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Introduction

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated in Sarajevo, Serbia. With assurances of help in a war against Russia from Kaiser Wilhelm in Germany, Austria declared war on Serbia a month later. On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia and against France on the third. And so Europe was plunged into a disastrous and bloody war that no one wanted. Britain could easily have remained aloof from these events on mainland Europe, but with the violation of Belgian sovereignty by Germany, she was obliged to uphold her treaty commitments and join the war against the Central Powers.

During periods of war, populations and peoples come together to present a strong and united front against the enemy. The Jewish population of Britain, however, was shocked to discover that during the First World War, it was not necessarily considered to have a part in this national emotion. The war proved to be a watershed for Anglo-Jewry, illustrating the fragility of emancipation and its place in British society. It was the culmination of a 250-year-old struggle for acceptance, but what many hoped would be the start of a new era of positive Anglo-Jewish relations rapidly proved to be disappointing.

Most accounts of Anglo-Jewry detail the immigrant experience up to 1905 or up to 1914, and then take up the story in the 1920s and 1930s to discuss the rise of fascism, Oswald Moseley and the British Union of Fascist, and refugees fleeing Hitler's Germany. In contrast, there has been very little written about what I would argue is the most defining period in the history of Anglo-Jewry.

*The British Jewry Book of Honour*¹, edited by the Reverend Michael Adler, Head Jewish Chaplain to H.M. Forces during the war, is the official record of the role played by Anglo-Jewry. The image of the patriotic nature of enlistment and sacrifice that Adler discusses are echoed up to a point in Jabotinsky's *The Story of the British Legion*. These two works, the former especially, established the idea

¹ Adler, Rev. Michael, ed., The British Jewry Book of Honour, Caxton Publishing Company Ltd., London, 1922

that the Jews in Britain and the Empire fulfilled the obligations incumbent on them as full citizens. They see the war as the victorious conclusion of the struggle for Jewish emancipation and acceptance. With such a glorious and patriotic contribution to the war effort, at a time when Britain and British society were under great pressure, the accusation could no longer be levied, it was hoped, that Jews were not loyal, or part of some international (pro-German) brotherhood. They had now justified beyond doubt their position within society and their right to be accepted as true citizens, as ready as any of their Christian compatriots to do their duty to their King and country.

This was the accepted version, and one which the old-school, assimilationist historian of Anglo-Jewish history, Vivian Lipman, in his important work, *Social History of the Jews of England* felt little need to elaborate on, let alone challenge. He does, however, give a limited account of Anglo-Jewish war service in *A History of the Jews in Britain Since 1858*, but it is in a similar vein to the Book of Honour, making sure to highlight the strong record of Anglo-Jewry whilst playing down any negative issues that arose, such as the question of the several thousand Russian-born alien Jews, whose record was not quite as exemplary.

There have been important studies made on the effect of the war on German and German-Jewish immigrants, such as that by C.C. Aronsfeld, *Jewish Enemy Aliens in England During the First World War* and *The Enemy In Our Midst* by Panikos Panayi. Others focus on anti-Semitism in Britain during the period, most notably Colin Holmes' excellent survey *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* and Elkan Levy's *Anti-Semitism in England at War, 1914-1916*. David Cesarani's important article, *An Embattled Minority: the Jews in Britain During the First World War*, is primarily a narrative of the effects of the war on the Jewish community, the issue of aliens and the inevitable anti-Semitism that found expression, but unfortunately does not fully examine the issues behind the debate over military service. Mark Levene's two major studies of Lucien Wolf and the Conjoint Committee on Foreign Affairs, *War, Jews and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914-19*, and *Jewish Diplomacy at War and Peace 1914-1919* both make references to the subject from the point of view of the Jewish community's 'foreign office,' as does Steven Bayme in his wider survey of the response to

anti-Semitism by the Jewish establishment in *Jewish Leadership and Anti-Semitism in Britain, 1898-1918*. At present, there are only two works which specifically address different Jewish responses to military service in Britain and the various issues that arise; Mark Levene's assessment of two Jewish memoirs from the Great War, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, and *The Revd. John Harris: Issues in Anglo-Jewish Pacifism 1914-18* by Evlyn Wilcock.

In more recent years, Anglo-Jewish history has been reassessed by 'revisionist' historians like David Cesarani, Colin Holmes, Lloyd Gartner, Tony Kushner and Bill Williams who have all sought to dispel the myth of the successful and problem-free acceptance of Jews into British, or more specifically, English society peddled by the Anglo-Jewish establishment. The traditional version was an historical attempt to convince non-Jews of the total submission of Jews to English values, often at the expense of their own Jewish values, in order to justify their status and position within society. Whilst the latter historians may not necessarily be Zionistic, in the sense that they do not believe that Jews can never be full citizens of a country or nation other than a Jewish one, they have all sought to show that the 'official' version of Anglo-Jewish history conveniently overlooks or glosses over all the problems encountered in the period leading up to the First World War to present a suspiciously problem-free account of integration.

This dissertation will extend this re-examination into the issue of army service and discuss the reasons why the years 1914-18 were not a time when Anglo-Jewry necessarily all 'pulled together' in a fit of community solidarity to stand by and serve heroically and patriotically their country as Adler and his successors such as Lipman and Roth would have us all believe. At a time when the Anglo-Jewish establishment was desperate to take advantage of the opportunity of war to demonstrate their allegiances, they had to face the difficult issues of strong Jewish anti-war sentiment, whilst subject to intense scrutiny. They had much to lose if they were seen to put a foot wrong. The presence of Russian-born Jews, who at first were exempted from the Military Service Act of 1916 made the issue of military service even more problematic.

In Chapter 1, I will develop the notion of Jewish paranoia and its continuation into the war years as an explanation for the efforts made to get Jews seen in uniform. I will look at the 'official' version of Jewish war service and show that while there was a very positive response to military service and the war in general, from a sizeable section of the Anglo-Jewish community, it cannot simply be explained by patriotism.

Chapter 2 will focus on the existence of Jewish opposition to the war. I will show that the traditional version is open to considerable qualification. In examining the arguments of those who did not respond so positively to the call to arms, I have chosen a thematic approach. Rather than adopt the chronological approach of most of the existing works that discuss military service, it is my hope that dealing with bases of objection will afford greater insight and understanding.

But the debate surrounding Jewish military involvement cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, it should be understood as the conclusion of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish questions. Thus it is first necessary to put the whole issue into context and give a brief history of the Jews in England since their readmittance by Cromwell in the 1650s up to 1914 and the outbreak of war.²

'In the three decades ending with the outbreak of war in 1914, the word "immigrant" meant "Jew"',³ and public discussions concerning aliens or immigrants rarely referred to any other group. It was at this group that the 1905 Aliens Act was primarily aimed, in order to restrict the flow of Jewish immigrants. It is not surprising that there were, at the very least, concerns regarding the growing number of immigrants coming to British shores at the end of the century - by 1914, there were about 300,000 Jews in England, 180,000 of whom were situated in London,⁴ the number having increased four-fold over the period.

² See particularly Alderman, Geoffrey Modern British Jewry Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992; Bermant, Chaim Troubled Eden, Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. London, 1969; Garrard, John, The English and Immigration Oxford University Press, London, 1971; Gartner, Lloyd, The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914, Allen & Unwin, London, 1960; Holmes, Colin, Immigrants and Minorities in British Society George Allen & Unwin, London, 1978;

³ Pollins, Harold, *The Jews in History Today*, July 1985, p.8

⁴ Brook, Stephen The Club: The Jews of Modern Britain Constable, London, 1989 p.26

There had been a permanent Jewish population in Britain since being readmitted in 1656. The road to acceptance was difficult, with results only in the 19th century, despite the developing religious tolerance. By the early Victorian period, many constraints still remained such as the lack of the franchise. In 1831, Jews were allowed into the City, and two years later, Francis Goldsmid was the first Jew called to the Bar. The first Jewish M.P., Baron Lionel de Rothschild, was elected in 1847, although he could not take his seat until the oath was changed in 1858. In 1871, universities finally became open to everyone.

By the middle of the century, there were about 35,000 Jews in Britain,⁵ a community large enough to have developed its own social institutions such as several schools, most notably the Jews' Free School, the Jewish Hospital and the Jews' Orphan Asylum, several synagogues and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, (Jewish representative body) and an independent Jewish Board of Guardians. By 1880, however, the Jewish population had grown to 60,000, more than half of whom were British by birth.⁶ Although most were poor and ill-educated, there could be seen rising a wealthy Jewish middle- and upper-class, with characters such as Lionel de Rothschild, the City's leading banker, Sir Moses Montefiore, a former Sheriff of the City of London, and David Salomons, a former Lord Mayor and founder of the Westminster Bank.

By 1880, there is a small, compact community with its own essential institutions, and burgeoning patriotic middle class, in an increasingly enlightened British society. But the pogroms and discriminatory laws that followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 caused the trickle of economically induced Eastern-European emigration to become a flood of refugees fleeing from political and religious persecution. Although only about 120,000 of the estimated 3 million refugees actually remained in this country, it became a contentious issue, especially as it coincided with a period of increasing economic pressure, culminating in the 1905 Aliens Act.

The arrival of these new immigrants in such numbers was instrumental in forcing Anglo-Jewry to define itself in reaction to the

⁵ Bermant, Chaim Troubled Eden, Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. London, 1969 p.15

⁶ Ibid. p.15

spectrum of responses from various sectors of British society which all helped to shape the attitude of the Anglo-Jewish establishment.

It was feared that these immigrants, who formed a very distinct community in terms of dress, language, religion and settlement, would simply by their very existence, undo the work of those who had struggled for acceptance. Quite simply, they were not English, and showed no signs of willingness to become so. The solution of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Jewish Board of Guardians and the *Jewish Chronicle* was to either send them back or send them on to America or elsewhere. In total, about 50,000 people were returned.⁷ They were considered purely as aliens by the Anglo-Jewish establishment; that they were co-religionists was at best unfortunate. At worse it was irrelevant. This explains the support for the 1905 Aliens Act from the Jewish establishment.

