in their outstretched hands, with bear heads, reverently repeating, as during prayer: "Holy!" Gapon's hairs were distributed among the working people and were kept by them as relics." In fairness, it leaves little to the imagination, alluding as it does, both to the story of Samson and to the perfectly recognizable ritual of Holy Communion. There's clearly a hostile and mocking undercurrent: the good natured workers are seen 'receiving' the divine grace of the false Prophet Gapon. Is the vaguely contemptuous reference to 'outstretched hands' the 'bear heads' significant? Jewish law dictates that men should cover their heads during prayer,

⁴⁷ 'How Father Gapon was Led to His Death', Pinchas Rutenberg, translated by Herman Bernstein, *New York Times*, November 7, 1909

so it may have been offered as additional evidence by Rutenberg of the profane nature of Gapon and the workers action, but if he did at would have been at the risk of offending a sizable percentage of the world's readers. One of the most important centres of power in many religions is the hair. In many religions, men should not enter the Divine presence with a bare head. But to arrive at an exact reading of Rutenberg's statement is fraught with complications relating to both time and custom. Among some religions of the world to tear one's hair was a sign of utter despair, as many women did during mourning rites. By contrast, among Sikhs, Muslim and even some Jewish sects, the cutting of hair is even prohibited. It may even have been the case that receiving Holy Communion 'bare headed' was just as irreverent a practice in the Russian Orthodox Church at this time. Perhaps it was acceptable among Nonconformists but not within the so-called High Churches.

Divining the author's intention is not an easy task. But one thing seems certain; Gapon's autobiography, published just months before his death, wrote that if there was only one ritual of the Orthodox church that he could get behind with any real sense of belief or enthusiasm, it was the celebration of the Mass "in which a vision of the full meaning of Christ's sacrifice" had come to him. It was, he confessed, the only time that he had felt any sense of "elation" or "delight" in his work. ⁴⁸

Chapter 7

Bialystock



Passover in Western Europe would have started on April 9th and ended on April 17th. But again, it's hard to draw any firm conclusions about the time and the date that Rutenberg chose to murder Gapon. It was a vaguely religious period for both Jews and Christians, and as we saw at Kishinev, it was very often a time of heightened tensions between the two groups. Little more than eight weeks after Gapon's death, violence broke out between Jews and Christians in Białystok. The Liberal Chief of Police of the town had been murdered, possibly by anti-Semitic members of the Black Hundred and

⁴⁸ *The Story of My Life*, Georgi Gapon, Chatton and Hall, p.24

a few days later a “Jewish Anarchist” was alleged to have hurled a bomb into a Catholic procession making its way through the town. Nearby a volley of shots were fired at a Russian Orthodox one. At both events a cry went up to ‘Kill the Jews!’ and that’s exactly what they did. By the end of the day’s aggressions 70 Jews lay dead and over 90 were seriously injured.⁴⁹ The *London Daily News* did its best to play down the scale of the hostilities between the ethnic peasant Russians and the Jews, laying the blame squarely at the door of the murder of Chief Dierkacz, believed to have been murdered by the ‘Black Band’ for supporting the welfare of the Jews and a small number of hooligans who had been drafted in from outside. It wasn't entirely true of course. The peasants' anger at the inevitable gridlock placed on normal life as a result of the ‘Socialist strikes’ was directed at the Jews. As far as they were concerned, the Jews were split awkwardly and provocatively between those causing the disruption (the Jewish Socialists — the Bund) and those preventing a fair and practical resolution (the Jewish business owners and merchants). The failure of the Left-wing and Liberal press to report truthfully on this matter was down to the narrative they were trying to preserve and the lives they were hoping to save. It was absolutely critical to the Socialist and Liberal campaigns being mounted around the world that it was the oppressive mechanisms of the Tsarist system and not the Russian people themselves that were to blame. Blaming the people would only divide them further, and the promise of a broad scale revolution would splinter and recede. Any harmony between the groups, however fragile, had to be maintained at all costs, with all eyes and assaults focused on a common enemy — the Court of the Tsar. The huge cultural divisions that existed between Jewish Peasant Christians and the mercantile ‘Jews’ were systematically ignored, polarising the narrative and handing the various solutions to the rival factions defending its two extremes. The various problems that were flourishing between the two religious and cultural groups were there alright. All it needed was a spark.

Discussions on the significance and meaning of the Białystok pogrom, both in terms of how it was being perceived in Russia and how it was being treated in the global press saw the fragile coalition between the various Jewish action groups begin to fracture, leading to a dispute between the co-author of Gapon’s pamphlet calling for worker support for the Jews, S. An-sky and the young Zionist propagandist, Zeev Jabotinsky, a

⁴⁹ ‘Over Six Hundred Victims’, *London Daily News*, June 19, 1906, p.7

former Socialist Revolutionary and friend of Maxim Gorky and Pinchas Rutenberg who was becoming increasingly the most singular powerful voice in the Political Zionist movement. Jabotinsky didn't see things the way that An-sky saw them. He saw the failure to acknowledge the part played by peasants and workers in the violence against the Białystok as an astonishing calumny and betrayal. Accepting that the workers may not have started the pogroms, they'd been abandoned by them nevertheless. Writing in his 1936 autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, Jabotinsky described the short-lived surge of joy flooding through his veins as learned first of the declaration and the pyroclastic anger that it sent hurtling towards the Jews as loyalist Tsarist peasants reacted. Returning to St Petersburg, he attended a meeting called by the Zionists at a hall in the city's Soliany Gorodok district.

The district, known locally as 'Salt City' stood on the banks of the Fontanka River, approximately in the region of where the Museum of Defence stands at 9 Solyanoy Pereulok today, about two or three hundred metres from the Okhrana's original 16 Fontanka address and a 20 minute walk from Maxim Gorky's apartment at 20/16 Znamenskaya Street (now Vosstania Street) — an apartment the author shared with Konstantin Pyatnitsky, the founder of the publishing house, Znanie where Gorky now served as editor and director. The meeting was attended by Jews and non-Jews alike and devoted exclusively to the whole issue of Jewish exclusion from the terms and conditions being demanded by the Worker's movement. The Socialist Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries had issued their statement rejecting the Tsar's proposal but at no point had it mentioned the nationwide slaughter of Jews that had erupted its wake. When it was Jabotinsky's turn to speak he took no time in making his point clear: people had tried to console them with the knowledge that there were no workers among those who embarked on the week-long vicious killing sprees — that the Russian proletariat stood for "equality and fraternity of all races." For Jabotinsky though, the proletariat did something worse, "they forgot us." That was the "real pogrom" he assured them. Menachem Ussishkin stood up and levelled a similar criticism: "the followers of Marx and Lassalle will forget about the sufferings of the people which produced these leaders just as easily as the followers of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul have forgotten their origin." A similar tack was taken at the home of lawyer, Mikhail Isaakovich Sheftel a few weeks later to no less overwhelming support. The 'Goyim' at the meeting — the

non-Jews — bowed their heads as he said it. Out of shame or respect, we don't know.

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By February 1906 Jabotinsky's conditional support for the Duma, based around a pragmatic appreciation of the short-term gains for the Jews, which would provide a route toward national autonomy, had been terminated and withdrawn. The path was becoming clear: to achieve his goals it would be necessary to separate all Jews from non-Jews and wreck the dominance of the Worker's Movement. The scale and scope of the violence unleashed on the Jewish populations of Odessa and Białystok as a result of the publication of the October Manifesto had highlighted the anti-Jewish attitudes within the Russian proletariat, shattering his existing hope that they had no enemies on the left. It was to mark a turning point in Jabotinsky's efforts to separate the Jewish people from the various regional, religious and cultural mechanisms that prevented their "beautiful unity." If anything useful was to come from any of it, it would be necessary to exploit the pogroms on behalf of Zionism.⁵¹

The significance of Rutenberg's revision of the date of Gapon's death— even if he was involved in it or not — may now have been lost to time. A quick and ultimately disappointing browse of the Internet tells me that the Paris Commune had also been formally established on March 28th 1871, but so far not even the combined wisdom of Google, Syrie and Alexa have been able solve the riddle.

Had Rutenberg really met Azef in Seversk? Had Rachkovsky really spoken to Gapon in the first few months of 1906 when attentions were already being focused on preventing the Duma? My own gut feelings are at this point are that Rutenberg was drafting-in names that by the summer of 1909 had become so mired in controversy and dubious intrigue, that anyone in Russia, Europe or America would have been prepared to believe just about anything of them. The deeply anti-Semitic and lupine Rachkovsky who had organized the publication of the pamphlet encouraging attacks on Jews at the height of the Revolution, had been discredited by former Chief Lopukhin as early as June 1906, when his dismissal from the Special Section of the Police had been requested by Witte as a result of being implicated in the fomentation of Jewish Pogroms, and later by

⁵⁰ The Story of My Life, Jabotinsky, pp. 93-95

⁵¹ *Vladimir Jabotinsky's Russian Years 1900-1925*, Brian J. Horowitz, Indiana University Press, 2020, p.59

Stolypin, in the murder of von Plehve.⁵² Yevno Azef had been revealed as a double agent working for Rachkovsky, and Manuilov had found himself dismissed as Witte's private secretary in September 1906 after it was found that he'd been involved in a series of serious embezzlement scandals. Practically every political faction in Russia — liberal, revolutionary or otherwise — would have accepted their involvement without question. They were easy targets, and easy scapegoats. By the time that Rutenberg made his allegations neither Rachkovsky or Azeff were around long enough to challenge them with any real zeal. By January 1909 Azeff had fled to Berlin and by 1910 Rachkovsky was dead. The only man really left to fill the gaps was Manuilov, who remained surprisingly quiet throughout.

By January 1910, however, just months after Rutenberg named him in his explosive article, Manuilov's home in St Petersburg was being raided by the Tsar's 'Preventative Police'. Papers and correspondence, including letters from Former Chief Lopukhin and Pyotr Rachovsky as well as documents relating to the Gapon case were seized. The reason for the raid was unknown but it was surmised by the press that it was based on the suspicion that Manuilov had been communicating with the Revolutionary Sherlock Holmes, Vladimir Burtsev — whose *Byloe* journal had just published the three-part kiss and tell by Rutenberg.⁵³ Their suspicions were later confirmed by Chief Lopukhin's wife and his daughter's governess, Miss Russell. There had been no conversation on the train between Burtsev and Lopukhin as Burtsev had claimed. The leak about Azef and his exposure as a double agent had come from Manuilov himself, a man the current chief of the Secret Police had been seeking to expel over his articles in the *Novoe Vremya*. A similar story would appear in *The Times*.⁵⁴ If true it took Rutenberg's story to a whole new level: the unlikely situation of Rutenberg and Burtsev colluding with the notoriously unpredictable Okhrana agent, Ivan Fedorovich Manasevich-Manuilov was looking more and more plausible. Although it was his espionage activities in Rome that would prove to be among the more relevant of his adventures — at least where Gorky and Rutenberg were concerned — it is curious to note that it was Burtsev's *Byloe* that produced the first credible thing that even came close to an official biography of the man in 1917, when Burtsev's co-editor Shchegolev published 'The Adventures of I. F.

⁵² Courts, Lawyers and Trials Under the Last Three Tsars, Samuel Kucherov, Frederick A. Praeger, 1953, p.282

⁵³ Evening Mail, January 31, 1910, p.3

⁵⁴ The Times (London), 31 January, 1910, p.5

Manasevich-Manuilov'. When cornered by Bolsheviks on the Russian-Finnish border, it was Burtsev who persuaded Manuilov to leave as soon as possible to save his life. The place where he'd been cornered, ironically enough, was the seaside town of Ozerki, the very town where Gapon had been murdered.⁵⁵

Although Ivan Manasevich-Manuilov had found himself at the centre of Rutenberg's sensational claims about Gapon, the former Secretary to Count Witte hadn't come forward to either confirm or deny the allegation. By 1910 he was the only man left standing. With the flight of Azef and the passing of Rachkovsky, the 'golden age' of the Okhrana had come to an abrupt and ignominious close.

Chapter 8

Was Gapon Anti-Semitic?



Strangely enough, it's not as extraordinary a question as it sounds. That he had co-authored *The Letter to the Russian Peasants and Workers* in the summer of 1905, in which he and the author S. Ansky had made a clear and impassioned plea for ethnic Russians to get behind the Jewish cause, is not in doubt. What may be in doubt are the depth and sincerity of the priest's concerns and the strength to which they extended after the publication of the Tsar's Constitutional Manifesto on October 17th 1905. However, the problems really start with Gapon's autobiography.

When enrolling as a student priest at the Lower Ecclesiastical School in Poltava, Gapon's prodigious oratory talents and radical curiosity had come quickly to the attention of his instructor Ivan Tregubov. The impact of Tregubov on Gapon's life would be tremendous. Speaking to *The Daily Telegraph* from Paris in the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday in January 1905, Tregubov provided a spirited defence of his old pupil. He had known the heroic priest for several years when he had been master at the Ecclesiastical College in Potlava. The next thing he said was quite revealing: "*Father Gapon was never an agent provocateur ... he used his influence with Plehve and his official position as a prison chaplain to work sincerely and ardently, like the*

⁵⁵ The Adventures of I.F. Manasevich-Manuilov, P. Pavlov aka. Shchegolev, Byloe, 1917, No. 5-6

sincere and ardent man that he is, for the liberation of the working classes.” The statement came in response to the claims by certain members of the Russian Social Democrats in Paris and London that Gapon was acting as an agent of the Tsar and the Secret Police, seriously jeopardising the story later told by Rutenberg. Rutenberg had claimed that it was his shock upon learning that Gapon may have been in the pay of the Okhrana’s Pyotr Rachkovsky and his men that fuelled the savage assault that left him dead. However, *The Daily Telegraph’s* interview with Tregubov, his old tutor, clearly suggests that long before Gapon led his march to the Winter Palace, there had already been serious doubts about the exact nature of his agenda.

As mentioned previously, many of these doubts stemmed from Gapon’s previous arrangement with Police Chief Sergei Zubatov, in which it was agreed that he would represent a legalized Worker’s Assembly based on a clear and formal edict not to open its doors to members of the Socialist parties or Jews. Despite his natural radical instincts and prior experience with his father’s Zemstvo Councils, Gapon had agreed to the arrangement, bringing him into contact with the various representatives of government and local authorities, Embassies and Prefects, Ministers and Metropolitans that formed the bureaucratic framework around the Tsar. None of his work was secret. In his pursuit of some basic rights for workers, like an eight hour day, it was generally accepted that Gapon’s objectives were sincere and he was compromising his natural Socialist instincts in the hope of making some civil gains. The fact that he had the support of his old tutor, Tregubov was a sound indication of his authenticity. As a close associate of Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov, Tregubov had played a vital role in the plight of the Dukhabour, a colourful group of dissident Christians who had angered the Russian Orthodox Church and had found themselves subjected to many of the same gruelling restrictions on worship and movement as Russia’s Jews. With the support of Christian Anarchists in America and Britain, including J.C. Kenworthy of the Brotherhood Church and the Arthur St John of the Penal Reform League Tregubov was able to raise the cash and secure the cooperation of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Pyotr Durnovo to have them relocated to Canada. Tregubov had in fact spent the first four years of the 1900s at Tuckton House near Bournemouth, the home of Vladimir Chertkov, Tolstoy’s literary agent and the chief promulgator of Christian Anarchism as defined by Tolstoy in the UK. This is interesting in several respects as Gapon’s brother who had drowned at

Hastings in March 1906 had first been arrested at neighbouring Eastbourne? Is it possible that he too had sought shelter at Tuckton House?

According to Tregubov, the young Gapon had been a boy of extraordinary intelligence, a voracious reader and passionate Tolstoist. The description was completely at odds with Lenin and Rutenberg's subsequent depiction of Gapon as rather lacking in intelligence and with little or no interest in reading. Because of the forbidden nature of the literature that Tregubov was passing to Gapon, a small and secret nucleus of radicals was formed and Gapon had grown to be one of his most "fervent disciples." Tregubov's own take on the Bloody Sunday demonstration was that Gapon "was merely carrying out Tolstoism." The priest's Socratic method of question and answer when addressing the workmen was another example of Tolstoism. Tregubov went on to explain how the catechism of the Stundist Sect was constructed along much the same lines. The working classes of St Petersburg were full of Pashkovists and Stundists, in which virtually all religious dogma had been discarded (much like the Methodist and Unitarian movements in Britain). In place of robes and ritual and the rigorous abracadabra of verse and liturgy were more practical human challenges and concerns. A month before the workers' strike, Gapon had shown Tregubov a draft of his petition. It was clear that he was advocating a pacifist general strike on Tolstoist grounds as an effort as means of liberating the workers from three of their biggest challenges: the Russian Orthodox Church, the State and Capitalism. Tregubov, who had shared his concerns with Felix Volkovsky about the creeping hand of terrorism among Tolstoy's legion of supporters, had composed a similar petition, but with one notable difference in that it did not include precise demands for specific political rights.⁵⁶

The Left-Wing historian Walter Sablinsky makes the claim that Gapon's entry to the St Petersburg Theological Academy was based in-part on the intervention of Konstantin Pobedonostsev, procurator of the Holy Synod. Citing father Gapon's *The Story of Life*, Sablinsky writes that the Bishop Illarion of Potlava had made a personal appeal on behalf of Gapon to have him enrolled at the elite academy even though a combination of ill-health and poor conduct had left him unable to complete his entrance exam. As a result he had no certificate. In its absence a "very strong recommendation" was said to

⁵⁶ 'Father Gapon: Interview with His Tutor', Daily Telegraph, January 31, 1905, p.10

have been put to Pobedonostsev.⁵⁷ The same story had appeared and in the very first part of the four-part ‘sneak preview’ that had been published in *The Strand* between July and August that year. I might be reasonable to infer from this, that Pobedonostsev had played a minor but critical role in Gapon’s career as a priest. But was there ever any truth in the statement, and was it his ghost-writers David Soskice and G. H. Perris who had fabricated the claim or was it Gapon himself?

The likelihood of the notorious bureaucrat and reactionary Pobedonostsev making such generous concessions based on Gapon’s radical and unorthodox conduct seems unlikely to say the least, especially in the absence of a formal certificate from the Lower Ecclesiastical School in Poltava. As the *London Daily News* was to report at the time of his death, Pobedonostsev lived by “clear, definite and deliberate creed”.⁵⁸ There were no grey areas. Pobedonostsev was an unapologetic defender of despotism and bureaucracy and proceeded in everything with the utmost caution, conscious that if he veered from the rule of law he would be infringing some rule or formality. We were being asked to believe that the man who stood for “absolute Orthodox Uniformity” would have consented to the enrolment of student at his elite academy that had a long and abiding history of heterodoxy and someone who had even judged his own “unruly spirit” to be totally “unfit” for the priesthood.⁵⁹

Why should it matter? Well the very suggestion that Pobedonostsev had played a part in Gapon’s priesthood would have been enough to destroy the priest’s credibility among the Socialists in an instant. As far as the revolutionaries were concerned it was Pobedonostsev who launched the pogroms in Odessa and Kiev in the 1880s and advised on the appalling ‘May Laws’ — the rules and regulations that effectively immobilised and damned the Jews. The man who had masterminded Alexander III’s ‘Manifesto on Unshakable Autocracy’ as a kneejerk response to his father’s assassination was fiercely anti-Semitic and judged by many to be the link in the chain between the Russian Orthodox Church, the Secret Police and the ultra-nationalist and monarchist bully-boys, the Black Hundred. His Manifesto had put the Church in the immediate firing line of the Revolutionaries: “*in the midst of our great grief, the voice of God orders us*

⁵⁷ *The Road To Bloody Sunday*, Walter Sablinsky, Princeton University Press, 1976

⁵⁸ ‘Pobiedonostseff’s Creed’, *London Daily News*, March 25, 1907, p.6

⁵⁹ *The Story of My Life*, Gapon, p.18

courageously to undertake, in deference to divine intention, the task of ruling, with faith in the strength and rightness of autocratic power. We are summoned to reaffirm that power and preserve it for the benefit of the people from any encroachment.”⁶⁰ The man’s reputation went before him and its inclusion in Gapon’s book is nothing short of baffling, as *The Queen* newspaper was to comment in December 1906: *“In the Orthodox Church the authorities are not fond of people who think for themselves; but for the friendship of Bishop Illiario, ‘Georgey’ might never have realised his ambition. But when he was turned out of the college in Potlava, by a fine stroke of unconscious humour, the bishop sent him with a letter of introduction to the Educational Committee of the Holy Synod through the great reactionary and autocrat of the bureaucratic Russia, M. Pobedonostsev. Through his influence father Gapon was able to pursue his training ... One can imagine Pobedonostsev speaking with a certain amount of grim humour when the name of Gapon is mentioned in its latest connection.”*⁶¹

Within 24 hours of news breaking about Father Gapon’s ‘bloody’ march on the Winter Palace, the newspapers were reporting that Pobedonostsev had been taken ill.⁶² Shortly after the release of Maxim Gorky some five weeks later, the head of the Orthodox Church was at the centre of another story. Responding to the recent breakdown in law and order Tsar Nicholas III had published an ‘unshakeable’ sequel to the Manifesto of 1881, providing an unqualified reassertion of the absolutism of the Tsar’s autocracy. Despite his alleged illness, rumours abounded that it was ‘the best hated man in Russia’ Pobedonostsev who was behind it. To make matters worse, it had been signed by the Tsar without consulting his ministers, cleaving open an already substantial rift with Witte, at this time Chairman of the Council of Ministers. It was clear from just the first few lines of the Manifesto that Pobedonostsev was showing no signs of changing tack and loosening his reign of tyranny:

“We humbly bear the trials sent us by Providence, and derive strength and consolation from our firm trust in the grace which God has always shown to the Russian Power and from the immemorial devotion which we know our loyal people entertain for the Throne. With the help and prayers of the Holy Orthodox Church, under the banner of the

⁶⁰ Manifesto on Unshakable Autocracy’, April 29th 1881

⁶¹ The Queen, December 16, 1905

⁶² New York Times, January 24, 1905, p.2

autocratic might of the Tsar, Russia has already frequently passed through great wars and disturbances, always issuing from her troubles and difficulties with fresh and unbending strength.”

— Manifesto, Absolutism maintained, London Daily News 04 March 1905, p.7

There are several ways you could look at the decision to include the anecdote in Gapon’s memoirs: Gapon was telling the truth to appeal to ethnic Russians and supporters of the Tsar; Gapon was telling the truth in an attempt to humiliate Pobedonostsev and hasten his departure from the Holy Synod, Gapon was telling a lie in an attempt to humiliate Pobedonostsev and hasten his departure from the Holy Synod; Gapon — or his ghost-writers Soskice and Perris — were secretly seeking to destroy the symbol of the warrior priest in the eyes of the revolutionaries. Such was the outrageousness of the claim that it certainly wasn’t there by chance. Either way it was a suicide mission, a handful of dynamite that was ready to blow. There was another, infinitely more fiendish and altogether more fantastical explanation: someone somewhere had persuaded the priest that such a scandalous declaration would hurt and humiliate Pobedonostsev when it was really meant to devastate Gapon’s heroic image as part of a more elaborate and long-term game plan. Perhaps it was intended to do both. That would have been the smarter move by far.

From a Semitic point of view there are no particular alarm bells in the first few chapters of Gapon’s memoirs. The author — or his ghost-writers Soskice and Perris at the very least — describe the restless journey of a man caught between his love of Christ and one of the more depraved manifestations of the repressive state apparatus: the falsity and hypocrisy of the Orthodox Church. Recalling an incident at the Ecclesiastical Seminary, Gapon describes how he was denounced by a local clergyman for demoralising the school and sowing the seeds of heresy. Tregubov had introduced him to Tolstoy and for the first time he had seen clearly where the “essence of religion” lay, not in its “outward forms”, rituals and ceremonies, but in its “inner spirit” and love for ones neighbour.⁶³ When he finally accepts that his fondness for “clandestine literature” and Unitarian principles does not coincide with the teachings of the Orthodox Church, a girl he has become romantically attached to intervenes: the main thing is that he should be true to,

⁶³ *Story of My Life*, Gapon, p.18

she observes, is not the Orthodox Church but to Christ himself who had been the model of sacrifice for all humanity. The symbols and rituals of the Church were just that: symbols and rituals only.