The period saw an increase in anti-Semitism. Many on the political right labelled Jews as undesirable foreigners who were causing overcrowding in the cities. Many trade unionists and socialists accused them of stealing jobs and prolonging the sweating system. Whilst anti-Semitism was also directed at the upper class 'West End' Jews, it was felt that it could be averted - if these immigrants could not be sent away, then they had to be made into Englishmen. Such institutions as the Jews' Free School, the United Synagogue and paramilitary youth groups like the Jewish Lads Brigade performed this task, to varying degrees of success.

The fundamental concern of the Anglo-Jewish establishment was to make these alien immigrants into the same Englishmen that they had become, in order to prevent anti-Semitism and thereby safeguard their position within the wider British establishment. Whilst the war was not necessarily greeted with enthusiasm by all establishment Jews with the same fervour as most non-Jews, the Anglo-Jewish leadership seized upon it as an opportunity for them to prove to the anti-Semites that Jews were as patriotic and loyal as any Gentile, and thereby justify once and for all their right to be treated as equal citizens.

⁷ Lipman, Vivian, A Century of Social Service: The Jewish Board of Guardians, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1959, p.94

In addition to published books and articles that provided much of the background information, I have attempted to draw on a variety of primary sources, many of which have not yet been fully examined. The papers of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Chief Rabbi and the Jewish Recruitment Committee provided a fascinating insight into the Anglo-Jewish establishment and the stance it adopted towards Jews and military service. I have sought to create a balance of primary material by using, amongst other sources, a selection of recorded personal testimonies of immigrants and first-generation descendants, as well as the minute book of the Manchester branch of the Foreign Jews Protection Committee. As the main Jewish newspaper and voice of the community, the *Jewish Chronicle* was, for obvious reasons, essential reading. I was very fortunate to have come across a selection of contemporary pamphlets of both Jewish and non-Jewish origin. I have also made use of primary sources cited within secondary sources, but have not listed these in the bibliography unless I have looked at them myself.

A note on definitions: I have used the terms 'Jew' and 'Jewish' to describe anyone who considers themselves, and is considered by others, to be Jewish by religion, nationality, culture and ethnicity, even if not all these labels apply to every individual. 'Anglo-Jewish' refers to British citizens and naturalised individuals covered by the above definition of 'Jew'. 'Anglo-Jewish leadership' refers to the anglicised Jewish establishment.

Chapter I Jews as Soldiers

*England has been all she could be to the Jews; the Jews will be all they can to England.*⁸

*To go into battle with such an order ringing in your ears...means victory...Tell the boys to be proud of their country, to rejoice in the name of Englishmen, to feel that no sacrifice they can make can be worthy of the great tradition of our history...worthy of the glorious name you bear – an English Jew.*⁹

As soon as war had broken out, the *Jewish Chronicle*, self-styled 'organ of Anglo-Jewry', in a manner worthy of Lord Kitchener himself, boldly demanded that the Jews of Britain should do their duty to their country. As expressed by Jewish writers in an attempt to create an 'official' war record in the post-war years:

*'in those fearful and ever-memorable days of August 1914, when the call came to the young men of the British Empire to give up all that they held most dear and go forth in the battle for right against might, for justice against injustice, for freedom against tyranny, among the first who responded were men of the Jewish faith.'*¹⁰

Indeed, prior to the introduction of conscription in 1916, 10,000 Jews had voluntarily enlisted for active service, of which 1,140 were officers.¹¹ The statistics presented by Kosmin, Waterman and Grizzard, in seeking to generate a realistic figure for the size and social structure of the Jews of Britain, seem to bear out this fact. Around 24 per cent of the male population, and 11.5 per cent of the entire population of Britain served in the armed forces. According to

⁸ *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 August 1914

⁹ Basil Henriques to unspecified recipient, March 1918 in Loewe, L., Basil Henriques: A Portrait, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976, p.50

¹⁰ Adler, ed., The British Jewry Book of Honour, p.1

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.4

the *British Jewry Book of Honour*, compiled by the Reverend Michael Adler D.S.O., Senior Jewish Chaplain to the British troops, 41,500 of those from Britain itself were Jewish. But whilst the ratio of troops to population for the country as a whole was 11.5 per cent, using the accepted estimate by Lipman that the Jewish community numbered 300,000, then the military contribution of the Anglo-Jewish community stood above the national average at 13.8 per cent.¹² If the number of Jews in Britain is taken to be 275,000, as estimated by Adler,¹³ then the ratio increases to an even more impressive 15%, bearing out Adler's triumphant claims for the patriotism of Anglo-Jewry.

However, looking at seemingly impressive figures does not help particularly in understanding the dilemmas presented to British Jewry by the war, a war that brutally exposed the fragility of Anglo-Jewish identity, and stretched the limits of emancipation. The response of the establishment finds its origins in the paranoia of British Jewry, particularly concerning the major influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe in the years leading up to the war. It is the 'hangover' left by this massive change in the make-up of Anglo-Jewry centring on the so-called 'aliens question' that guides its policy through the war years. The communal bodies, in the wake of various terrorist disturbances in London, most notably the 'Tottenham Outrages' of January 1909, the Houndsditch murders in December 1910, and the Sidney Street 'siege' of 1911,¹⁴ saw their fears being realised that Jews in the East End may develop a reputation for anarchistic anti-state activities. The concerns surrounding these immigrants was that their behaviour would be extrapolated by the non-Jewish community to include the Jews, the 'Cousinhood'¹⁵ of the establishment, successful Jews, and thus bring down their precariously crafted notion of emancipation. 'The threat of a swarm of very noticeable Yiddish-speaking paupers weighed heavily, not just on the well-to-do, almost aristocratic members of the Anglo-Jewish community, but also on the fairly recently-arrived German and Dutch settlers. The great

¹² Kosmin, Barry; Waterman, Stanley; Grizzard, Nigel, *The Jewish Dead in the Great War as an Indicator for the Location, Size and Social Structure of Anglo-Jewry in 1914* in Immigrants and Minorities, vol. 5, no. 2, July 1986, pp. 181-192, p.183

¹³ Adler, ed., The British Jewry Book of Honour, p.4

¹⁴ Fishman, Bill, East End Jewish Radicals, 1875 – 1914, Duckworth, London, 1975, ch.6

¹⁵ See Bermant, Chaim, Troubled Eden, Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. London, 1969

fear was social regression, through being identified with such unpleasant co-religionists¹⁶ who threatened the very idea that Jewishness and Britishness were totally reconcilable.¹⁷

Levene notes in his studies on the Conjoint Foreign Committee and its president Lucien Wolf, the existence of another, equally difficult issue, that of the government's foreign policy. The Conjoint Foreign Committee was a Jewish 'communal' body established in 1878 to conduct Anglo-Jewish foreign policy. It was based on the premise of what Stephen Bayme terms 'the liberal compromise',¹⁸ that the upper echelons of British Jews perceived themselves as Englishmen who happened to be Jewish. Rather than necessarily meaning that they had eschewed their religiosity, the term describes the notion that Jews should be able to participate in society, as would any other British citizen. It was the belief of the establishment that Jewish values ran parallel and were analogous to British values, and this included foreign affairs, with which the Conjoint was concerned.

This illusion was shattered when Britain entered into the war as an ally of the despotic and overtly anti-Semitic Tsarist regime, the same regime whose acts of persecution had induced the flood of immigrants to the safety of the west. The *Jewish Chronicle*, before its remarkable and patriotic volte-face in August 1914, had declared after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that it would be 'wicked' for England to fight alongside Russia.¹⁹ To compound the awkwardness of the issue, at the outbreak of war the Russian army had begun to deport large numbers of Jews residing in the Pale of Settlement on the border with Germany,²⁰ a region that was to witness harsh fighting during the war, in the middle of which Jews were caught up.

The Conjoint saw that the answer to the 'Jewish question' lay in striving to achieve the emancipation of European Jewry, and this was simply one part of the foreign policy of Britain to export its own

¹⁶ Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875 – 1914*, p.65

¹⁷ For a recent examination of 'Englishness', see Paxman, Jeremy, *The English: A Portrait of a People*, Penguin, London, 1999

¹⁸ Bayme, Stephen, *Jewish Leadership and Anti-Semitism in Britain*, unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1977, p.34

¹⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 July 1914, quoted in Cesarani, David, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.115

²⁰ Panayi, Panikos, *The Frontiers of Genocide: Jews in the Eastern War Zones, 1914-20 and 1941*, in Panayi, Panikos, ed. *Minorities in Wartime*, Berg, Oxford, 1993, pp.83-117, p.91

cherished liberal ideals. Although Britain joined Russia, the persecution of the Jews continued, only now Britain was not prepared to jeopardise its alliance by denouncing Russia's treatment of her Jews when such an alliance was essential in splitting Germany's army across two fronts.

'Almost overnight, trumpeting one's Britishness whilst belittling one's ethnicity or religiosity became both for the voice of the community and for most established British Jews as individuals, *de rigueur*.²¹ At the first meeting of the Conjoint after the start of the war, a resolution was passed to denounce moves by French Jewish leaders to continue to defend their persecuted co-religionists in Russia, for fear that it would lead to further accusations of the so-called cosmopolitan nature of Jews, and the Anglo-Jewish Association, established in 1871 by the assimilationist Sir Francis Goldsmid, faced up to the fact that 'Russia is now an ally of England...[and] the success of her arms is longed for by every Englishman. All painful subjects of difference and dissent must for the time being be overlooked.'²² Duty to the community took second place to the obligation to the Crown, and this meant positive campaigns to ensure the rapid enlistment of young Jewish males of military age.