The narrative up until this point would only have served to endear him with the Revolutionary dissenters and Christian Socialists who hedged the anarchist movement and who had very often collaborated with their Jewish counterparts. Whether any of it was true or not is another matter, as it remains just as conceivable that in a not unreasonable attempt to win the respect and support of the world's Liberal and Socialist groups Father Gapon and his team of writers crafted a more rebellious and adventurous account of the route he takes through the church. Perhaps the young and capable Gapon had sat his entry exams like everyone else, grumbling privately about the hypocrisy of the Church's Orthodoxies and not really standing out as anything other than a talented and conscientious student. As his former tutor Ivan Tregubov told the Daily Telegraph, he had been a boy of "extraordinary intelligence" who undertook his studies "zealously" and was "always at the top of his class".⁶⁴ Either way, his story so far was without controversy. Even the accounts of his meetings with Zubatov are offered with disarming and casual frankness and the utmost transparency. It is obvious to anyone who reads his book that working alongside Zubatov and the Political Police had been a necessary sacrifice in his pursuit of better conditions and terms for the Workers. It bothered him, it concerned him and he was more than a little conscious that he was forfeiting his natural Socialist principles. Some clarity on the rather impossible situation he had found himself in would be provided a few years later when Father Grigori Petrov, a member of the State Duma and a Constitutional Democrat would be arrested, charged and imprisoned for taking part in political propaganda "without first seeking the consent" of the Ecclesiastical Authorities and the Orthodox Church.⁶⁵ In the absence of a Revolution, progress was only to be made within the clear and rigid codices provided by the apparatus of the state. For those who had found themselves in the extremely unlikely position of making progress, there were various etiquettes to observe. Any attempt to operate outside these strict protocols would jam the system but it would never crash. Pobedonostsev had seen to that. The cogs and belts would keep on whirring, and

⁶⁴ 'Father Gapon: Interview with His Tutor', Daily Telegraph, January 31, 1905, p.10

⁶⁵ London Daily News, March 11, 1907

the machine would spit you out. Gapon's old tutor Ivan Tregubov had discovered that already, having been booted out of Russia in the early 1900s. Arriving in England with Chertkov he co-founded the *Free Age Press* at Tuckton in Eastbourne. It was only after the October Revolution of 1917 that he would return, making some attempt to cooperate with the Bolsheviks and the Commissariat of Agriculture under Lenin at the Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets in December 1919.⁶⁶

Gapon's scholarly foundation in Tolstoyism, and his personal familiarity with Tolstoy's disciples Chertkov and Tregubov opens up a can of worms in some respects. As a 2014 article by Benjamin Ivry makes clear, there have been concerns among modern scholars that his 1870s novel "Anna Karenina" raises questions about the novelist's "complex and contradictory attitudes toward Jews."⁶⁷ There's no real need to go into the specifics, but suffice to say that it comes down to new translations of old material and that within the big heart and the extensive concerns of the author, he was never once willing to portray a significant Jewish character in his fiction. In his writings, his pacifist Christianity found him distinctly at odds with cruel and vindictive rules of the Mosaic (Jewish) Laws which he claims Jesus Christ had rejected.⁶⁸ However, the closer you look at the author's work and review his often contradictory sentiments the more it becomes clear that if the 'quasi-Christianity' of the Russian Orthodox Church was to slug it out with their Jewish cousins in a no-rules boxing fight, Tolstoy would be politically driven to cheer the Jews. If there was one thing he disliked more than the Jews it was the Holy Synod, and it was only at times of the most wanton brutality against them, that he could marshal the effort to condemn their Tsarist tyrants, and use their unique, relentless suffering to win global support for his own rather ambiguous revolutionary aims. This was never more evident than in August 1906 when a series of 'private letters' between the novelist and the late philosopher and rights campaigner, Vladimir Solovyov were leaked to the monarchist reactionary newspaper the *Moskovskie Novosti*:

"I deplore the persecutions to which the Jews are being subjected and regard them not only as unjust and cruel, but as senseless. The subject however does not occupy me to

⁶⁶ The Modern Encyclopaedia of Russian and Soviet History, Vol. 39, Academic International Press, p.118

⁶⁷ Foward, Benjamin Ivry, November 6 2014

⁶⁸ What I Believe, Leo Tolstoy, trans. Aylmer Maude, OUP, 1921 (1884), pp. 160-180

the exclusion of all others, or even above all others. There are matters which stir me more deeply, and therefore I could not write anything upon it that would greatly affect people.

I think that the ethical teaching of the Jews and their actual daily practice are incomparably higher than the teaching and practice of our quasi-Christian society, which accepts from the body of the Christian doctrine only the theories of repentance and expiation ... and because of this moral superiority of the Jews we see envy, hatred and oppression”

— *The American Israelite, August 10 1905, p.4.*

If nothing else, it was a frank exchange of views. The letter’s psychology, however, was deeply schizophrenic. As supportive as it was, Tolstoy went on to explain how in spite of the injustices he had been witnessing he disliked with equal intensity the prejudices that were inherent in the separatist and nationalistic ‘Jewish Mission’ (the Zionist movement). On the one hand the letter published in the *Novosti* showed Tolstoy in a reasonable and positive light in which he shows sympathy with the plight of Jewish Russians, but on the other it shows him as taking a dangerously ambiguous and neutral stance during at a crucial juncture in Jewish, and more specifically Zionist, affairs. Further stories of his anti-Semitism would later emerge. One of them featured Royal Photographer and Zionist fund-raiser, Constantin Shapiro who the novelist is alleged to have had escorted off his premises. Just a few days before the Tolstoy letter was leaked, Father Gapon, the most gifted student of Tolstoy’s acolyte Tregubov, had published his Letter to the Russian Peasants and Workers imploring them to get behind the Jewish cause and take more aggressive stance in the war on anti-Semitism. Whoever had leaked the letter had seen a rather advantageous fault-line in the already fragile relationship between the Tolstoyists and the Jews. The Committee of ministers who had been tasked with reviewing and translating the Tsar’s vague ideas on constitutional reform into concrete proposals had declined to recommend any specific measures that addressed the rights of the Jews. If there was one thing that angered Jewish activists like Jabotinsky and Maxim Gorky more than anti-Semitism, it was indifference to anti-Semitism — the cold hard shell of human apathy that starved the roots of change of oxygen and the green shoots of progress of light.

The news of Tolstoy's letter was revealed in *The Hebrew Standard* a few months later on October 6th. In the very next column was an interview with Maxim Gorky, the respected novelist who had assisted Gapon and Rutenberg in their escape in the bloody aftermath of the Bloody Sunday demonstration. Speaking from his temporary home in Finland he discussed the failure of the world to learn from the lessons of Kishinev. Kishinev may have horrified the world but they had endured "scores of Kishinevs during the last six months" — Bialystok among them. As far as Russia's war with Japan was concerned, the peace deal being negotiated "had only strengthened the Government's hand" and sapped the energy of the Revolution.⁶⁹ As Benjamin Ivry's *Forward* article points out, just six months after the Tolstoy leak in January 1906, the author had revised his position again, writing in his diary: "Jewish faith is most irreligious ... It is a proud faith in that Jews consider only themselves as the chosen people of God.." What impact this may have had on the psychology of Gapon's assassins is something we need to approach.

Gapon's account of how he had been forced to shelve his idea of creating Labour unions like those in Britain is described in detail in his memoirs. After learning of Zubatov's plans to legalise non-political workers unions partly subsidized by Police and State he had written and submitted reports to General Kleygells — Prefect of St Petersburg — and Metropolitan Antonius of the Orthodox Church, warning against his plans. But the more that Gapon resisted attempts by Zubatov to rope him into the legalized unions, the more determined Zubatov became. Gapon's various efforts on penal reform had greatly impressed von Plehve and he was clearly out to convert him and disengage him as a threat. But the internal structure and functioning of the Assembly was likely to create divisions. Unlike the Moscow groups, Gapon and Zubatov's Saint Petersburg Assembly would need to adhere to strict criteria and conditions if was to retain the relative autonomy and self-administration sought by the priest. And it was something that would almost certainly upset the Jewish Socialists: formal members of the Worker's Assembly were to be factory workers of either sex but strictly of Christian faith.⁷⁰ If Gapon withdrew his support from Zubatov's schemes and pursued a wholly independent line he knew he would encounter a series of insuperable obstacles from the Police.

⁶⁹ *The Hebrew Standard*, October 6, 1905, p.11

⁷⁰ Petersburg's First Mass Labor Organization, Gerald D. Surh, *The Russian Review*, July, 1981, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jul., 1981), pp. 241-262

Superficially at least he would be willing to toe the line and suppress his more radical ambitions until the time was ripe. But what he divulges next may prove critical to understanding the various political and emotional triggers that concluded in his execution.

Zubatov had arranged a series of strategy sessions on neutral territory, with one at the house of a friend. Gapon had consented and met several individuals who had already been enrolled into his schemes. The first of these was Manye Vilbushevich (Shochat) and Dr Henrik Shaevich, two supporters of the early Zionist movement who had agreed to front the Independent Jewish Worker's Party. Like several of his labour projects, Zubatov saw the party as a means of disengaging the Semitic masses from the Socialist Revolutionary movement by dangling the carrot of legalised trade unionism before them. Filling them with dreams of a mass repatriation with Israel and the Holy Land had always the favoured outcome of the Okhrana and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, procurator of the Holy Synod. Zubatov's first real bid in managing Zionism came in August and September 1902, when he granted permission to Shapiro and his friends to host a the first (and only) Zionist conferences held in Tsarist Russia. The first took place in Białystok on August 19th and featured delegates from the towns of Grodno. The second was held in Minsk on September 4th when over 500 delegates crammed into the theatre of the Hotel Paris "beautifully ornamented with Zionist symbols and flags." Minsk, in modern-day Belarus, was a thickly populated district of the Jewish 'Pale', a former Bundist stronghold for Manye Vilbushevich and her team of propagandists, but now very much under Zubatov's spell, believing that the Jewish movement would come to reject a revolution and take a purely economic direction.⁷¹ The missing link in the evolution from Jewish Labour activism was, they believed, Zionism. The choice of location was critical to their plans. Using the promise of practical living gains over and above the fool's gold of Socialist idealism, Zubatov and his Zionists were now seeking to poach as many workers away from their bitterest rivals, the Bund. Zionism would give the workers not only the spiritual nourishment they needed it would put food in

⁷¹ Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism, Jeremiah Schneiderman, Cornell University Press. 1976, p.232

their mouths and a few extra roubles in their pockets.⁷² Among those chairing the events in Minsk was Dr Shapiro and the Odessa Committee.⁷³

Prior attempts at assimilating the Jewish immigrants had generally been doomed to failure, partly on account of their love and fidelity to their culture and race, and partly as a result of rejection by ethnic Russians, intimidated by their trading acumen, suspicious of their intelligence and resentful of their wealth. According to Gapon's sensational autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, one of the men supporting activities of Vilbushevich-Shochat and Dr Shaevich in Zubatov's 'Legal Beagles' was 'Dr Shapiro' aka. Dr. Yosef Berkovich Sapir, one of the leading and most respected figures in the Zionist movement and a member of the Hovevei Zion in Odessa since his youth.⁷⁴ Whilst Gapon was quick to point that in spite of their connection with agents of the Secret Police, all three individuals were likely to have harboured "real revolutionary sympathies" and may have had "ulterior purposes" in joining Zubatov. Weak defences aside, this was truly explosive stuff. One of the men with them at the meet was former Revolutionary turned undercover agent Mikhail Ivanovich Gurovich, a "tall dark gentleman" who had been recruited into the Secret Services by Zubatov and Plehve, his authentic revolutionary background, including several years of exile in Siberia, making him a strong and attractive magnet to men like Burtsev, who he had befriended around the time of the Paris Bomb Plot.

By 1899, the man who the fiercely anti-Semitic head of the Russian Imperial Navy, General Spiridovich once referred to as "the chinovnik Mikhail Ivanovich Gurovich of the Jews" had been installed as editor of the legalised Marxist newspaper *Nachalo*, a short-lived periodical, which would as time moved on, have presented an especially keen threat Lenin's battleship journal, *Iskra*. Writing to Gavriil D. Leiteisen in October 1902, Lenin said he urged "all honest Russian citizens strictly to boycott Gurovich and to treat him consistently as a traitor and spy."⁷⁵ After his exposure by Lenin and his tribunal he was a firmly established pariah. With his secret 'legalised' work and activities well and truly wrecked, he was taken on in a more formal Police capacity and

⁷² Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism, Jeremiah Schneiderman, Cornell University Press. 1976, pp. 252-254

⁷³ Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, September 19, 1902, p.6

⁷⁴ The Story of My Life, Gapon, pp. 93-94

⁷⁵ Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1977, Volume 43, pages 91b-93a

by 1905 was acting as private secretary to the Assistant Governor in the Caucasus, advising on special policing and political matters.

By the time that Gapon writes of Gurovich in his book, the full treachery of the man was known, especially to Vladimir Burtsev and the Socialist Revolutionary and Democratic coterie back in London. The pair had corresponded regularly over the years and there were few more aware of the depth and audacity of his deceit. The odds of Gapon's ghost-writer David Soskice not being cognisant of the gravity of his appearance at the meeting with Vilbushevich-Shochat, Shaevich and Shapiro are practically nil. And this is quite concerning. To have revealed these much respected figures of the proto-Zionist movement as Police informers and agents of the State could so easily have brought about their immediate execution and a gradual erosion of support for the Zionist movement in general. Either it was reckless and irresponsible or it was politics of the cruellest kind. By slipping these names into his book, Gapon and his ghost-writers were committing personal and political vandalism on a remarkable and dangerous scale. The chapter leaves little to the imagination: "*Zubatov apparently gave material help to all these persons, and I summarized his policy in the ancient formula, Divida et impera. He was evidently attempting to organize the Jewish workmen under the flag of Zionism, and trying to detach them from the Revolutionary Party*".⁷⁶ The message that Gapon was none too subtly conveying was that the Okhrana was bankrolling the Zionists as agents of the State. In his determination to prove his worth among the Socialist Democrats and Revolutionaries, he was sacrificing a group who he would have had little understanding of, and even less in common with. To make matters worse, the authors of the book had made every effort to blank-out or obscure anything that might reveal the identities of any Socialist Democrat or Revolutionary who may have assisted his escape — like Rutenberg and Gorky — or any protected source who may have aided his subsequent revolutionary efforts. In situations like these the names would be concealed by a totally misleading initial followed by a tantalising, trailing underline ('___'). The contrast in Gapon's approach when it came to protecting leading Zionists was staggering.

That all three Jews had been active and willing envoys in Zubatov's hive of legalized clubs and unions was unlikely to have been enough to incur the wrath of their legion of faithful followers. The greater offence was that they were being aligned with their "great

⁷⁶ The Story of My Life, Gapon, p.94

friend and co-worker” Gurovich, whose treachery had extended to ratting on many of his former comrades and entrapping them into acts that would result in their arrest and inevitable exile. The revelation about their complicity would almost certainly have put their lives and reputations in jeopardy, especially from their former comrades in the Socialist Democratic Party and the Jewish Bund who increasingly viewed the Zionists and the exit-route they provided as a debilitating influence on their effectiveness and their numbers. The greater risk, however, was likely to have come from the Okhrana.

Writing of Manye Vilbushevich and Dr Shaevich, Gapon had confessed how in spite of their relationship with the Russian Secret Police he suspected they had “real revolutionary sympathies” and “ulterior purposes” in joining Zubatov. In other words they were betraying their handlers and working as triple-agents: they had been loyal to the Revolutionary cause and were working within the framework of the legalised party whilst pursuing their own revolutionary agenda. To put it more simply, they were Trojan spies. If you were to follow the logic of what Gapon was saying, then the corollary of this was that Dr Shapiro was on the level. His own cooperation with Zubatov and the Secret Police was more straightforward affair: he backed their aims and supported their projects. It’s hard to know which would have had the gravest impact: revealing Vilbushevich and Shaevich as ‘triple agents’ or Shapiro as a willing stooge.

Chapter 9

The Jewish Question



Gapon was right about one thing: Zubatov Rachkovsky and von Plehve recognised the value of co-developing the Zionist movement, both as a means of splintering the Marxist parties, driving an even bigger cultural wedge between the Jews and ethnic Russians and fomenting the kind of robust national spirit that would drive them from their land and have them landlocked in a region forever at risk from Arab incursion and ethno-religious conflict. If what Gapon was saying was true, then the Promised Land wasn’t just God’s Will; it was the will of Zubatov and Plehve, whose game plan was to be handed a significant boost by the furious global backlash to the Kishinev massacre. In an attempt to clarify his position as a result of an encouraging meeting with the Zionist

Inner Actions Committee immediately after the events at Kishinev — and which more than likely included long-serving member Dr Shapiro and long-standing President, Theodore Herzl — Plehve reiterated his commitment to the Jewish Question in the most brutal and unflattering of terms. Writing to Dr Herzl at the 6th Zionist Congress in Switzerland at the end of August, Plehve explained that he tolerated Zionism “only that it will aid in getting rid of the Jews.” His full statement read:

“Sir,— You expressed a desire to preserve a memorandum of our interview. I agree willingly to do this wish, in order to set aside everything which give rise to exaggerated hopes or disquieting doubts. I have had occasion to inform you of the point of view from which the Russian Government actually regards Zionism. The Government, in fact, might very easily be obliged to change its policy or toleration in view of measures dictated by national safety. As long as Zionism consisted in wishing to create an independent State in Palestine, and promised to organize the emigration from Russia of a certain number of its Jewish subjects, the Russian government was perfectly well able to be favourable, but from this moment when this principal aim of Zionism is found to be abandoned in order to be replaced by a simple propaganda of national Jewish concentration in Russia, it is natural that the Government cannot tolerate this new departure of Zionism. Its only effect would be to create groups of individuals, perfectly strange and hostile to the patriotic sentiments which are the power of every State.

That is why Zionism cannot be tolerated except on condition that it returns to its former plan of action. It could in that case count on moral and material support when certain of its practical measures should cause a diminution in the Jewish population of Russia. This support might consist in protecting the agents of the Zionists near the Ottoman Governments, in helping the action of emigration societies, and in even in supplementing the needs of these societies, evidently outside the means of the State, by means of contributions levied on the Jews.

I consider it necessary to add that the Russia Government, obliged to conform in its mode of action in the Jewish Question to the interests of the State, has nevertheless never departed from the great principles of morality and humanity. Quite recently it has enlarged the rights of domicile within the borders of the localities destined for the Jewish population, and nothing prevents it hoping that the carrying out of these

measures will serve to ameliorate the conditions of living of the Russian Jews, especially if emigration diminishes their number. —Tours, etc ...”

— *London Daily News 26 August 1903, p.7*

As Plehve’s response makes clear, the aims of Zionism were not as sharply defined in these early stages of its history as one might assume. On the one hand there were those who were pressing for the right to self-determination — a Jewish State — in the territories of Southern Russia, whilst amongst the more rightist Zionists there was an increasing need to set a ‘Palestine-or-nothing’ target. Under Herzl, it was the latter that was gaining ground, but the resoluteness of the vision that he himself had created was being slowly undermined by a mixture of terminally slow progress and a more urgent turn in aggressions against the Jews. As a result he was exploring other options. Plehve had made it quite clear that much of the costs of emigration would need to be derived from funds raised by the Jews themselves. This would come in the form of additional taxes and contributions from foreign philanthropists. There was only one problem for Herzl: the bulk of support he was receiving from charitable and political directions inside and outside Russia didn’t currently favour the Palestine solution. American-Jews for instance were still pressing for greater assimilation and a broader raft of rights inside Russian territories. The British, on the otherhand, were more in favour of establishing a Jewish Homeland in Uganda, East Africa, where their wealth and business acumen could better prop-up the vast commercial efforts of the Empire.

By the time of the 6th Zionist Congress in Basel in August 1906, it was the Ugandan Scheme that Herzl was backing, and it split the various global factions as emphatically and irrevocably as the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP in London had split Lenin and Martov just weeks before. Within months of his proposal, the Zionists would divide into ‘maximalists’ like Jabotinsky and those willing to make temporary and practical concessions like Herzl. The ‘night refuge’ being offered by the Brits suffered a resounding rejection by the Russian and Odessan Zionists who made a grand display of their objections by staging a dramatic walk-out, among them Chaim Weizmann, Zeev Jabotinsky and Dr Yosef Shapiro (Sapir). After the conference was reconvened and the members had returned to their seats the British offer was put to a vote. The delegates agreed by 295 in favour, 178 against and 98 abstentions that a committee should be dispatched to examine the possibility of Jewish settlement in East Africa. As members

of a more purist delegation that had been dispatched to the congress from Odessa, Weizmann, Jabotinsky, Shapiro and Odessa 'self-defence' organiser, Meir Dizengoff voted vehemently against, considering the whole thing a gross betrayal of the 1897 Basel Program which had promoted settlement in Palestine.⁷⁷ Among the 'yes' camp was Joseph Massel who just six months later would meet Weizmann off the train in Manchester and become of his closest friends and allies during his years in England wooing Balfour. In fact, it would be as a result of Massel introducing Weizmann to Charles Dreyfus that Weizmann would meet Balfour, then serving as MP for Manchester East, and from whence the whole remarkable story of the 1917 Balfour Declaration would take shape.⁷⁸

Plehve's uncompromising letter to Herzl clarifying the Tsar's position was clearly an attempt to help sharpen the resolve of the Congress to back the original Palestine solution at the expense of all others, the conditions clearly being determined by the region's high-value significance in Ottoman-Russian relations. It was entirely likely that like other Great Powers in Europe, Russia intended exploiting the immediate proliferation in religious and cultural hostilities to further establish their respective spheres of interest in the region. As Professor and Political Scientist Mim Kemal Oke once wrote, Herzl had been determined to build the Zionist movement as "an actor in international relations with the necessary apparatus of institutions and program." At the time that negotiations were taking place Palestine was still a part of the Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and home to the Arab subjects of the Sultan. Plehve like the Turkish Sultans who Herzl had approached originally was clearly anticipating that once the number of Jewish colonies began to increase in Palestine the settlers would no longer be contented to live under Ottoman law, but would be pressing for the formation of an autonomous Jewish State which they would seek to expand to neighbouring districts. Plehve had simply sought to secure the cooperation and support of Herzl's Political Zionists before either Germany or Britain: "Suspicious as they were of the Wilhelmstrasse's ambitions in the Near East, St. Petersburg must have thought that if

⁷⁷ Zionistenkongress VI Basel 1903, Protokoll de VI. Zionistenkongresses in Basel, 28 August 1903, p. 247

⁷⁸ *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann*, Chaim Weizmann, Harper, 1949, p. 95

the establishment of a Jewish state was unavoidable, it would be better to have it under Russian rather than German protection.”⁷⁹

There were several dimensions to Russia and Germany’s interest in pushing Zionism as broad spectrum cure: on the one hand it would help extend the political influence of both countries in the Middle East and on the domestic front, it would also starve the Bund and the Socialist Democratic and Revolutionary movements of some of their most powerful leaders and combat activists.⁸⁰

Plehve had already conceded that the standard of living in the Pale Settlement (Jewish reservation) was bad. The region was, he confessed, little more than a ghetto, and as long as the standard of living was continued to deteriorate it was inevitable that more and more Jews would join the Revolutionary parties. Whilst he needed little convincing about the merits of Zionism as an alternative, the narrative that had emerged in the aftermath of the Kishinev massacre was heaping more and more attention on Jewish culture, organisation and Jewish nationalism. As time went on there had been less and less talk of Palestine — which just “didn't suit them” at all.⁸¹ Little more than a week before news of Plehve and Russia’s commitment to Zionism was leaked to the press, Gapon’s paymaster, Sergei Zubatov was dismissed. He had fallen out of favour as a result of a General Strike that had been sweeping through Odessa. At the same time Plehve had been grappling with the fallout of Kishinev. The minister’s impossibly complex strategy had got out of hand. Plehve felt betrayed. His fomentation of legal strikes had gained a momentum and a potency few would have predicted. It was now a multi-cell organism, proliferating and spreading exponentially. Zubatov was fired from his position of Special Section on August 19th just as Plehve was preparing to clarify the position of the Russian Government in their support for Herzl and the Zionist movement. Writing from St Petersburg on August 12th Herzl spoke of a receiving a “long, satisfying letter from Plehve together with a personal note.” At a meeting in St Petersburg on August 8th Plehve had explained in the clearest and most dispassionate of terms how the Imperial Government of Russia now intended to “resolve the Jewish

⁷⁹ The Ottoman Empire, Zionism, and the Question of Palestine 1880-1908, Mim Kemal Oke, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Aug., 1982, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 329-341, Cambridge University Press

⁸⁰ The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, London, ed. Raphael Patai, Herzl Press, 1960, Vol. II, pp.726-734, p.737