This was given further urgency by the persistence of anti-Semitic attacks after the outbreak of war, against both the naturalised and often assimilated wealthy financier with German origins and the poor working class Eastern-European immigrant in the East End of London or Redbank in Manchester. In 1916, H. G. Wells wrote that under the strain of nationalism, England 'revealed a malignity less focused and intense than the German, but perhaps even more distressing',²³ because England, with her liberal tradition, did not have, or at least was not recognised as having, such a history of virulent patriotism and hatred of the 'outsider.' Understandably, the war mentality led to rampant domestic chauvinism, physical

²¹ Levene, Mark, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18* in *Jewish Culture and History*, vol. 2, no. 2, Winter 1999, pp. 66-95, p.72

²² Annual Report of the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), 1913-14, quoted in Levene, Mark, *War, Jews and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914-19*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, Oxford, 1992, p.39

²³ Aronsfeld, C.C., *Jewish Enemy Aliens in England During the First World War* in *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. XVII, no. 4, October 1956, pp.275-283, p.277

outbursts of xenophobia and distrust and dislike of anything alien, and, unsurprisingly, the issue of the Jews became particularly significant. Indeed, *The Times* came to use the terms 'German and 'Jew' interchangeably,²⁴ and anti-German sentiment easily slipped into anti-Semitism.²⁵

The situation was further complicated by the fact that many Jews were in fact still unnaturalised aliens, and remained, officially, German or Russian citizens. But more disturbing was that even those who were naturalised or even full citizens, but known to have foreign origins, suffered as well. The most notorious antagonist was Leo Maxse, editor of the *National Review*, who maintained his anti-Semitic onslaught, accusing Jews of being inherently incapable of being loyal citizens, claiming that not only were they pro-German, but that they were manipulative, corrupt and part of some hidden international financial conspiracy, citing the Marconi scandal and the Indian silver affair as evidence.²⁶ Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, was perturbed by the sympathy for Germany shown by German-born Jews in America, and by comments from Lord Rothschild's negative views as to Britain's capabilities. Unfortunately, it was often difficult to deny such allegations, even if the Prime Minister himself, Herbert Asquith, did denounce such behaviour in Parliament,²⁷ given not only the German origin of some prominent Jews, but also initial hesitance of Anglo-Jewry to fall in with the jingoism of the war years and the reluctance to support the alliance with Russia since the Jews there were still suffering state-sponsored maltreatment.

Against this background, efforts were made to scrutinise and penalise those Jews who had achieved considerable advancement in society. In 1915, at the behest of a Scottish baronet Sir George Makgill, two prominent Jews, Sir Ernest Cassel and Sir Edgar Speyer, were brought to court to prove the authority by which they were Privy Councillors, since they were not British-born. The case was heard before the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Reading, but was thrown

²⁴ Levy, Elkan, *Anti-Semitism in England at War, 1914-1916* in Patterns of Prejudice vol. 4, part 5, 1970 pp.27-30, p.27

²⁵ Panayi, Panikos, *The Enemy In Our Midst*, Berg, Providence, 1991, p.163

²⁶ Panayi, *The Enemy In Our Midst*, p.175

²⁷ Hansard, May 13, 1917

out. As the war continued, the attacks increased: Sir Felix Cassel, nephew of Sir Ernest, suffered several stinging attacks in the Commons and was called upon to resign his post as Judge Advocate-General.²⁸ Sir Alfred Mond, founder of ICI, was forced to bring several libel actions, and yet the Conservative association in his Swansea constituency passed a resolution that he was 'not a fit and proper person to represent any British constituency in the Imperial Parliament.'²⁹ Arthur Strauss, Conservative MP for north Paddington, was called upon to resign his seat, not being native-born, though fully naturalised.³⁰

The sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine in May 1915 led to a series of anti-German riots. Whilst according to Colin Holmes these disturbances were not specifically anti-Semitic, Jews were inevitably implicated, and many of Russian origin felt compelled to display photographs of themselves in Russian uniform in their shop windows.³¹ This led to a series of 'loyalty letters' being written to *The Times* by several prominent individuals of German descent, including Jews such as Cassel, in a bid to stress their loyalty to their adopted home by publicly denouncing the German action.

And so we understand that it was of the utmost importance for the Anglo-Jewish leadership that Jews displayed their solidarity with the British cause and conform to a popular outlook that did not make allowances for minorities – Leopold Greenberg, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, having once declared that 'we have no interest in the upholding of Russia and far less in the debasing of Germany...with whom she [Great Britain] has no quarrel whatsoever'³² not only ceased his condemnation of Russian atrocities, but went so far as to devise a warped apologetic explanation, arguing that Russia's treatment of its Jewish population was merely a misdirected reaction against the aggression of its militaristic neighbour to the west;³³ the weekly bulletin written by Lucien Wolf that had regularly detailed

²⁸ Hansard, July 26 1918

²⁹ Bolitho, Hector, *Alfred Mond*, London, 1933, pp. 210-211

³⁰ Aronsfeld, *Jewish Enemy Aliens in England During the First World War*, p.277-280

³¹ Holmes, Colin, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939*, Edward Arnold, London, 1979, p.122

³² *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 July 1914, quoted in Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe*, p.26

³³ *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 September 1914

such atrocities, *In Darkest Russia*, was duly wound up.³⁴ When enemy aliens, many of whom were Jewish, were interned in 1914-15 despite having been resident in England for many years after having fled their country of birth in search of a better life in the supposedly 'liberal' England, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, representative body of Anglo-Jewry, remained markedly aloof. Notwithstanding an objection from one member, the Board decided that these Jews were interned as alien enemies, and not as Jews, and therefore the issue was beyond its mandate.³⁵ The Board refused to sit on appeal tribunals, and so it was left to independent organisations such as the middle class B'nei Brith and individuals to defend Jewish aliens.³⁶ The President of the Sephardic community Sir Francis Montefiore, in December 1915, declared in the *Jewish Chronicle* that the occasion of war was not the time to consider the 'small questions of sect...the so-called Jewish questions...At the present time, the thoughts of all patriotic Englishmen should turn only to national questions', and that 'all enemy aliens should be locked up.'³⁷ The difficulties facing the leadership surrounding the issue of foreign-born Jews, the emergence of Zionism, further accusations of 'shirking' and the effect on anti-Semitism will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Yet, for the period before compulsory service was introduced, the ultimate test of patriotic loyalty and proof that one truly deserved British citizenship lay in the voluntary enlistment in the new citizen army of Lord Kitchener. For this reason the Jewish War Services Committee (JWSC) was set up in 1915 at the request of the War Office, headed by Lord Rothschild himself. And it is fair to say that from the start of the war until the introduction of conscription in 1916, English-born Jews responded positively on the whole to the call to arms, even though there were relatively few professional Jewish soldiers before 1914. Not only did 10,000 willingly join up as noted above, but also the rate of voluntary enlistment amongst the well-to-

³⁴ Levene, Mark, Jewish Diplomacy at War and Peace, 1914-19, unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1981, p.70

³⁵ Board of Deputies Minute book, 15 November 1914, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), ACC2805/4/4/3. At the same meeting, it was decided that the Board should join the Central Committee of National Patriotic Organisations.

³⁶ Cesarani, David, *An Embattled Minority: the Jews in Britain During the First World War*, in Immigrants and Minorities, vol. 8, no. 1, 1989, pp.61-81, p.65

³⁷ *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 December 1915

do families, whose sons were of English birth and education, is recognised as approaching 90 per cent.³⁸ The Jewish Lads Brigade, one of the many youth organisations established by the official Anglo-Jewish leadership to Anglicise Eastern European immigrants, contributed 84 officers in August 1914.³⁹

The large majority of the 50,000 Jews who served were distributed throughout the services, 'on battleship and torpedo boat, among the cavalry, the infantry and the artillery, the engineers, the tanks and machine-gunners, as members of the General Staff and the Intelligence Corps and aviation units.'⁴⁰ Jewish officers and men were to be found everywhere, and in his war diaries from the Western Front, Rev. Adler details the prayer and burial services he held all along the line for many different regiments and divisions in which Jews were serving, from the highly Jewish 5th King's Liverpool's, various Manchester divisions and the Middlesex Regiment,⁴¹ to the 2nd Northants., 17th West Yorks., 8th Bucks., and 11th Northumberland Fusiliers.⁴² This was surely proof to the British people that its Jews were serving on the front line alongside their compatriots. Yet in a period when the ideas of social Darwinism were becoming more widely heard, many still believed that the Jew was physically and mentally incapable of being a good soldier, even if he was a loyal citizen, notwithstanding the fact that over half the male population in general who were conscripted between 1916 –1918 were physically unfit for frontline duty.⁴³ After the Chief Rabbi, Reverend Dr. Joseph Hertz visited Flanders for the first time towards the end of 1914, the *Jewish Chronicle* published a copy of the dispatch of Sir John French – 'anyone who now chooses to question Jewish loyalty and military ardour does so in defiance of the declaration of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.'⁴⁴

³⁸ What the Jews of the British Empire Did In The Great War – Read and Learn the True Facts, Woburn Press, 1936(?) p.2, Manchester Jewish Museum (MJM), 06WDB001, authorless pamphlet published to counter anti-Semitism in the 1930s

³⁹ Ibid. p.2 See Appendix A, p.65

⁴⁰ What the Jews of the British Empire Did In The Great War, p.4, MJM, 06WDB001

⁴¹ Due to the number of Jews in the Middlesex Regiment, it was dubbed the 'Yiddlesex' Regiment

⁴² War Diaries of Revd. Michael Adler, January 1915 – November 1918, Parkes Memorial Library (PML), University of Southampton, MS 125/AJ 433/1

⁴³ Winter, Jay, The Great War and the British People, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987 edition, p.62

⁴⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 November 1914

The intensification of anti-Semitism does not mean that all the Jews who rushed to the colours were doing so to limit it, and were, by implication, insincere. Many, having been educated at public schools, been to university or if from an immigrant background joined at a young age one of the paramilitary youth organisations such as the Jewish Lads' Brigade or the Brady Street Club for Working Lads, were honest patriots - 'The schools [such as the Jews Free School] [had] provided the equipment, the language, the knowledge; the clubs were to provide the attitude...to remove the ghetto bend...to forge out of the young Jews of Whitechapel a body of robust English boy scouts.'⁴⁵ Those living in the poor areas of the big towns often mirrored the enthusiasm shown by those from the wealthier class of Jew.

Leo Lizar, for example, born in Strangeways, Manchester, to Russian parents in 1891, is an excellent example. At the start of the war he volunteered for a Pals' Battalion, but was rejected because of his poor eyesight. Fearing the possibility that the government may introduce conscription, he memorised the letters on the eye-test card, and ended up by March 1915 at the age of 23 in the 4th Manchester Infantry Regiment because he did not want the stigma of having been forcibly drafted.⁴⁶ In a letter written to the historian Bill Williams, he makes his motives quite clear - 'I did not intend to be called up for service to the country of my birth, as I thought it was my duty to help to [sic] the defence of my country, and I am rather proud of not being a conscript. Unfortunately, there were some of our faith who would not have been in the army if they had not been conscripted.'⁴⁷

For some, like Jack Copeland, born in Strangeways of Lithuanian parents, voluntary enlistment served to demonstrate to their anti-Semitic accusers that Jews were in fact signing up. Although thoroughly assimilated, eating bacon and eggs even though the Chief Rabbi and the home Chaplain Reverend Lipson had secured the provision of kosher food for Jewish soldiers still under training, he retained a strong notion of Jewish identity, signing up as a Jew.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bermant, Troubled Eden, p.88

⁴⁶ Oral testimony of Leo Lizar, MJM, J269

⁴⁷ Leo Lizar to Bill Williams, 24 August 1979, MJM, J269

⁴⁸ Oral testimony of Jack Copeland, MJM, J71

Others such as Henry Myer had eschewed their Jewish identity almost entirely, signing up as Englishmen of Jewish birth. His only attachment to Judaism was as an officer with the J.L.B. who took it upon himself to help assimilate immigrant youth. He was one of the few Jewish soldiers in the army before the war, having served part-time in the City of London Rifles with many other Jewish city businessmen, professionals and stockbrokers. His motivation for joining the Judeans in 1917 was not borne out any notion of Zionism or one that equated patriotism with Jewishness, but rather his sense of belonging to the wider British community and his duty to use his skills to address immigrant non-participation.⁴⁹

And then there were others such as the poet Isaac Rosenberg. In a letter to his fiercely patriotic patron, the one-time personal secretary of Churchill, Edward Marsh, Rosenberg made explicit his views – ‘I never joined the army from patriotic reasons. Nothing can justify war’⁵⁰, and described England, in having gone to war, as being betrothed to ‘that incestuous worm’ Satan.⁵¹ Volunteering was not an issue of patriotism. He always considered himself an alien in his own country, the efforts of the London Board School not having been successful enough to instil in him any notion of patriotism. Rather, enlistment was a personal issue, the only solution he saw to his bleak life and a way of supporting his family with his soldier’s pay and separation allowance. He was, ironically, a pacifist and opposed to the notion of killing, like many of his contemporaries at the Slade School such as the Jewish artist David Bomberg, and others he had met whilst a member of the Young Socialist League.⁵² His rejection of war was part of a rejection of the old-fashioned and bourgeois notion of patriotism, yet he lamented the immorality of joining with no patriotic convictions.⁵³

For the Anglo-Jewish leadership trying to put on a patriotic face, the motivation and ideology of those who enlisted was irrelevant – all that mattered was that they were in the army fighting

⁴⁹ Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, pp.84-86

⁵⁰ Quoted in Cohen, Joseph, Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918, Robson Books, London, 1975 p.133

⁵¹ Quoted in Cohen, Journey to the Trenches, p.165

⁵² Ibid. p.125

⁵³ Liddard, Jean, Isaac Rosenberg: The Half Used Life, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1975, p.182

for Britain. It was these brave soldiers whose names filled the *Jewish Chronicle's* 'Honour Record,' a weekly list of Jewish men who had joined the forces, up until the introduction of conscription. It was these soldiers who were winning the 1,596 honours and awards, including 5 Victoria Crosses,⁵⁴ and who were heaped with praise in the pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*.

The Jewish establishment bent over backwards to encourage Jews to join the colours, but there were many who were still hesitant. For a number, the threat of inducing anti-Semitism by 'shirking', the rejuvenation of Jewish pride, or the wider fear of being labelled a coward were not enough to assuage any religious issues they had.

In response to a query from an upper class Jewish student at Oxford University who had just began training for a commission, the Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz made what was to be a very significant ruling. He is asked whether one may ride a bicycle on the Sabbath in order to undertake tactical training, an otherwise prohibited activity. Interestingly, the issue for the student is not whether their may be some issue because he is not on active war service, but because time was limited and there may not have been an opportunity to repeat the exercise, but is quite prepared to walk if necessary.⁵⁵ In reply, as the official authority of Jewish practice in the British Empire, Hertz ruled that:

all those training in consequence of their having definitely resolved to enlist for Active Service [sic] may consider themselves during such times of training as already being under the direct control of the War Office, and therefore for the time being exempt from strict observances...⁵⁶

Although adherence to Jewish law during wartime is abrogated in many circumstances, this was a particularly liberal decision, open to abuse, given that the student in question was not yet officially under orders. As noted above, Jewish chaplains, led by Adler, conducted

⁵⁴ Adler, *The British Jewry Book of Honour*, pp.7-8

⁵⁵ Herbert Loewe to the Chief Rabbi, 11 May 1915, Papers of the Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz, PML, MS 175 30/11

⁵⁶ The Chief Rabbi to Herbert Loewe, 14 May 1915, Ibid.

prayer services for the troops where possible,⁵⁷ but both the Chief Rabbi and Adler also endeavoured to secure where possible kosher food at least for soldiers who were still training in Britain, the provision of *matzah*⁵⁸ for soldiers abroad, and leave to coincide with Jewish festivals, with varying degrees of success.⁵⁹ Whilst all this was preferable, it was not essential, but Hertz, in making contingency rulings regarding the observance of Jewish commandments based on political concerns, did push the boundaries of Jewish law.⁶⁰ In order to cater for the spiritual well being of the Jewish soldier, Jewish literature was sent out to the front, such as the *Book of Jewish Thoughts*, written by Hertz himself. It was presumably preferable to push for special treatment where viable than to risk accusations of shirking if observant Jews did not sign up.

As it turned out, this was less of an issue than at first imagined; it is recognised that during the course of the war the level of religiosity declined even amongst the more orthodox men, even where provisions were made available for observance. Jack Copeland had put on Tefillin, phylacteries, every morning and prayed every day, but admits that 'four years in the army knocked it all out of me.'⁶¹ On more than one occasion there was protest from Jewish soldiers that their bacon rations had been replaced with kosher food at the request of one of the Jewish chaplains in France, the Revd. Arthur Barnett.⁶² It can be seen that the war was assimilating Jews at a rapid rate, even if the cessation of religious behaviour was a little extreme, and would ultimately backfire on the new concept of Jewish identity that was to emerge after the war.

⁵⁷ See above, p.21

⁵⁸ Special unleavened bread for the festival of Passover

⁵⁹ Papers of the Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz, PML, MS 175 30/52; Papers of the Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/10 e.g. a letter from the Chief Rabbi to Major de Rothschild of the JWSC, 12 May 1916 notes that kosher food was provided to Jews even in the Russian, German, Turkish and Austrian armies; letter from General Commanding Officer B. Cubbitt to the Chief Rabbi, 26 May 1915 regrets that leave for Festivals other than Passover for that year was not possible for frontline troops.

⁶⁰ Interview with Rabbi Y.Y. Rubinstein, 28 February 2001

⁶¹ Oral testimony of Jack Copeland, MJM, J71

⁶² Revd. Arthur Barnett to the *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 February 1919, cited in Englander, David, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1994, p.351

But Jews continued to encounter discrimination, and were turned away from recruiting stations in Hackney, because of 'very strongly developed prejudice among a certain section [of the troops] – not the best – against the Jewish recruits. They were greeted with 'rough handling in every possible way...[and the troops] called them names, hustled them, distorted their foreign names, and made things generally offensive.' Consequently, the Recruiting Officer decided to refuse them, 'in the best interest of the Jews themselves'.⁶³ But even when the supply of volunteers began to dry up the following year, attitudes at the recruiting stations did not improve, the *Jewish Chronicle* reporting in November 1915 that Jewish volunteers were statistically more likely to be turned away than their fellow countrymen for no reason. Individuals had been told that 'Lord Kitchener does not want any more Jews in the Army,' that 'we are not enlisting Jews,' but if they changed their minds, that 'Jewish recruits will be taken last.' The ones who were accepted were sometimes subject to discrimination and persecution with no redress from their N.C.O.⁶⁴

For this reason, many assumed English-sounding names and signed up as Anglican Christians.⁶⁵ Colin Holmes agrees with Adler's assertion in the 'Book of Honour'⁶⁶ that anti-Semitism was not endemic within the British forces⁶⁷ in the sense that it was 'institutional,' but both, the latter understandably given the agenda of the Book, seem to underestimate the extent of individual incidences of anti-Jewish racism. Yet the Director-General of Recruiting in Lord Kitchener's War Office since October 1915, Lord Derby, is reported to have stated that regarding the infamous 'Derby Scheme', the 'gigantic engine of fraud and moral blackmail'⁶⁸ and the last drive to encourage voluntary enlistment by which men 'attested' to their willingness to serve if called on to do so, that the Jewish response

⁶³ *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 October 1914

⁶⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 November 1914

⁶⁵ Oral testimony of Wolf Beninson (Shaefinsky), MJM, J24

⁶⁶ Adler, Revd. Michael, *Experiences of a Jewish Chaplain on the Western Front, 1915-18* in The British Jewry Book of Honour, pp.33-58, p.44

⁶⁷ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p.126

⁶⁸ Marwick, Arthur, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1967, p.81

was 'patchy'. This accusation was echoed in *The Times* in December 1915.⁶⁹

Behind the trappings and proclamations of patriotism there lurked a real sense of fear and uncertainty caused by the jingoistic nature of the press and public opinion. The Jewish establishment had done all it could regarding the service of British-born Jews, but problems continued. The stumbling block was not so much Jewish contribution as a whole, but that of the Eastern European immigrants, the majority of whom were as yet unnaturalised, and not serving in the Forces. It is on this group that the attention of the official Jewish leadership, popular opinion and the government were focused, particularly after 1916.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 5 December 1915, quoted in Cesarani, *An Embattled Minority* in Immigrants and Minorities, p.65. For more examples of Anti-Semitism, see Patterson, John, With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1922, pp.230-236

Chapter II Jews as Anything but...