⁸¹ Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, Vol. IV, p.1525

Question in a humane manner.” After much consideration they had decided to balance the needs of the Jews with those of the State. They had decided that the most practical way of assisting the Jews was to give aid to the Zionist movement which would consist of the following: effective intervention with His Majesty, the Sultan and obtain and charter to colonize Palestine with the exception of the Holy Places. The administration would be managed by the Colonisation Company and set-up with sufficient capital by the Zionists. Secondly the Imperial Government would provide a financial subsidy for emigration.⁸² It was hoped that the relationship that could be established between the Imperial Russian Government and Zionism whilst not "amicable" could at least be practical to them both.⁸³ Just a few days before Plehve had issued a circular to the Governor of Kherson banning Zionist activity in the Province, its passionate Nationalism disrupting any attempt to resolve the tensions between the Christians and the Jews in the region.⁸⁴ The Governor had his own ideas about settling the Jewish Question. As far as he was concerned, the Jews had showed an encouraging response to his agricultural programs and possessed a strong belief in their abilities to cultivate the land. It just needed some encouragement. For the Governor, the best way of helping dissipate the National and cultural energy that extremists among them were harnessing, was to offer them a more equal share of the land and remove the obstacles to education. Worrying numbers of Jewish families were leaving for the United States and from America’s perspective at least, there needed to be some way of stemming the flood.⁸⁵

The meeting Herzl had with Plehve a few days later went even better. Whilst dismissing some of the criticism levelled by foreign governments on the way they handled the Jews in Russia, Plehve accepted that if he were a Jew in Russia he too might be an enemy of the government. Things being what they were he was able to relay a message from the Emperor saying that “the creation of a Jewish State, capable absorbing several million Jews” would suit them best of all. However, they weren’t prepared to lose all Jews, just those who were contributing little in the way of value to education or the treasury. In a way that mimicked the US ‘Anarchist Exclusion’ Act of March 1903, it was those who were “weak” and with “little property” that they were keenest to let go. More

⁸² The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, August 9th, 1903

⁸³ The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, Vol IV, pp. 1520-1521

⁸⁴ New York Times, August 7, 1903, p.3

⁸⁵ Evening Mail December 21st 1903, p.2

specifically, they wanted to keep the shrewd capitalist Jews of Russia — those with their trove of foreign investors and firm links with Jewish financial houses like the Rothschilds of Paris— and push those expressing Socialistic and revolutionary sentiments en-masse to the Turkish borders where they could then march fractiously into Jerusalem and disrupt the Ottoman Arabs. Writing in Vladimir Burtsev's *Byloe* in 1918, Zubatov would confirm that both Plehve and the former Chief of Police Lapukhin had begun to see Zionism as a simple mechanism that could absorb large numbers of revolutionary Jews and compete successfully with Socialist principles. The careful recalibration of a Jewish national identity would direct the energy of the troublemakers in a completely different direction. Better still, another country. ⁸⁶

To push matters along Plehve indicated to Herzl that he would urge Count Witte to withdraw his decree prohibiting the sale of shares of the Colonial Trust whose main activities in Palestine were being carried out at this time by the Anglo-Palestine Bank — the Bank Leumi —founded as a joint stock company subject to English jurisdiction, framed according to English laws, and under the protection of England. ⁸⁷ Just a few weeks later on October 3rd, the Zionist Actions Committee under the Presidency of Herzl made the collective decision to place any dividends granted to the shareholders of the Colonial Trust at the disposal of the Actions Committee to cover the costs of the various fact-finding missions to Palestine and East Africa. Among those members of the Actions Committee making the appeal to the Trust was Jabotinsky's friend, Dr Yosef Shapiro (Sapir), the Zionist leader from Odessa who Gapon had sensationally claimed was at the assembly meeting and receiving 'material support' from Zubatov. ⁸⁸ In the first week of September 1903, Plehve had released a circular ordering all funds being collected by the Jewish National Fund should be redirected to the Odessa Committee, possibly as a result of the fund's links to British and German interests and it straying from the original programme of establishing a State in Palestine. ⁸⁹ The statement coincided with a demand put forward by 'No' voter Meir Dizengoff, the revolutionary Odessa businessman who had been managing the affairs of Jabotinsky's self-defence

⁸⁶ The Attitude of the Jewish and the Russian Intelligentsia to Zionism in the Initial Period: 1897-1904, J. Goldstein, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4, Oct., 1986, pp. 546-556

⁸⁷ Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, Vol. IV, p.1526

⁸⁸ Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, October 2, 1903, p.6

⁸⁹ New York Times, September 2 1903, p.1

militia under the careful eye of Okhrana agent, Henrik Shaevich. A few days after the vote had been cast, Dizengoff pleaded that any monies raised for the National Fund should be reserved exclusively for the Palestine project. Only by investing at least “three quarters of the money” on land there now could the organisation prevent any further attempts on using the cash for “any other use.” The rich, fertile soils they needed were being seized by rival investors. They needed to act fast. They needed to act now. ⁹⁰

Some several months earlier in February 1903, *The Jewish Voice of America* had been reporting that the Odessa Committee had appointed a body to deal exclusively with the purchase of land in Palestine and was instructing that all sums devoted to that purpose should be deposited with the Jewish Colonial Trust in London. By March that year a substantial tract of agricultural land had been purchased by rival stakeholders, whilst banker and philanthropist Edmond de Rothschild who had bankrolled the first Hovevei Zion settlement at Rishon LeZion in the early 1880s was now in possession of an additional four farming villages near Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The discovery of such a plot would have eventually left von Plehve little option but clarify the Tsar’s position and immediately shut-down any fundraising activities that were likely to favour a rival nation. ⁹¹ As one of the oldest groups seeking to colonize land for the purpose of farming Palestine, the Odessa Committee (known alternatively as the Odessa Society) was the only Zionist group that von Plehve was willing to do business with. Its aims were among the most transparent and most practical of its agents in Russia. And to cap it all, among the Committee’s most respected and senior members was Zubatov’s Dr Shapiro (Yosef Sapir) whose support they could clearly rely on.

Whatever had happened between that last meeting with Plehve and the 6th Congress in Basle is not entirely clear, but whatever it was, it triggered a sharp reversal in tone and the unceremonious exit of Russia’s most controversial civil servant to date. On August 19th Zubatov was fired. The support he had offered to the Zionists and the Jewish Independent Party had only served to heighten the self-awareness and nationalism of Russia’s Jewish populations. Chief Lapukhin had been warning that things were deteriorating fast. As a result the Independent party was shutdown. Zubatov’s dismissal

⁹⁰ Zionistenkongress VI Basel 1903, Protokoll de VI. Zionistenkongresses in Basel Vom 23, 28 August 1903, p.287

⁹¹ The Jewish Voice, February 6, 1903, p.8

came some twelve months to the day that he had sanctioned the first Zionist Conference at Białystok. His 'Zubatovshschina' was all but finished.

But things may not have been exactly as they seemed. The order from the Ministry of the Interior to re-direct the flow of funds to Shapiro and the Odessa Committee does, suggests that Zubatov's attempt to bolster the Zionist's Palestine Settlement programme was still being actively pursued by von Plehve. He may have published a circular banning the greater part of Zionist activity in Russia, but the Palestine 'Maximalists' of Odessa the beating, practical heart of the original Bilu and Hovevei Zion movements, appear to have been one group who found themselves exempt from this new approach. Moreover, as receivers of all the various cash-donations to Jewish National Fund, they were benefitting financially and politically from the crackdown on their rivals. Although the real reasons for Zubatov's dismissal have never been entirely clear to historians there are some clues to be found in a letter sensationally published the *New York World* a few months later in November. The letter, written by Solomon Wiener of Manhattan was dated August 27th and was warning von Plehve of a British plot:

100 East Eighty-Second Street,

New York, Aug 27th 1903

Excellency: Several months have gone since I laid before his Excellency Count Cassini, the Russian Ambassador at Washington my views about Rabbinical Judaism and Zionism and offered him my services to combat this danger and disclose this world swindle. Your Excellency how right I was. Zionism is a political experiment on the part of England and Dr Herzl and Dr Nordau are in English Pay. Having been unsuccessful in regard to Palestine they have hit upon an exodus to Africa and the above-named leaders are unscrupulous enough to lend their brethren (?) to destruction. I have a great desire to write a book about the whole business which would completely justify the conduct of your government but without your support as I can do nothing as His Excellency Count Cassini will confirm.

In all devotion.

S. Wiener

— *The World*, November 26th 1903, p.3

Within days of this letter being published, von Plehve released his circular ordering all funds being collected by the Jewish National Fund (which was ostensibly a fund being propped-up by British interests) should be redirected to the Odessa Committee under Dr Shapiro.

What was going on here, and who was Solomon Wiener? The *New York World* reporter had made attempts to answer these questions, but the few details that were being offered only served to obfuscate the matter still further. The letter, translated from its original German, had been uncovered in von Plehve's 'Secret Archives'. Whilst *The World* doesn't explain how the letter arrived in their possession, the fact that it emerged shortly after Zubatov's dismissal which would make one naturally think that it may have arrived in the hands of *The World* courtesy of the resentful former Police Chief. But the date of letter makes this extremely unlikely. Zubatov was dismissed from his role on August 19th and was ordered to leave St Petersburg immediately. The letter is dated August 27th and is likely to have found its way into von Plehve's 'secret archive' sometime in September at the earliest. The fact that it makes explicit mention to "his Excellency Count Cassini, the Russian Ambassador at Washington" makes me inclined to think that the publication of the letter had the full approval of von Plehve and that it had produced specifically for publication in *New York World*. If Wiener's letter had been a genuinely spontaneous effort intended only for the attention of von Plehve, it seems doubtful that he would have needed to explain that Count Cassini was the Russian Ambassador in Washington. This rather generous explanation is clearly for the benefit of the ordinary American reader. It's the press equivalent of providing subtitles. A more natural expression is likely to have read: "Several months have gone since I laid before his Excellency Count Cassini, my views about Rabbinical Judaism and Zionism." As the Russian Government's Minister of the Interior, Plehve didn't need to be told by Mr Wiener from New York that Cassini was their Ambassador in Washington.

But the *New York World* report wasn't just covering up the manner in which they have obtained the report, it was also concealing the true nature of its intent. Although it was obliged to point out that Solomon Wiener was a former Zionist himself, it failed to acknowledge the immense divide that opened up between the maximalists of Hovevei Zion — of which himself was a member — and Theodor Herzl who Wiener claimed to

be in the pay of the British. This wasn't an attempt by a former Zionist to blow the whistle on the Zionist Movement per se; it was an attempt to destroy the watered-down version of Zionism being bankrolled by the British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain and its increasingly vilified founder, Mr Herzl. The problem wasn't Zionism, it was the Ugandan Scheme; the British-backed compromise that would see the Jewish colony set-up in Africa and not Palestine. At the time the letter was published the offer was under serious consideration and an expedition was being prepared. If successful it would have been to the detriment of Russia *and* the United States; Russia because it robbed them of their stakes in a key Ottoman region, and the America because it would lure the raft of Jewish investors currently making good on Wall Street over to their much-loathed cousins, the Brits. Just as Chamberlain was poised to capitalize on Zionism, the rug was taken from under him: Zionism was being sold as British conspiracy. What made it all the more extraordinary was that it was small group of Zionists who were attempting to sell the idea.

Wiener had done a consummate job of proving his credentials to the *New York World*. Claiming to be a blood relative of the man he was accusing of being an agent of the British Government — Dr Max Nordau — he boasted he had inside knowledge of the Zionist movement. He had lived in Russia for thirty years, having been born in Bialystock in the 1830s. 'Cousin' Max was likely to have won himself few friends in America after claiming in an interview with the press some six years previously that the Jewish race was intellectually, morally “and under certain conditions” physically superior to all the Aryan peoples, with the possible exception of the English.⁹² It was exactly the kind of expression that would boost Wiener's claims and have the ordinarily supportive New Yorkers foaming at the mouth and falling hook, line and sinker for practically any salacious claim he attempted pin on the pair. In a year when plans to restrict the number of Jews entering America had gathered pace with the launch of a new Exclusion Act, the chauvinistic basis of Nordau's 'Muscular Judaism' was more likely provoke some no less burly aggression from readers of the *New York World*.

Wiener never explained just how he was related Nordau, but then neither did he explain how his Hovevei Zion brand of Zionism had become increasingly estranged from the bastardized version of Zionism being rudely re-imagined by Anglophiles Nordau and

⁹² Indianapolis Journal, August 29, 1897 p.14

Herzl. For the sake of the argument he'd switched sides. He'd drilled his little stick of dynamite deep into the bedrock of American patriotism, had stood back and watched it blow. Most would be none the wiser that his objections were the cruel and fractious outcome of bitter rivalries within the group, and not as he and the *New York World* was want to impress upon them, the shock and horror of a Reformed Jew — a non-believer. Little of what he was saying was new. The celebrated Jewish Arabist Dr Eduard Glaser was already of the opinion that Zionism as “nothing but an English catspaw for the partition of Turkey and the creation of a petty State.”⁹³ The Americans and their pro-German allies were simply reheating an existing debate. What made their story more sensational was that it had a ‘whistleblower’ dimension. The claims this time came from an ‘insider’ — a ‘turn’. It would be difficult to fault the creativity of the *New York World*. They had presented Wiener as a Jewish American patriot who had seen the error of his ways and now totally recanted the Zionist vision being offered by Herzl and Nordau. But this was not the case. Solomon Wiener had arrived in New York with good wife Frejda Rabinowicz in the mid-1880s. Within a few years he had set himself up a teacher and had a vision of setting up schools for immigrant children to help with moral and academic development. The first of the schools to bear fruit was the Hebrew Free School of Greenpoint in Brooklyn, a sincere and heartfelt project he had undertaken with fellow trustee, I. Gottlieb. As a means of supporting his meagre teaching salary Wiener started writing articles for journalist and publisher, Michael Singer, founder of several pro-Zionist and pro-German journals including *The Immigrant* and the Hungarian *People's Voice* from his office on East 72nd Street on the Upper East Side of New York. By 1897 the two men had started work on a joint project called ‘Toleranz’. This German Jewish weekly, published in New York, lasted just two years before being re-launched as *Der Zionist*.⁹⁴ It was this publication that brought Singer to the attention of Herzl who excited by the prospects of engaging a larger American audience, appointed him General Secretary of the League of Zionist Societies in the United States and tasked him with reporting on any progress being made.⁹⁵

A short time later Singer co-founded the Orthodox “League of Zionists” with fellow Hungarian, Rabbi Philip Klein. As the popularity of Herzl's Political Zionism swelled,

⁹³ Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, February 4, 1898, p.6

⁹⁴ The Hebrew Standard, April 2, 1909, p.12

⁹⁵ The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, London, ed. Raphael Patai, Herzl Press, 1960, Vol. II, pp.552

the purity of the Palestine vision that defined Wiener and Singer's Hovevei Zion organisation became increasingly marginal. As a result, a variety of splinter groups began to emerge. In a desperate bid to unify the various bodies Herzl tasked the Manchester-born Hebrew Scholar Richard Gottlieb with launching the American Zionist Federation. As a result, Singer, Klein and Wiener were sidelined. Their response was to launch the United Zionists of Greater New York from Singer's brand new office at Broom Street Lower Manhattan and it was Herzl's failure to recognise the group in time for the 6th Congress in Basle in August 1903 that ostensibly led to the letter to the *New York World* and a series of further acrimonious discussions. According to the *New York Herald*, the group and its Basel delegate, Dr Joseph Bluestone had not followed the rules of the congress and recognised the authority of Gottheil's Federation or paid the necessary union fees.⁹⁶ They had been invited to the Congress only to restore some balance and resolve the differences between them.

Upon the failure of these discussions, their representative, Dr Bluestone was refused the right to vote on the British-backed Ugandan Scheme.⁹⁷ Gottheil's timing couldn't have been worse. No sooner had their man been excluded from the crucial vote than he cabled the news offices of America that the Jewish Colonial Trust, operating through the Anglo-Palestine Bank of London, was setting up offices in New York.⁹⁸ As the gulf between the concerns and expectations between Russian and German Jews continued to widen in America, relations took a turn for the worse and by 1905, Singer, Klein and Wiener's United Zionists was absorbed in Gottheil's larger Federation, their demand that the Federation abandon its compromise with the broader aesthetics of Jewish assimilation, drowned out in the global backlash against the horrors of the Kishinev massacre and the increasing sense of urgency in reaching a swift and practical solution.

Responding to Wiener's letter in the *New York World*, Gottheil said an article published by Wiener some months earlier entitled 'Zionistic Liberia' had been brought to his attention by a friend in England. Gottheil described how there was little doubt that it had been written for the purpose of getting it to the eye of Minister Plehve and demonstrate the power and information Wiener had with regard to the issue.

⁹⁶ The New York Herald, August 28, 1903

⁹⁷ Zionistenkongress VI Basel 1903, Protokoll de VI. Zionistenkongresses in Basel, 28 August 1903, p. 247

⁹⁸ Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, September 4, 1903, p.9

Furthermore, he was in the employ of persons who claimed to represent the Zionist cause. Gottheil saw it as further evidence that Russia was determined to install its own Jewish hierarchy as an Imperial and trading outpost, rather than see it established under a hostile British protectorate.⁹⁹ Palestine's location on the extreme eastern flank of the Suez Canal — the highway of the world — had made it one of the most important links in our communications with India and the Middle East. As Russia saw it, the Palestine Mandate would allow Britain to enjoy all its strategic advantages with few of the burdens: it would be peopled with a race devoted to its soils, committed to its commercial progress and passionate to defend it. Furthermore, the fractious British taxpayer wouldn't have to forfeit a penny. And neither would the Russian's. As author and explorer Sir Martin Conway was to describe: the Jews were an "overlapping people": Oriental by race and Western in ideas. As a consequence they were out best and cheapest safeguard in Palestine. The more Jews that settled in Palestine the easier it would be to the keep the Suez Canal open and free from local disturbance and foreign aggression. Though supporting in principle the industrial schemes being tendered by Pinchas Rutenberg, he had a message of caution against Zionism. Arabs and Jews had lived together in the region without friction for many years. Balance was most definitely needed with neither side ruling the other.¹⁰⁰

Chapter 10

An Revelations, Not Revolutions



The alleged meeting between Zubatov and Gapon, and the three Jewish representatives, Dr Shapiro, Dr Shaevich and Manye Vilbushevich probably took place sometime between December 1902 and August 1903, shortly before the formal launch of Gapon's Worker's Assembly. Whatever their motives, neither Herzl nor Plehve lived so see their dream of a Palestine nation realised: Herzl died of heart failure on July 3rd 1904 and

⁹⁹ New York World, November 26, 1903, p.3

¹⁰⁰ Westminster Gazette, November 17, 1923, p.4

Plehve died a few weeks later when a bomb was thrown into the carriage that he was in riding by Socialist Revolutionary, Yegor Sazonov.

When Gapon did eventually return to Russia in December 1905, the writing was already on the wall, his standing and reputation having been diminished rather than boosted by his contact with the Socialist Revolutionaries camp in London. Try though they might to have pictured him as ‘their man’, some kind of revolutionary Golem who arrived to do their bidding, they and the Social Democrats quickly came to realise the Priest had little if any political clarity. Meeting Gapon in Geneva, the exiled Lenin had been among the first to acknowledge that whilst the priest had a good connection with the countryside and a sound working knowledge of the needs of the peasant farmers it was “difficult to meet anyone so thoroughly permeated with a priest’s psychology as Gapon”. By nature he was not a revolutionist but a ‘sly priest ready for any compromise’. His faith lay in profound revelations, not revolutions. Worse still, from Lenin’s point of view Gapon ‘did not know how to learn’. On Lenin’s recommendation he had begun to read Pleckhanov’s works but had read them from more by obligation than by conviction. The ‘avalanche’ of resistance that Lenin and the Socialists anticipated ripping through Russia, was in dire risk of melting on impact. The workers thus far had wanted to fight to the finish, halting it half-way would end of sapping their strength and deplete their energy to fight.¹⁰¹

An interview at the end of September 1905 with respected Zionist and anti-Semitism campaigner, Carl Joubert signalled the moment that Gapon’s fortunes and reputation had begun to dwindle. The author of ‘Russia As It Really Is’ and the 1902 effort ‘Aspects of the Jewish Question Zionism and Anti-Semitism’ had little faith in the workers and even less in Gapon: “*The engineers of the revolution now in progress in Russia do not believe in bombs and bomb-throwing. They have nothing to do with the so-called Revolution led by Father Gapon a few months ago. Father Gapon is to them what Carlyle called a ‘water-rat’. He led defenceless people to be slaughtered and then deserted them.*”¹⁰² At the time of his interview, Joubert — the Dutch-born Adolphus Waldorf Carl Grote — was staying in his flat at 9 Douglas Mansions on Cromwell Road in Kensington. It was here that he worked on an English translation of the Talmud,

¹⁰¹ *Memories of Lenin*, Nadezhda Krupskaya, International Publishers, New York, 1930, pp.124-125

¹⁰² ‘The Czar’s Choice’, London Daily News, October 31, 1905, p.7

having already become of a member of the Hammersmith Synagogue at 71 Brook Green, just a few doors down from Gapon's ghostwriter, David Soskice at No. 90.¹⁰³ Some ten years later the same flat would be the home of suspected Soviet agent and Communist Captain, Harold Granville Grenfell, the former British Naval attaché in Petrograd. Just five months after the interview Joubert was dead. He'd fallen ill shortly before Christmas and died at his home on February 16th 1906, just as allegations were being made in Russia that Gapon had been subsidized by another fiery figure of Dutch heritage — Russia's newly elected first Prime Minister, Count Witte. In November 1905, shortly after his interview with the *London Daily News*, Joubert, ill in bed after an emergency operation had relayed a warning through his secretary, Gladwys M. Logan to *The Daily Mail*, informing them of an imminent threat on the Tsar's life from Socialist Revolutionaries.¹⁰⁴

The interview with Joubert had coincided with plans to publish Gapon's Soskice and Perris-penned autobiography, 'My Life Story', first serialized in *The Strand* during the summer of 1905, and now finding a route onto the shelves of bookstores nationwide courtesy of the *Daily News* affiliated, Chapman and Hall. As news of the publication was going to press, another suspected fable was in production: the Tsar's 'October Manifesto'. It had been a fine-line between intensifying a military dictatorship or conceding some basic civil liberties in the form of a formal Constitution. From a tactical point of view, Tsar Nicholas and his principal minister, Count Witte had judged the latter to be the more prudent direction to take. As rumours spread of the manifesto's existence, Gapon had steamed back to Russia, cutting-loose from the Socialist Revolutionaries in the hope of reviving his pet-project, the Workers Assemblies which had been outlawed in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. The partial amnesty declared by the Tsar, and the prevailing climate of discussion, gave him the optimism to think that he could re-start negotiations and score even better terms from Witte.

On November 27th 1905, Gapon's memoirs were finally published. Speaking from Saint Petersburg on November 30th, the *London Daily News*' special correspondent, David Soskice revealed that Gapon had been back in Russia since August 6th, and makes the startling allegation that Gapon was now encouraging the people of Russia to be content

¹⁰³ Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, March 9, 1906, p.6

¹⁰⁴ Daily Mail, November 14, 1905, p.6

with the gains that they had made. It's worth pointing out that much of the news that was arriving on British shores was being drip-fed through the filter of the Social Revolutionary Party. In terms of the liberal and left-wing press, Soskice had the market and all the various exits covered. Russia's *Novosti* newspaper made the announcement that the political amnesty has not been extended to Gapon. A telegram to the Paris *Eclair* that same day announced that a warrant had been issued for Gapon's arrest. A day later it was being reported that he had fled first to Finland and then to Paris. ¹⁰⁵

By the middle of December the Guardian's 'special correspondent' David Soskice was reporting that the Mensheviks were attempting to become directors of the revolutionary movement and convert the much anticipated Duma "into a party organisation". According to Soskice, the Russian 'intelligent' — composed in the main of Socialists familiar with the basic tenets of Marxist theory watched anxiously as the various Workers Council made a catalogue of tactical mistakes more characteristic of anarchy than any clear political objective. In the words of Soskice, many of the workmen were still 'Gaponites' with their garbled and rather formless short term aims anchored in the guttural, rootless instincts of trade unionism. The Workers Assemblies that Gapon and Witte had organised prior to Bloody Sunday had been shockingly inadequate, and now they were being revived. The "dazzling and distant ideals of the orthodox Marxist" were being savagely brushed aside in favour of a reflex smash and grab scuffle for the eight hour day. There's an amusing sliver of hypocrisy from Soskice when he praises the Socialist 'intelligents' for having a "deep, instinctive sympathy with the working man" but can't accept how these same men are allowing themselves to be directed by the Social Democrats. The Guardian's 'Special Correspondent' goes on to describe a meeting he had had with Gapon, who "changed little in his appearance since that dramatic week in January". Gapon was said to be convinced that the extreme Socialist elements that were now active in Russia were seriously injuring the workmen's cause. He was even more certain that if he was again allowed to work publicly with the workers he would be able to restore its fortunes. The anger of the average Russian peasant, Gapon conceded, was directed more against the 'strikers', 'intelligents' and 'officials' than it was against the Tsar. ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Manchester Guardian, November 30, 1905, p.7; December 2, 1905, p.9

¹⁰⁶ Manchester Guardian, December 15, 1905, p.7

The more it dawned on David Soskice and his Socialist Revolutionary brotherhood that Gapon was preparing to cooperate with the Tsar and his plans for the Constitution, the more aggressive the rumours became. The tipping point came at the end of the December when a story was published informing the world that the heroic revolutionary priest had been spotted at the roulette wheel in Monte Carlo, allegedly in the company of a “muscovite with Royal blood” — the Grand Duke Cyril. The paper that bagged the exclusive was James Gordon Bennett Jr’s Paris-based *New York Herald*, the man who continued to enjoy an unusually warm friendship with his Imperial Highness, the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, another Paris regular. Bennett Jr had met the Grand Duke during the latter’s arms-buying trip to New York in the 1870s, when he had been entertained rather lavishly at the Rhode Island yacht club. The Duke himself had moved to Paris after the assassination of his brother, the Tsar’s fifth son, the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich in the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday that February. Arriving in Paris in the summer of that year Grand Duke Alexis had immediately forged ahead with plans to open a gambling house in the city. According to the paper’s exclusive on Gapon, the priest had been staying in Nice at the Hotel Interlaken under the alias ‘S. Norzoff’. It’s curious to note at this point that both the Grand Duke Cyril and the Grand Duke Alexis had both been deeply humiliated and removed from the Tsar’s inner circle by December 1905. In October Cyril had been discarded, disowned and deprived of his imperial income by the Tsar when he had persisted in marrying Princess Victoria Melita, the recently divorced daughter of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. The grand Duke Alexis, on the otherhand, had been sacked from his position as naval commander after Russia’s earth-shattering defeat at Port Arthur at the hands of the Japanese.