*Emancipated Jews in this country regard themselves primarily as a religious community...As citizens of the countries in which they live, they are fully and securely identified with the national spirit and interests of those countries...The idea of a Jewish nationality in Palestine...must have the effect of stamping the Jews as strangers in their native lands*⁷⁰

*England, in her hour of need and danger, came to the Jewish immigrant with the call: "Come and help me to defend my life!" Be careful in your answer to such a call. You do not answer for yourself only – you answer for the Jewish nation...A healthy youth who lives in a country must be ready to defend it like a man, with a gun in his hand.*⁷¹

Whilst many Jews signed up to the colours, there remained a considerable number who did not. The Russian Jews living in the East End who did not enlist were, as foreign nationals, under no obligation to do so, but that they were not serving became an issue of great contention.

The Anglo-Jewish establishment welcomed the Military Service Act of 1916, which introduced conscription. It was hoped that compulsion would end any threats of Jewish shirking and negative accusations as to the Jewish war record by eliminating any choice not to enrol. So confident was the *Jewish Chronicle* that it stopped printing its weekly 'Honour Record' in February. Julia Bush notes how in Stepney, there was a rush of applications to the military tribunal for exemption based on various grounds⁷² that I will discuss below. This illustrates how dubious the claim was of glorious Jewish war service. Arguably the most important issue raised by

⁷⁰ Minutes of the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), 17 May 1917, PML, MS 175 141/2

⁷¹ Translation of *On Military Service*, Yiddish poster, 1916. Public Record Office (PRO) HO 45/10819/318095/94 quoted in Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, p.326

⁷² Bush, Julia, Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-1919, Merlin Press, London, 1984, p.172

conscription, for the Jewish community at least, was that it highlighted the anomaly of the 25-30,000 Russian-born friendly alien Jews of military age who, by virtue of their foreign birth, were not eligible for military service.⁷³ Even though they could not serve if they had wanted to, and some such as Michael Cohen, who tried to join the Lancashire Fusiliers, had indeed wanted to,⁷⁴ they became the target for anti-Semitism and popular hostility once they were the only group of able-bodied men of military age left (apart from those in reserved industries). Hostile sentiment against this seemingly immune group was based upon the accusations in the local press of job-snatching, that they had the moral obligation to fight for the same side as their native country, and that they should repay Britain for the good treatment they had received.⁷⁵ Agitation was further fuelled by reports of the massive loss of life in France.

The government felt that it could not be expected that citizens of an allied nation should be prevented from serving, so in May 1916, the War Office announced that it would allow friendly aliens to volunteer for the British Army. But the recruiting drive was a failure, and so the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, announced that 'voluntary' enlistment would be backed up by the threat of deportation.⁷⁶ The Board of Deputies in July promised the government its full support,⁷⁷ but there emerged a strong opposition movement, spearheaded by the newly established Foreign Jews Protection Committee against Deportation to Russia and Compulsion (FJPC)⁷⁸ which forced the government into retreat.

As a Jew, the Home Secretary was, in the words of Cesarani, in an 'exquisitely agonising position',⁷⁹ and one that is discussed in depth by Bernard Wasserstein.⁸⁰ In his public role, he was forced to

⁷³ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p.126

⁷⁴ Oral testimony of Michael Cohen, MJM, J65

⁷⁵ *Deportation or Conscription of Russian Jews*, pamphlet produced by Jewish students at Manchester University, 1916, p.3, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/22,

⁷⁶ This idea was disgraceful to both Wolf and Greenberg, who, whilst disappointed with the reaction of these Russian Jews, objected to their being returned to the country from which they fled. They both advocated a system whereby they would be conscripted and receive full citizenship in return.

⁷⁷ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p.127

⁷⁸ See below, p.35

⁷⁹ Cesarani, *An Embattled Minority*, p.67

⁸⁰ Wasserstein, Bernard, *Herbert Samuel: a Political Life*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992

regard these Russian Jews simply as foreigners, but this led to the accusation that he was ignoring his Jewish ties and that he was pressing this illiberal policy in order to avoid any charge of favouritism towards his own people. These recalcitrant Jews were undermining the effort of the Jewish leadership to get Jews, no matter what their background, seen in uniform. It is estimated that no more than 700 did actually volunteer during this period.⁸¹

The MP Stuart Samuel defended the wealthy, assimilated Jews of German origin against those who sought to intern them as disloyal alien enemies:

These Jews have in almost case left the country of their birth with the intention of settling permanently in their new home, without any intention of ever returning...They have been subjected to civil disabilities...and have no sympathies with the political aims and ideals of [the] countries [they have abandoned].⁸²

This argument was taken further: 'once a Jew abandons the country of his birth...with the intention of making his home in another country, he recognises that his individual allegiance is due to his new country'.⁸³ But these arguments could surely not be used to defend the estimated 25-30,000 Russian Jews who were reluctant to serve their country of adoption.

Even Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, the main proponent of the Jewish Legion, admits that many preferred to stay home to avoid the war, entertain their girlfriends and play billiards,⁸⁴ but this is by no means the complete explanation. That even he has admitted this is more likely to have been an attempt to show how strong and emotional an ideology Zionism was, that it could transform these

⁸¹ Yisraeli, David, *The Struggle for Zionist Military Involvement in the First World War, 1914-17*, in Artzi, Pinhas, ed., Bar-Ilan Studies in History, Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 1979, pp. 209, 211, cited in Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.92

⁸² Copy of letter from Stuart Samuel, MP, to David Lloyd George, Prime Minister, 9 July 1918, LMA, ACC2805/4/4/3

⁸³ Memorandum of the BOD to the Members of the Advisory Committee on the Interment of Alien Enemies, 3 October 1918, Ibid.

⁸⁴ Jabotinsky, Vladimir, The Story of the Jewish Legion, New York, 1945, p.62

apparently conscience-free individuals into brave soldiers of Zion. It is possible to identify four different types of objection that many of these people had, ideological, religious, pacifist and anti-imperialist, but because they are all so intricately interlinked, there will inevitably be a certain amount of overlap in discussion. By first examining these arguments, we can consider the government's response in context.

Ideological and anti-Russian objection

On the most simple level, many parents of the young Russian Jews in question had fled Russia to avoid military conscription there during the previous century,⁸⁵ and so had a natural aversion to any form of compulsory military service. This was one of the major objections that the parents of Isaac Rosenberg had when he enlisted voluntarily in 1915, his father having an intense hatred of the military from a young age.⁸⁶ This is just one aspect of a wider argument. The 'ideological' objection was based on the Jews' refugee status; they had been oppressed by state-sponsored persecution in Russia, and were thus forced to flee for their lives. For this reason, it could not be expected that Jewish emigrants owed any allegiance to this despotic regime that did not recognise them as citizens. Though they remained officially Russian citizens, their connection was purely technical, the Russian Jews, like their German co-religionists in Britain, having totally renounced this link.⁸⁷ Thus it follows that they should not be liable for conscription as 'citizens' of a foreign nation that they had chosen to leave.

In their defence it was argued that they would have served in the forces sooner if they had been afforded equal rights as citizens. Even those born in Britain, of foreign-born parents, were not allowed to join the very exclusive Navy until the beginning of 1916 and experienced the same restrictions of movement.⁸⁸ Nevertheless,

⁸⁵ Oral testimonies of Jack Copeland, MJM, J71 and Wolf Beninson, MJM, J24

⁸⁶ Cohen, Journey to the Trenches, p.124

⁸⁷ Deportation or Conscription of Russian Jews, pamphlet produced by Jewish students at Manchester University, 1916, pp.3-7, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/22

⁸⁸ Levy, *Anti-Semitism in England at War, 1914-16*, p.29

because of the great suffering experienced by these Russian Jews and their responsibility to their brethren who did not have the opportunity to escape, they would have joined the army 'in great numbers', if only Britain did not fight the war in alliance with Russia. 'We can forgive [mistreatment in Britain], but to participate in a war in which one of your Allies is bathing in the blood of our brethren is unnatural and inhuman.'⁸⁹

Those who took this line found a voice in the FJPC, led by Solly Abrahams, alias Abraham Bezalel. The Committee had been established in 1916 as a self-defence and propaganda organisation in protest against the introduction by the Home Secretary of conscription with the threat of deportation, and brought together 22 different Jewish organisations, including 7 socialist groups, 12 trade union branches and various Friendly Societies, with the support of the infamous East End anarchist leader Rudolf Rocker.⁹⁰

The government was fully cognisant of the FJPC and considered them to be no more than a band of anarchists, taking measures such as raiding meetings and the homes of leaders.⁹¹ Whilst many of the member organisations were of extreme politics, the aim of the society was to protect the rights of Russian immigrant Jews as refugees. They opposed the notion of compulsion with the threat of deportation, and with the support of the radical MP for North Somerset, Joseph King, they lobbied, albeit in a subversive way by disrupting Jewish recruiting meetings, for the right of asylum to be preserved for these Jews that had fled persecution.⁹²

Before the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1917, Bezalel and his supporters chided the government for deceiving these immigrants into serving, accusing them of being misleading regarding the reward of naturalisation.⁹³ After the Revolution and the inception of a democratic system that granted emancipation to Jews in Russia for the first time, the FJPC campaigned against the compulsion and

⁸⁹ Wassilevsky, I., Jewish Refugees and Military Service: The Ethical Aspect of Compulsion Under Threat of Deportation, The National Labour Press Ltd., 1916(?), p.3. PML, MS 185/AJ 320/2/1. Pamphlet produced in defence of the action, or rather inaction, of Russian immigrants.

⁹⁰ Bush, Behind the Lines, p.174

⁹¹ Minute book of the FJPC, Manchester, p.84, Manchester Central Library (MCL), M239/2

⁹² Holmes, Anti-Semitism in British Society, p.129

⁹³ Basil Thompson to J.F. Henderson, 14 September, PRO HO 45/10819/318095/91, cited in Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, p.327

deportation of Russians in Britain along pacifist lines, even though for many, returning under such different conditions was no longer such a threat.⁹⁴ It declared that if military service was owed anywhere, it was in Russia, and so the Committee began assisting those who wanted to leave to join the revolution and supported their dependants who could not return with them.⁹⁵ That many were prepared to return was surely welcomed by the Anglo-Jewish leadership, as it proved that not only were these Russian Jews not in fact shirking, but that they were patriotic and willing to fight for the country of which they were now citizens. But after the Bolsheviks assumed control, the positive image of patriotic Jews returning to help their country was transformed into one of subversive and dangerous extremists returning to avoid service.