In fairness, the whole gambling affair seemed rather dubious and was probably based on little more than whispers and rumours and no small amount of wishful thinking. Father Gapon was in Monet Carlo, the Grand Dukes were regulars here so the public wouldn’t take much convincing that all three of them had been shooting dice at crabs at the Monte Carlo Club or the Casino Municipal in Nice. In terms of press exclusives this unlikely ‘ménage à trois’ was about as sweet as it could get. That the three of them could have been rigging the wheel against the Tsar and chasing their recent collective losses didn’t seem to occur to the press. There was another possibility of course: perhaps the Tsar’s cruelly dispossessed brothers the Dukes had enticed Gapon to Southern France on the pretext of plotting a coup only to have leaked the news of his arrival to Bennett

Jnr. at the *New York Herald*. Those bearing the brunt of the media damage would be the Tsar's royal circle itself and the headline-grabbing priest — the only two people among them with anything substantial left to lose.

The message was as simple as it was lethal: 'Gapon plays whilst Moscow Bleeds.'¹⁰⁷ The reports published during this period were big on innuendo but a little short on detail. If anything, the *New York Herald's* account had been surprisingly poetic: "at the present moment both sections of Russia society, the aristocracy and democracy are fully represented here, the former by an unusually long list of Grand Dukes and titled personages and the latter by Father Gapon." And he hadn't just played at roulette, he'd won at Roulette. And not just little sums of money but 'large sums' of money. A correspondent with *The Daily Telegraph* provided more details. Gapon had spent a few nights at Monte Carlo before visiting a country house at Bordighera some 16 miles east across the border in Italy on the Monday. Here, he remained for several hours. The priest had travelled to the region by car and it was found that he had arrived at approximately the same time as "several distinguished Russians" — all of them Russian exiles. Whilst it was impossible to guess at the exact nature of the visit, it was believed to preclude the arrival of a "high political personage."¹⁰⁸ Bordighera had been in the news some weeks earlier, when it was announced that one of the town's most respected residents, the poet, fantasy novelist and Congregationalist preacher, George MacDonald had died during a visit from his home at Casa Coraggio. The town had a considerable British colony and George's brother John Hill MacDonald had strong links to both Russia and the Manchester Socialists, having been a tutor to the chaplaincy of the British Embassy in Moscow.¹⁰⁹ William Morris, the founder of the British Arts and Craft Movement, would subsequently occupy MacDonald's former home at 26 Upper Mall in Hammersmith. Taking over the lease of the house from MacDonald in the late 1870s, Morris renamed his home in Casa Coraggio, Kelmscott House after his country retreat in Gloucester. A book by George's son Greville MacDonald mentions that John had intimate relations with a "beautiful Russia lady of rank" and had narrowly escaped a murderous attempt on his life.¹¹⁰ By the time that Gapon had arrived at Bordighera, a special service and

¹⁰⁷ Pall Mall Gazette, December 28, 1905, p.7

¹⁰⁸ The Daily Telegraph, December 26, 1905, p.7

¹⁰⁹ Elgin Courant, and Morayshire Advertiser, September 22, 1905, p.8

¹¹⁰ George Macdonald and His Wife, Greville Macdonald, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, p.167

memorial had been arranged by Reverend Arthur T. Barnett, the chaplain of the All Saints Church in George's honour. ¹¹¹ The house would subsequently be closely connected with novelist and ex-military man Edmondo De Amicis of the Italian Socialist Party, who selected it especially for its place in the life of MacDonald. Just four years later, Edmondo would die suddenly in this same town. ¹¹² Curiously, a 25-year old Benito Mussolini, himself a member of the Italian Socialist Party, had arrived in the region just a few days before after landing a post as a French teacher at a local college. ¹¹³ Within hours of his death, Mussolini would publish a tribute to his literary and military hero in the very first article he was to write for the Socialist weekly, *La Lima*. ¹¹⁴

In a slightly mocking follow-up, the *Manchester Guardian* published an interview that their 'special correspondent' had conducted with Gapon at the Hotel Interlaken in Nice just a week or so later. When questioned about his trip to the casino, Gapon had said that he had come to the French Riviera to revive his health which had been shattered by recent events. There was no mystery about his gambling trip to Monte Carlo. He remarked that not going to a casino in Monte Carlo would be like going to Rome without seeing the Pope. And what's more, he hadn't played with the cash funds entrusted to him for the workers from Count Witte as reported by some members of the press, but with the money he had earned from his articles in the English newspapers. He wished to see at close quarters the kind of money that was being frittered away by Russia's Grand Dukes whilst the rest of the country starved. He immediately added that the casino authorities had denied the request of Grand Duke Nicholas to refuse him entry. ¹¹⁵ True or not, it was interesting that he should say it, as if anticipating the inevitable parallels that might be drawn with the curious timing of the whole affair. Either way it smacked of a deliberate set-up, even if Gapon's story seemed more than a tad fishy.

The Monte Carlo story, which had rattled on for the best part of a month, would go a long way toward softening the gullible public for the torrent of abuse that would come next. Without these obvious attempts to discredit the priest, Gapon's legion of faithful

¹¹¹ Huntly Express, January 31, 1902, p.6

¹¹² Morning Post, March 14, 1908, p.8

¹¹³ *Socialist Mussolini: Literature and Religion*. I. Anthology of Texts, 1900-1918, Stéphanie Lanfranchi and Élise Varcin, eds, ENS, 2019.

¹¹⁴ *Mussolini in the Making*, Gaudens Megaro, George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1938, p.122

¹¹⁵ Manchester Guardian, December 31, 1905, p.6

followers would probably have had difficult swallowing the claims about to be made in the press. Fortunately for the Russian authorities, the tales now had all the disturbing characteristics of an unwanted but inevitable truth: the moderate Worker's Assembly that Gapon organized in St Petersburg in the weeks and months prior to the revolution had been subsidized by Count Witte and the Tsar himself. Gapon was being presented as just an agent of the State. Worse still, it was now being said that he wasn't even the real brains behind the movement. The real brains, they alleged, had been Gapon's press agent, Matushensky who had since disappeared with the \$12,000 of funds provided by the Minister of Commerce to cover outstanding damages.¹¹⁶ The claim had come from the President of the Putilov section, which may well have come through Pinchas Rutenberg himself, the mysterious foreman at the Putilov Iron Works who had first aided and then murdered Gapon. Even the religiously sceptical Lenin had been impressed by the sincerity of Gapon's revolutionary ambitions, even if he'd doubted his political clarity and his religious high-mindedness. Lenin was impressed by few people. It seems impossible to think that the master conspirator had been hoodwinked so easily and so emphatically by a mere 'adventurer'. Within days Matushensky had been apprehended. He had been tracked down by the Workers Assembly, but it was claimed that he was still refusing to give up the \$12,000 in funds that had been promised to the workmen's association. It was also now being alleged that it had been Matushensky and not Gapon who had been responsible for drawing up the petition to the Tsar that the hundreds of slain workmen had been delivering to the Winter Palace.¹¹⁷ The news coincided with the publication of the Gapon's Soskice and Perris-penned life story in America, supported rather generously by double-spread excerpts in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. This was meant to be his defining moment. It was the same then as it is now: if you can crack America you can crack the world. The priest's evolution into a revolutionary phenomenon right up until this point had been quite emphatically 'in the bag'. But things deteriorated rapidly with the release of the story. Within 24-hours of the sensational two-page spread on the 'Hero of Bloody Sunday' appearing in the *New York Times*, they ran another headline: "MINISTRY WAS BEHIND GAPON: Government Money Paid for the Clubhouses of His Organization" There was no real sensation here. The revolutionaries and workers that the priest had worked with had

¹¹⁶ 'Father Gapon in Pay of Czar', *Washington Post*, February 22, 1906, p.3

¹¹⁷ 'Ministry was Behind Gapon', *New York Times*, February 22, 1906, p.5

known it for years. The whole issue had been covered in dull, exhausting detail in his Soskice and Perris-penned autobiography. The whole issue of collusion went back to his work with Police Chief Sergei Zubatov a few years earlier. Faced with growing discontent and an increasing trend among the young to use violence in pursuit of their aims, Zubatov had solicited the help of community leaders to form legally recognised labour movements in the hope of steering the masses away from the Revolutionaries. The priest had negotiated a similar arrangement with Witte. No one was being hoodwinked. The whole impossible scheme had received worldwide attention some years before. Soskice and his friends at the *London Daily News* had been reporting the scheme immediately prior to the Kishinev massacre of 1903: “*A certain police official, Zubatoff, with the support of the Governor of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergius ... started a special trade unionist movement of his own, strictly limited to trade matters, for the purpose of combating the free labour organisations, which evidently do not limit their action to trade matters only, and discuss political matters.*”¹¹⁸ Gapon had accepted the inevitable limits of the arrangement and so too had his supporters. Until now that is.

Within hours of the troubled priest’s victory-parade book being published in the US, another story hit the headlines; a member of Gapon’s inner circle by the name of Sechoff had committed suicide. Like Gapon’s press officer, Matushensky, Sechoff had been accused by Nikolaj Petrov — President of the Nevsky section of workers — of embezzling money from the funds. The high-standing member of the workers assembly had shot himself shortly after making an impassioned speech maintaining his innocence and revealing the wretched torment he was now experiencing after the organisation that he so valued so much was suspected of being “in league” with the Tsar. Both he and the organisation were innocent. With the barrel of his gun laid to his head Sechoff is alleged to have risen from his seat and shouted, “I will now give you supreme proof of my honesty”, before blowing his poor brains out. The scandal had seen him lapse into a swift and deep depression. To make matters worse, Gapon was accused of being in the worker’s meeting room when he did it.¹¹⁹

Quick to capitalise on the extraordinary downturn in Gapon’s fortunes was the *Manchester Guardian* on March 7th, it’s ‘Special Correspondent’ lying quite

¹¹⁸ ‘Labour Movement Steadily Spreading’, *London Daily News*, March 7, 1903, p.12

¹¹⁹ ‘Suicide at Meeting’, *New York Times*, March 6, 1906, p.4

unashamedly when he wrote that whilst there had been “suspicions” about Witte’s endorsement of Worker’s Assembly, the part that Gapon was playing had been “not at all been clear”.¹²⁰ It wasn’t true in any sense of the word. All the various demands being placed on Gapon had been revealed in his book, published in Britain the previous autumn. The Priest had in fact been quite transparent about them. Zubatov and even Witte had made no secret of the fact that the legalised working clubs had under the leadership of community figures like Gapon, been set-up squarely and specifically to “withdraw the masses of the working men from the sphere of influence of the Socialist parties.” There was the unmistakable hand of a vexatious revolutionary like Soskice or Rutenberg here, even if the story had been written-up by the Guardian’s latest press signing, the 25-year old Dover Wilson. A plausible narrative was now taking shape: Gapon hadn’t been in Russia conversing with peasants as he’d suggested, he’d been in Finland by way of Stockholm and spent several days in Helsingfors. Gapon had spent the best part of three months incognito, so why several days in Finland in any way contradicted his claims isn’t clear. The report goes on to say that the workers union that Gapon and Witte had organised, and which had been temporarily outlawed in the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday, had been ‘mysteriously’ revived. One of his assistants had come forward with an “extraordinary accusation”. The President of the Putilov section of the Workers Assembly confessed that the organisation had secured further funds from Witte to renew its club activities. According to the Guardian’s correspondent the story had been “simply and circumstantially” told and bore the “impress of sincerity”.