Opposition to service in Britain remained strong, and many threatened to resist as conscientious objectors if their families could not join them.⁹⁶ In this way, the revolution brought the FJPC into close collaboration with other socialist, trade unionist and anti-imperialist groups.⁹⁷ Two of these groups were the Marxist Russian Anti-Conscription League and the Committee of Delegations of Russian Socialist Groups, the latter claiming as a leading figure Georgi Chicherin, who was to become Soviet Foreign Minister.⁹⁸ As early as July 1916, a delegation of leading Jewish unionists met with Herbert Samuel to protest against the deportation of 'friendly aliens.'⁹⁹ However, Kaddish maintains that whilst these Russian Jews were not keen on service in either Russia or Britain, their primary concern was not politics, but the daily struggle against poverty.¹⁰⁰

Religious objection

In April 1916, the Chief Rabbi overturned his ruling of 1915 regarding the desecration of the Sabbath.¹⁰¹ Whilst he maintained

⁹⁴ Bush, Behind the Lines, p.179

⁹⁵ Minute book of the FJPC, Manchester, MCL, M239/2

⁹⁶ Bush, Behind the Lines, p.181

⁹⁷ For some groups, the shared opposition to the war was greater than the hostility some harboured towards Jews.

⁹⁸ Kaddish, Sharman, Bolsheviks and British Jews. The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution, Frank Cass, London, 1992, p.202

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.201

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.205

¹⁰¹ See above, p. 26

that strict observance of Jewish law in the front line was only necessary and possible 'military exigencies permitting',¹⁰² he was forced to lobby for allowances to be made for soldiers still in training¹⁰³ in the hope that it would make military service less objectionable for orthodox Russian Jews. Indeed, the papers of the Chief Rabbi are full of correspondence from soldiers and relatives desperately seeking leave for Festivals and special allowances for the Sabbath and for food, especially over Passover. Consequently, there is a large volume of correspondence from the Chief Rabbi to the military authorities attempting to secure these provisions, whereas in the early part of the war he was able to be very liberal with his rulings. It should be noted that the vast majority of these letters are not objecting to the concept of Jews serving in the army per se, but are pleas for special arrangements and allowances to be made: 'We are...willing to do our utmost for our country provided facilities be granted for the maintenance of practice of our religious principles.'¹⁰⁴ This, however, posed just as much a threat to Hertz's authority as those who objected outright to serving on religious grounds.

For some, however, even the provision of such allowances was not acceptable. Exemptions from military service were claimed on religious grounds, and it was the actions of independent immigrant rabbis in upholding these claims that greatly concerned both the State and the Chief Rabbi. Religious objection, at least regarding that of Russian Jews seeking to claim exemption from service on these grounds, was considered by the government and the Chief Rabbi to be at best no more than a facet of political objection to serving alongside Russia, or at worst, simply a way to avoid service.¹⁰⁵ This was justified by the very fact that the Chief Rabbi claimed to speak for the Jews of Britain.

But the issue of objection on religious grounds, whilst I believe that it should be considered as an independent form of objection, was part of a much wider and more fundamental debate, the question of identity and the authority of the official Anglo-Jewish

¹⁰² Chief Rabbi to the JRC, 4 April 1916, LMA, ACC/2805/4/4/6

¹⁰³ Chief Rabbi to the JRC, 31 March 1916, LMA, ACC/2805/4/4/6

¹⁰⁴ Copy of letter sent to the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, 20 March 1916, LMA, ACC/2805/4/4/11

¹⁰⁵ See Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, pp.58-60

establishment, particularly that of the office of the Chief Rabbi. The Chief Rabbi was the official 'Head of State' as it were, of Anglo-Jewry, whose decisions were meant to be the definitive and binding rulings on the Judaism of the Empire's Jews. His very right to set the benchmark against which the Judaism of Jews in Britain was to be measured was being viciously challenged by rabbis from Eastern Europe, who, many justifiably, did not feel the need to recognise his authority.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the decision of what many even today consider to be 'the incidental office of the Chief Rabbi'¹⁰⁶ was more likely to have been grounded primarily in politics than Jewish law. And whilst the idea of national Chief Rabbis is not a Jewish concept, and appointments to the post are political, his conclusions were sound and within the boundaries of orthodox Jewish law, at least according to some opinions. Jews, even the priestly Cohanim, regarding whom there exist additional laws such as the prohibition of killing or being near a dead body, are required to fight for their country of residence if called on to do so, even against Jews in the armies of enemy nations.¹⁰⁷ In letters to the J.W.S.C. and to a Captain S. Astell of the 3rd Staffordshire Regiment, Hertz officially expressed this ruling that Cohanim cannot claim exemption from any form of military service, even combatant roles,¹⁰⁸ 'when the safety of the country is at stake.'¹⁰⁹ Yet claims for exemption by (supposed) Cohanim continued until the end of the war, supported by the Leeds Beth Din (rabbinical court).

It is arguable that the Chief Rabbi misunderstood the request of these rabbis, as they were not seeking full exemption for Cohanim, merely non-combatant service to keep them out of the firing line so as not to risk defiling their priestly 'purity'.¹¹⁰ The Chief Rabbi would not relent, and a protest meeting of Cohanim at Ashville House in Leeds condemned him for his ruling based on what they claimed to be a 'misinterpretation of Jewish law', and for not consulting with

¹⁰⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 April 2001

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Rabbi Y.Y. Rubinstein, 28 February 2001

¹⁰⁸ Chief Rabbi to Capt. Astell, 5 June 1916, LMA, ACC/2805/4/4/11

¹⁰⁹ Chief Rabbi to JWSC, 10 March 1916, Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Leeds Beth Din to the Chief Rabbi, 22 March 1916, PML, MS 175 30/4

other rabbis before doing so.¹¹¹ Based on the Chief Rabbi's official judgement, local tribunals summarily dismissed such cases¹¹² and the *Yorkshire Evening News*, reporting the meeting, took pains to point out that at that moment in time, there were 43 officers and 317 volunteers with the name Cohen serving under British Colours.¹¹³

But just because Cohanim could serve in the front line, did not mean that they *should*, and considering the small number involved, the Leeds Beth Din continued its petitions to the Chief Rabbi, but to no avail. The issue was made even more contentious due to the fact that one of the Leeds rabbis, Revd. Michael Abrahams, was not in fact officially recognised as such by the Chief Rabbi's Office. In protest against the Chief Rabbi for not acknowledging the individuals they regarded as having valid claims for exemption as Cohanim or ministers of religion, the Leeds Beth Din, with the support of the majority of congregations in the city, declared itself independent from the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi and assumed full powers to decide all ecclesiastical matters. The Manchester Beth Din very nearly followed suit.¹¹⁴ It is this major incident in Leeds that sparked off the anti-Semitic agitation of 1917.

The official view of 'State Judaism' was that Jews, as Jews, could, and therefore should, serve. Thus there could be no religious basis for conscientious objection. This decision automatically renders those who felt that there were in fact Jewish grounds for abstention, not religious conscientious objectors, but 'shirkers' and cowards. The Leeds Beth Din, whilst under no obligation to recognise the *political* authority of the Chief Rabbi, had no basis in Jewish teaching to disagree with his rulings, even if they were made for the wrong reasons. It was made up of Rabbis from Russia who possessed arguably greater religious knowledge and authority than the Chief Rabbi, and so their dissention could then be based on other factors - reluctance to aid Russia perhaps, the belief that they should not be expected to fulfil the obligations of citizens without benefiting from

¹¹¹ *Yorkshire Evening News*, 26 March 1916, clipping in Papers of the Chief Rabbi, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/2

¹¹² See below, p.43

¹¹³ *Yorkshire Evening News*, 26 March 1916, clipping in Papers of the Chief Rabbi, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/2

¹¹⁴ Papers of the Chief Rabbi, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/9

the rights of citizens, or simply the desire not to risk getting killed, especially in a war that did not hold any Jewish significance.¹¹⁵

One particular issue that caused considerable dispute within the Jewish community was the issue of Jewish ministers. Whilst the Military Service Act of 1916 exempted all officially recognised ministers of religion of all denominations, the Chief Rabbi felt that many non-naturalised Russians saw this as another means of escaping military service. To address this embarrassing problem and defeat what he considered to be bogus claims, he had interviews at the Home Office.¹¹⁶ If a theological student met certain criteria, then the Chief Rabbi would issue him with an official certificate to this effect. The military authorities used these certificates as proof that the bearer was an officially-recognised Jewish minister. Many Russian Jews, 'with little or no claim to be regarded as regular ministers of religion',¹¹⁷ applied for such certificates, and when refused and called up at a later date, they simply maintained that they did not recognise the authority of the Chief Rabbi.¹¹⁸ Whilst it was recognised by one civil servant, the Principal Assistant Secretary at the Home Office, John Peddar, that there was 'some risk in accepting and promoting the Chief Rabbi's claim to a jurisdiction over sections of Jewish religious opinion which do not readily admit it',¹¹⁹ nevertheless, the rulings of the Chief Rabbi's Office were taken as the determining factor at military tribunals.¹²⁰

Only six theological students in training received the Chief Rabbi's approval in obtaining exemption.¹²¹ Not many more ministers were fortunate. One such individual however was Revd. Joshua Beck, even though as only a Reader he did not fulfil any of the three criteria normally required as a minister of religion. Others who

¹¹⁵ It should be remembered that Jewish law is a very complex issue and that there is rarely any consensus of rabbinical opinion. The Chief Rabbi may well have been wrong in his judgement.