The next revelation was more shocking still. At the first meeting of the Central Committee on October 17th 1905 (the day that the Tsar’s October Manifesto had been published), Gapon is reported to have said that he must die “in order that the cause might rise again”. The phrasing had all the solemn humility and high drama of a last supper, with the sacrament taking the form not of bread and wine this time but roubles. Addressing his disciples, the priest is alleged to have said “Comrades, I give you 1,000 roubles towards the opening of the clubs, and you already have in hand another 4,000. Work with this money in the meantime, and afterwards more will be found. Don’t trouble about raising money comrades; there will be no lack of it.” The allusions are

¹²⁰ ‘A Tool of Witte: Father Gapon and the Revolution’, Manchester Guardian, March 7, 1906, p.7

predominantly Catholic in nature from the resurrection imagery that is implicit in the word ‘rise’, to the miracle of the loaves and the fishes — or in this case the 5,000 roubles being transformed into an infinite supply of roubles — and the imminent sacrifice to be made on the cross. Someone is having fun with this. It’s a cruel and rather spiteful kind of fun, but it is fun nonetheless. Gapon is being depicted as a duplicitous, vain fantasist with a shameless Messiah-complex. The representative of the Putilov section who had provided this confession went on to describe how he had been wounded during the march on Bloody Sunday and had to remain some time abroad. The confessor more likely than not was Pinchas Rutenberg, foreman at the Putilov works. This would certainly explain how the same witness was able to claim that Gapon had been in Finland, because this is where Rutenberg had fled too. If correct, then the man exposing “this suspicious character in the eyes of the workmen and the Russian people” was Father Gapon’s assassin. Hardly the most impartial witness one could have by any means.¹²¹

In Britain at this time, clouds were similarly beginning to form. In Eastbourne on March 3rd Gapon’s younger brother Sergey, a deserter from the Russian Imperial Army ever since after its devastating defeat at its naval base, Port Arthur was arrested for being drunk and disorderly in Eastbourne. After a short hearing it was agreed that Sergey would be expelled under the Aliens Act and was removed to Lewes Prison to await deportation. A week or so after his release from Lewes Prison he was seen standing in an obvious state of distress on the pier at Hastings. By Sunday March 11th he was being pulled dead from a groyne on the beach. The whole sorry episode took place as Helene de Krebel aka Marie Derval — the former mistress of Socialist Revolutionary Varlam Tscherkesoff who was said to have been recruited by the Tsarist Secret Police — checked into the Liffen Hotel in Pimlico and committed suicide. The Russian Embassy had been little more than 500 yards away.

One month later on April 11th, just a week or so after Father Gapon is believed to have been murdered by Rutenberg in Oserki, the celebrated Russian novelist Maxim Gorky arrived at the Hoboken, New York, having sailed across from Berlin under his real name Alexei Maximovich Peshkov on the North German Lloyd Steamship, Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse. The fanfare was tremendous and the timing was curious. Just twelve months

¹²¹ ‘A Tool of Witte: Father Gapon and the Revolution’, Manchester Guardian, March 7, 1906, p.7

earlier Gorky had been jailed by the Tsarist Police for the part he had played in Father Gapon's Bloody Sunday demonstration. At the request of his their mutual friend Pinchas Rutenberg, Gorky had provided refuge to the pair in the immediate aftermath of the protest. Gapon provided a summary of the events in his book. The evening prior to the demonstration he had asked Rutenberg to visit Gorky and see if he and other "prominent Liberals" could make an appeal to the Minister of the Interior Sviatopolk-Mirsky and Prime Minister Count Witte on the behalf of the Workers Assembly, reaffirming their commitment to ensuring a peaceful protest and reiterating that their only objective was to present a petition to the Tsar. Among those chosen to visit Witte that days were Gorky, Constantine Arseniev, Alexey Peshekhonov and Evgeny Ganeizer of the RusKoye Bogatsto newspaper and plus Gapon's secretary Dmitrii Kuzin. The men insisted that there would be no need for any bloodshed. The meeting had been less than successful and Gorky and his friends had left their interview with the officials fearing the worst.

It was for this abortive sequence of events that Gorky had been imprisoned. Witte had viewed the novelist's pre-demonstration appeal not as an attempt to prevent bloodshed, but part of a plot by the Liberal-based 'Union of Liberation', a loose coalition of writers and prominent townfolk to present themselves as a Provisional Government in advance of a Revolution.¹²²

Gorky's revolutionary Socialism had never really been in any doubt, despite the softening of his public image in recent years and his natural vitriol having been partly obfuscated by mainstream literary success and the respect of the Liberal classes. The 'Poet of the Vagabonds' was back at the forefront of the fight against the most soulless despotism in Europe — whether it was funding the Russian Social Democrats or assisting the gallant fantasies of a warrior priest. After serving a four week sentence in the Peter and Paul Fortress, Gorky was released, his health in rapid decline. The general outcry that erupted after his arrest had put the Tsar in a grievous position. The fiercest diplomatic protests came from Italy, after a leading voice in its surprisingly powerful Socialist and Radical Party — Prince Scipione Borghese — came out in support of the "great novelist". At a meeting in the Chamber of Deputies in Rome on February 2nd

¹²² *Maxim Gorky in the Revolution of 1905*, Alexander Kaun, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, June 1930, Vol. 9, No. 25, pp. 133-148

1905, Italy's interim Prime Minister Tommaso Tittoni was forced to take questions from the Socialist Party leader, Filippo Turati on whether the government considered its duty to inform the Russian Government of the "feelings of horror and indignation" at the events unfolding in Russia. A petition had been prepared in conjunction with Prince Borghesi pleading that the life of Gorky might be spared. Tittoni had little option but to remind the group that to convey such a message in any formal, diplomatic capacity would be a breach of international protocol. As it was the rumours currently circulating in the Berlin Socialist newspaper, *Forverts* that Gorky would be hanged for treason had absolutely no foundation.¹²³ The response from Italy could well have been a deciding factor in his release. Italy's Socialist Party was one of the worlds', if not *the* worlds' most successful and credible left-wing parties. Founded as the Party of the Italian Workers in 1892, it emerged from the left-wing republicanism of its national hero Garibaldi. At the start of the 20th Century the party divided, rather like the Russian Socialist Democratic Labour Party, whose views it closely mirrored, into maximalist and moderate (Reformist) factions. Among its Maximalists were a young Benito Mussolini and among its Reformists, Filippo Turati. What role Mussolini played in demanding Gorky's release isn't known, but it's curious to note that the fates of Gorky and his friends Pinchas Rutenberg and the future Zionist Leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky would intertwine with Mussolini's in several of the decades to come as the leader evolved from Socialist Revolutionary and Intellectual to German sympathizer and eventual Fascist. What seems certain though, given Jabotinsky early entry into the mechanics of Italian Socialism as a result of his education and early journalist career in Rome from 1898 to 1903, is that he'd made firm contacts with these networks that would serve Gorky and Rutenberg well in the weeks and months after Gapon's murder.

At five o'clock on February 26th 1905, Maxim Gorky was released on a bail of £1000 and deported from St Petersburg to Riga. After spending several months in Berlin he travelled to the United States and it is here that we find on a fund-raising tour with Nikolai Tchaikovsky, Ivan Narody, Bund-leader Maxim Romm, Millionaire Socialist, Gaylord Wilshire, the US novelist Mark Twain, US *Forverts* editor, Abraham Cahan, Russian-American theatre mogul Joseph Mandelkern and lawyer Morris Hillquit, a

¹²³ 'How Gorky Was Arrested', London Daily News, February 1, 1905, p.7

regular defender of civil rights who had previously defended anarchists Michele Guida and Johann Most.

By the end of 1905, the Jewish novelist and Socialist Revolutionary Shloyme Rappoport aka 'S. An-sky' was urging Chaim Zhitlovsky to come to Russia to front a Jewish Socialist Revolutionary Party. He was breaking with the SRP in Geneva and heading to Berlin. The revolutionary spirit was tearing through Russia like wildfire but there needed to be one attitude, one goal and that was the rebirth of the Jewish nation. As far as An-sky was concerned, this was the moment that should change the Jewish condition forever.

At the centre of his sweeping vision, An-sky had seen the Jews and Christians coming together in a spirit of Revolutionary martyrdom. With the support of a Jewish sponsor in Geneva, a deeply controversial circular published under the name of Gapon, pleaded with the workers and peasants of Russia to unite against anti-Semitism. It began with the parable of the Good Samaritan before letting rip with a furious tirade: *“Tell me, workmen, peasants, good Christians all, what does Our Lords parable teach us? To follow the example of the hypocrite Pharisee or of the Good Samaritan? Why are you my Christian brothers, so ready to act against the Saviour and against Humanity? Why do you fill your hearts with blind hatred against the Jews? ... I will answer the question for you, my beloved Russian people ... you are so far from the Good Samaritan that you are worse against the Jewish people than the Levites and priests, worse than wild brigands, because you are in dark ignorance and extreme poverty, and you see no way out of your misery.”*¹²⁴ The circular had been co-written by S. An-Sky during Gapon's stay with the novelist's friend Boris Savinkov, the leader of the SR Fighting Organization who had murdered von Plehve the year before. In a feverish attempt to capitalise on Gapon's extraordinary world-wide fame, An-Sky had taken it upon himself to complete an entire draft from start to finish in one night. Gapon is said to have looked at it and added his own priestly inflections, and given the whole solicited effort a more accessible and populist slant with lashings of “godly expressions.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ The Hebrew Standard, 11 August 1905, p.2

¹²⁵ Wandering Soul, The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-sky, Gabriella Safran, Harvard University Press, 2011, p.p. 119-126

Just weeks before Gapon's murder at the hands of his friend, Pinchas Rutenberg, the Paole Zion group was formed under the leadership of former RSDLP member Dov-Ber Borokhov in Rutenberg and Gapon's hometown of Poltava. The group's inaugural conference took place in the town on March 12th 1906. By March 28th Gapon was dead. Just several days later the newspapers were reporting the distribution of thousands of anti-Semitic pamphlets as tensions among the peasants and Jewish population intensified as a result of further strikes.¹²⁶ The following month, Dov-Ber Borokhov, having already been expelled from the RSDLP expressing Zionist sentiments, was arrested when Tsarist Police claimed to have found a stash of weapons in a room of his house. The party itself was banned the following year.

The threat that Gapon posed wasn't one of revolutionary danger but of peaceful resolution. The chain of events he had set in motion was resulting in positive, long-lasting change. It was only a matter of time before the grief, shock and horror of Kishinev would be forgotten and then broad external pressures of Western sympathy and attention that had breathed such fire into the reform movement would increasingly be starved of oxygen, and the flames that spread so virulently would eventually take no more. The threat he presented to the Socialist Revolutionary Party and Lenin's RSDLP was just as profound. The wind would die and the spark that they hoped would light the revolution would blow out. The ambiguous concessions rewarded by the Tsar in the October Manifesto had promised to smother the revolution completely. The last thing the Bolsheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries needed right now was a symbolic victory. For a revolution to truly take hold it was better for one's demands not to be met at all, than for those demands to be only partially satisfied. The key to killing the victory lay in killing its symbolic hero — first figuratively and then physically. It was the only emphatic way of destroying Russia's dream and getting its countrymen to wake up. A new and overwhelming shot of unfulfilling consolation was about opiate the masses.

To some the October Manifesto was like the Tsarist government grabbing the cloth and applying the chloroform. To others it was more like coitus interruptus. Of the 487 members elected to the First Duma in April 1906, only one was a Socialist Revolutionary, the party's leader Victor Chernov, like Lenin, having boycotted the entire event. The successful candidate was Sheftel's Hammersmith neighbour, Aleksei

¹²⁶ New York Times, March 19, 1906, p.2

Aladin. Responding to Chernov's boycott, around fifty of their members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party had formed the breakaway 'Labour' party, the Trudoviks, and Aladin became its leader.

Gapon wasn't the only man to die that day. The other man was Nikolay Alexandrovich Romanov. Only the world wouldn't know of it for another eleven years.