¹¹⁶ Interview with the Chief Rabbi at the Home Office, 31 October 1917, PRO HO 45/10819/318095/497 cited in Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, p.59

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *Yorkshire Evening News*, 26 March 1916, clipping in Papers of the Chief Rabbi, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/2

¹¹⁹ Minute of John Peddar, 1 November 1917, PRO HO 45/10819/318095/497 cited in Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, p.60

¹²⁰ See above, p.41

¹²¹ Board of Deputies Minute book, 9 January 1918, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/3

clearly did meet the stipulated requirements, or those who had the backing of the respected Rav Abraham Isaac Kook in Spitalfields, a rabbi of unquestionably greater religious knowledge than Hertz, and later Chief Rabbi of Palestine, were not granted the approval, so that it was necessary for them to be granted exemption by the military tribunals.¹²² This suggests that the Chief Rabbi made at least some of his rulings according to 'political' considerations.

Although 'no Jew ought or can claim exemption qua Jew',¹²³ many presumably felt that the issue of their 'Jewishness', even if it was not a factor for the individual, precluded them in some way from registering themselves as a conscientious objector, and hoped that in the supposedly liberal and tolerant Britain, a religious claim may be accepted.

Conscientious objection

The right to conscientious objection, however, was invoked by 16,000 individuals from 1916 onwards.¹²⁴ The number of Jews amongst them is unknown, and it would be difficult even to estimate, because for many of them, their Jewish identity was irrelevant. Emmanuel Ribeiro was one of these Jews who was opposed to the war on grounds of conscience, and not of religion. His son outlines the reason why he opposed the war, a combination of pacifism and socialist anti-imperialism:

If a man steals something, he faces the threat of punishment. He is taken from his role of father, husband and protector of his wife and family and mostly surrenders to the powers that take away his freedom. No one has yet proved that the theft of food and property is worse than the legal thefts carried out by all the large industrial companies in their operations...No one in his right mind enjoys being exploited but...the service of...[a]

¹²² Papers of the Chief Rabbi, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/2, 9

¹²³ Cited in Cesarani, The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991, p.119

¹²⁴ Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War, p.88

hereditary monarch has become commonplace...Anyone doubting this is considered a terrorist or a fool or a criminal.¹²⁵

He was considered to be a subversive, just like every conscientious objector, but his appalling treatment of 17 months' forced-feeding in Lord Derby's military hospital made him into a cause célèbre. Amongst the signatures on the petition for his release¹²⁶ can be found that of Bertrand Russell, the famous socialist philosopher and founder of the Union for Democratic Control, who himself had encountered great problems by virtue of his pacifism.¹²⁷ It was a well-publicised case, but I have found only one reference to it amongst the Chief Rabbi's correspondence,¹²⁸ though it must have weighed heavily on his mind; here was a British Jew, of British parents, who refused to fight and do his duty for King and country. What made the matter even more complicated, at least from the point of view of the Chief Rabbi, was that there were no pretences to strict adherence to religious observance as was the case in Leeds and Manchester; religion had nothing to do with it – he was an atheist trade unionist, whose only connection to Judaism was through the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue which gave the family charity in the form of second-hand clothes.¹²⁹

But whilst this was the desire and goal of the assimilationist establishment under normal circumstances, that he was identified even in the petition as a Jew, although he had little religious connection, at a time when identity was such a contentious issue, must surely have been the source of much embarrassment and awkwardness for the establishment. All the more so because the Chief Rabbi had no mandate over an unaffiliated Jew who, whilst not claiming exemption on religious grounds, was still given the label of Jew. It should be noted, however, that bitterly opposing their stance on the war did not prevent the Chief Rabbi from mounting a limited

¹²⁵ *Memoirs of Alec Ribeiro*, son of Emmanuel Ribeiro. Unpublished manuscript. Undated, possibly 1975. pp.36-37. My thanks to Bill Williams for the source.

¹²⁶ Facsimile copy of petition presented to David Lloyd George, Prime Minister, to secure the release of Emmanuel Ribeiro from force-feeding in a military hospital. Undated, but around July 1917. My thanks to Bill Williams for the source.

¹²⁷ Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: a Political Life*, pp.191-195

¹²⁸ Mrs. Ribeiro to the Chief Rabbi, 25 September 1917, requesting that her husband not be fed during the Day of Atonement when one is obligated to fast. LMA, ACC/2805/4/4/3

¹²⁹ *Memoirs of Alec Ribeiro*, p.29

campaign on behalf of religious interned conscientious objectors such as those at Princetown in Dartmoor, to get Saturdays and Jewish Holidays, and facilities for religious observance.

If the Ribeiro issue was one of great concern because of his being labelled as a Jew, then the case of the Revd. John Harris, an orthodox minister in Liverpool, must have caused even more anguish. Unfortunately for the Jewish leadership, religious objection was a (misguided) belief not held exclusively by many immigrant Russians, but this important case has received only cursory treatment.¹³⁰ 'If he [a Jew] fights in the war of any other nation, it is because of the decree of his country, and he fights not so much for the justice of the cause, but because of his duty as a citizen and to bear his share of national suffering.'¹³¹ One of the rights of citizens, however, is the right to conscientious objection, and Wassilevsky, consciously or not, has tried to apply the idea of the 'liberal compromise' at a time when notions of identity were being stretched to their limits. The Harris case is fundamental to the understanding of the breadth of Jewish response because he sought to put the theory into practice, and was arguably the first person to argue that Jews should have the same rights as Christians to lodge a conscientious objection.¹³²

The problem lay in the fact that the principle of conscientious objection was not originally pacifist, but religious objection to compulsory vaccination against smallpox. Thus to prove genuine opposition to the war on grounds of conscience, an individual had to secure a testimonial from a recognised religious minister.¹³³ But as we have seen, the Chief Rabbi and the Jewish establishment had the monopoly in deciding who was a recognised minister, and ruled that there were no religious grounds for holding such a position anyway. Wilcock rightly recognises that the issue of religious objection caused great difficulty for the Jewish leadership, but claims that the Chief Rabbi, refusing to acknowledge its existence, was 'unable'¹³⁴ to

¹³⁰ See Wilcock, Evelyn, *The Revd. John Harris: Issues in Anglo-Jewish Pacifism 1914-18*, Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, vol. XXX, 1987-88, pp. 163-177

¹³¹ Wassilevsky, Jewish Refugees and Military Service, p.3

¹³² Wilcock, *The Revd. John Harris: Issues in Anglo-Jewish Pacifism 1914-18*, p. 163

¹³³ Ibid. p.165

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.166

recognise any religious basis for Jewish pacifism. In the latter respect, Wilcock has missed the point; though it was undoubtedly a politically motivated move by Hertz, pacifism has no grounding in Jewish law, even if Hertz was not necessarily the most competent religious authority.

A Jew could not be a conscientious objector.¹³⁵ But John Harris, as a minister of religion, openly vouched for individuals appearing before tribunals as conscientious objectors,¹³⁶ in defiance of his establishment congregation that eventually sacked him. But he confidently did so as an Englishman citing his personal religious beliefs, daring, unlike the majority of his contemporaries, to exercise one of the rights given to citizens. For this he received the support of the *Jewish Chronicle* and Rabbi Dr. Moses Gaster, leader of the Sephardi Jewish community, both noted advocates of positive Jewish involvement in the war.¹³⁷

All these arguments and explanations seem to ignore the fact that many Jews, not just those of Russian birth, just like many individuals in wider society, simply did not want to die. Mark Levene suggests that running away to avoid service as opposed to declaring oneself as a conscientious objector illustrates the difference between the responses of the immigrant Jew and the (partly) Anglicised Jew who was able to base his opinion in English pacifist tradition, citing the example of many of those in Isaac Rosenberg's circle who avoided the army.¹³⁸ But I would argue that in many circumstances, this was simply irrelevant. Arnold Harris, for example, was born into a religious family, but while not eschewing his religious observance, had developed leftist and Zionist leanings. Yet he did not portray himself as a pacifist: 'I had made up my mind that I would not surrender to the call-up, not for ideological reasons, but out of plain

¹³⁵ The implication is that for the observant Jews who continued to practice their beliefs in detention could not admit to being pacifists, for fear of jeopardising any religious facilities they may have enjoyed.

¹³⁶ *Jewish World*, 15 March 1916, cited in Banister, Joseph, ed., Our Hyphenated Citizens, London, 1916. A pamphlet consisting of anti-alien and anti-Semitic newspaper articles. PML, MS 185/AJ 320/2/3,

¹³⁷ Wilcock, *The Revd. John Harris: Issues in Anglo-Jewish Pacifism 1914-18*, p.170-171

¹³⁸ Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.83

fear.' Neither did he apply to join the Judeans.¹³⁹ Similarly, eighteen Jews from Leeds were caught after having attempted to evade the draft by fleeing to Ireland where conscription had not been introduced.¹⁴⁰ Whilst up to 3,000 Russians returned during the Revolution, the majority stayed in Britain¹⁴¹ in an effort not to serve anywhere.

Attempts to avoid service were also made by those already under orders: a 2nd Airman A. Blaskey feigned both physical and mental illness, despite being certified as healthy by six doctors.¹⁴² The poet Siegfried Sassoon describes his conversion to pacifism after having experience front-line duty,¹⁴³ and it should not be surprising that many such as Jack Copeland, applied to the Judeans because there was less chance of getting killed in Palestine than in France.¹⁴⁴

It should also not be ruled out of hand that there were certain Russian Jews who were happy to take advantage of the domestic situation by profiteering, but few historians, not even Colin Holmes who suggests that many were simply shirking,¹⁴⁵ are brave enough to admit that.¹⁴⁶

Responses to objection

In April 1917, the Board of Deputies expressed its official 'deep and heartfelt joy at the revolution which has liberated the Russian nation and with it Jewish citizens.'¹⁴⁷ The British government also believed that the problem of these Russian immigrants not serving

¹³⁹ Cited in Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.79-80. See below, p.52

¹⁴⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, 30 March 1916, cited in Banister, ed., Our Hyphenated Citizens, PML, MS 185/AJ 320/2/3,

¹⁴¹ Kaddish, Bolsheviks and British Jews. The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution, p.216

¹⁴² Second Lieutenant G. Blake, Air Adjutant, Airplane Repair Section, No. 1 Southern Aircraft Repair Depot to JWSC, 30 April 1918, LMA, ACC 2805/4/4/1

¹⁴³ Sassoon, Siegfried, Sherston's Progress, Penguin, London, 1948 edition

¹⁴⁴ MJM, Oral testimony of Jack Copeland, J71; see also Kosmin, Waterman, Grizzard, *The Jewish Dead in the Great War as an Indicator for the Location, Size and Social Structure of Anglo-Jewry* p.185

¹⁴⁵ Holmes, Anti-Semitism in British Society, p.127

¹⁴⁶ Bayme, Jewish Leadership and Anti-Semitism in Britain, p.25; see also, Holmes, Colin, John Bull's Island, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988, p. 105

¹⁴⁷ Board of Deputies Minute book, April 1917, LMA, ACC2805/4/4/3

would be solved, now that the Russian Revolution had removed the despotic Tsar. In this vein, a public campaign led by local politicians and press in East London and the Bethnal Green military tribunal, was launched to advise the 'friendly' aliens that they would either be conscripted or deported.¹⁴⁸ Despite the efforts of the JWSC to avert anti-Semitism by recruitment, there still remained a large body of Jews who were not serving, resulting in anti-Jewish disturbances in Leeds in June and Bethnal Green in September,¹⁴⁹ which marked the peak of anti-alien hysteria. The government was forced into two partly contradictory strategies to address the problem.

The first move was a hastily-concluded agreement with the new government in Russia, headed by Kerensky. The Anglo-Russian Convention on Military Service was signed in March 1917 and finally implemented by an Order in Council in August. It imposed a mutual liability to military service on Russian subjects in Britain (and vice versa), bringing these formerly immune Russian Jews within the Military Service Act of 1916 that applied to British subjects.¹⁵⁰ It even conferred upon them the right to conscientious objection, a right that was effectively useless, as we have seen. It should be noted that in practice too, these Russians were not to be considered as equals of British soldiers – they were prevented from seeking commissions, and the majority ended up humiliated in labour battalions,¹⁵¹ to the disappointment of the Anglo-Jewish establishment. Initially, however, naturalisation was not offered, and when it was, it was still subject to requirement of 3 months residence and a certain level of English.¹⁵²

But the British government was wrong in assuming that the Russian Revolutions would be the answer to the hesitancy of the Russian immigrant Jews. This was to become apparent after the Bolshevik seizure power during the second Russian Revolution in November 1917 and the subsequent end of Russian participation in the war at Brest-Litovsk, when the situation in Britain deteriorated.

¹⁴⁸ Kaddish, Bolsheviks and British Jews. The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution, p.47

¹⁴⁹ Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.74

¹⁵⁰ See Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, pp.327-329, for a transcript of the Military Service (Convention with Allied States) Act, 1917

¹⁵¹ Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.74

¹⁵² Cesarani, *An Embattled Minority*, p.69

The essentially domestic issue for which the Anglo-Russian Military Convention had been negotiated were rapidly becoming a source of international conflict and embarrassment. The Russian army was being demobilised and conscription in Russia had stopped. The British government had no choice but to stop applying the agreement to the citizens of the new Russian regime, thus letting off again all the Russian Jews who has previously been guarded from compulsion before 1916.¹⁵³ In Manchester, for example, 350-400 Russians had their police summonses for absenteeism withdrawn.¹⁵⁴ If the War Office felt that 'that there were about 25,000 of these Russians of military age in this country, of whom only about 4,000 had...been called up...[and] that a majority of the remaining East End Jews...were only anxious to make profits',¹⁵⁵ the Anglo-Jewish leadership must have had their fears renewed.

Opponents of the coercion of Russian Jewish immigrants pressed upon the government an alternative, that of the Jewish legion. Even before the February Revolution, the government had surprised the Jewish community by announcing its intentions to create an all-Jewish regiment. The whole story of its creation is set out in the book¹⁵⁶ by who was to become the Commander of the 38th Royal Fusiliers, Lieutenant-Colonel John Patterson, so it is necessary to give only a brief overview here.

The idea of an all-immigrant unit as a means to overcome the reluctance of foreign-born Jews to serve was first mooted by an eccentric English Jew, Captain Webber, but met nothing but fierce opposition from the Anglo-Jewish establishment. Both Revd. Adler and Edmund Sebag-Montefiore opposed the idea on the grounds that it would imply that Jews were reluctant to serve in regular units for fear of anti-Semitism or out of a greater attachment to other Jews. If prejudice existed, then Jews had to serve across the Armed Forces, not as part of a 'ghetto regiment,' in order to refute any notion of a

¹⁵³Maxim Litvinoff, Provisional Plenipotentiary for Great Britain of the Russian peoples' Commissary for Foreign Affairs, to Arthur Balfour, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 31 January 1918, PRO HO 45/10819/318095/558, cited in Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920, p.336

¹⁵⁴ Unidentifiable newspaper clipping in Minute book of the FJPC, Manchester, MCL, M239/2

¹⁵⁵ Minutes of a meeting of the War Cabinet, 23 January 1918, PRO Cab. 23/5 WC 329 (12), cited in Englander, ed., A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920. p.334

¹⁵⁶ Patterson, With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign,

Jewish 'bond'.¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, what the establishment failed or refused to realise was that prejudice did exist, and that it was not the main reason for the unwillingness to fight.

Greenberg was the only one to defend such a proposal, based on the very idea of a Jewish bond, because it would encourage Jewish service and therefore avert anti-Semitism. A Jewish unit was justifiable along the same lines as the Pals' Brigades that were being formed at the time.¹⁵⁸

The idea resurfaced in June 1916 due to the efforts of the Russian journalist, Zionist and organiser of the Zion Mule Corps,¹⁵⁹ Vladimir Jabotinsky. This issue was just as divisive when the War Office finally took it up at the end of July 1917, but debates raged over its purpose and the question of insignia. *The Times*, bastion of the English establishment, was surprisingly in favour of a specific Jewish identity for the Jewish regiment from the outset, and decried Lord Derby for dangling it as a carrot as an incentive for good service: 'The raison d'être of a Jewish Regiment is that it should be thoroughly Jewish, and therefore needs an identity to appeal to Jews,'¹⁶⁰ but the Zionist Greenberg argued that a Jewish soldier wears uniform as a soldier, not as a Jew.¹⁶¹ The unit ended up as the 38th to 40th Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers, destined for service in Palestine.

For many, even the idea of a Jewish regiment, even if directed for a specifically Jewish purpose in Palestine, could not induce them to service. The constitution of the Manchester branch of the FJPC sets out their 'emphatic protest against the formation of a Jewish regiment,' a copy of which was duly sent out to the Prime Minister Lloyd George, Lord Derby, Neville Laski of the Board of Deputies and the press.¹⁶² Additionally, no more than 1,500 immigrant British-domiciled Jews served with the Judeans.¹⁶³ This seems to suggest

¹⁵⁷ Cesarani, *An Embattled Minority*, p.70

¹⁵⁸ See Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, pp.29-33

¹⁵⁹ See particularly Sugarman, Martin, *The Zion Muleteers*, in *The Military Advisor*, summer 1996, pp.24-31

¹⁶⁰ *The Times*, 13 September 1917, clipping in papers of the Jewish Recruitment Committee (JRC), LMA, ACC/2805/4/4/6

¹⁶¹ Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914-19*, p.146

¹⁶² Minute book of the FJPC, Manchester, 16 August 1917, p.12, MCL, M239/2

¹⁶³ Jabotinsky, Vladimir, *The Jewish Units in the War*, in Adler, ed., *The British Jewry Book of Honour*, pp.59-65

that Zionism was much weaker an ideology than Jabotinsky and Weizmann had led the government to believe, much to the anger of the staunch anti-Zionist Wolf whose closeness with the government they had usurped, and that they took advantage of the British government during a crucial phase in the war. Despite the objection felt by the establishment as a whole towards a separate Jewish unit, it had become official government policy, and so the Jewish leadership was forced to support it like good loyal citizens. The establishment hijacked the whole project in an attempt to make it into part of the positive story of glorious war service.¹⁶⁴ Neither did its existence end the debate concerning conscientious objectors.

Objection to the war and military service, particularly, but not exclusively from the non-naturalised Eastern European immigrants was much more complicated than assumed at the time and caused severe disputes within the Jewish community. In my conclusion, I will seek to put the issues in the wider context of the notion of Anglo-Jewish identity.

Conclusion

*By this record of patriotism and sacrifice [the Book of Honour], British Jewry will be judged in the years to come, and there need be no fear as to the verdict that will be pronounced. For the Jew of the British Empire has risen to the height of his opportunity during the greatest crisis in the history of England, and side by side with his compatriots of all other creeds and nationalities has materially contributed to the victory of the cause of the Allies.*¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ For a list of all committee members, see The Jewish Regiment Committee: August 1917 to August 1919, Cromack, London, 1919, PML, MS 185/AJ 320/2/2

¹⁶⁵ Adler, ed., The British Jewry Book of Honour, p.27

I have hopefully shown that this 'official' assessment of Jewish service is more than slightly misleading and too simplistic. Even in terms of figures, the truth is less impressive still: of an estimated 30,000 Russian Jews of military age, only 8,000 are known to have served in military units, and no more than 1,500 with the Judeans. For the 10,000 who voluntarily signed up before conscription was introduced in 1916, there were twice as many who did not, either by choice or a luckily low medical grading and a further 30,000 who were compelled by law to serve.¹⁶⁶

In Great Britain, 5 million men had been under arms, and many more had worked in essential production. 'It was a war in which popular participation in the war effort not only was for the first time the critical condition of victory, but was felt to be so by politicians, civil servants, Trade Unions and the press.'¹⁶⁷ But it can be seen from the reaction of the establishment and Anglicised Anglo-Jewish community that popular participation, to sections of society, namely minorities, meant more than just victory for the nation; it would mean, hopefully, victory for the community. It was essential to be seen to be instrumental and essential in helping bring about a success in the war, to prove their loyalty as citizens, as full, true citizens of the British Empire, for what it was worth, and to thereby make concrete their place in society as such. It was of paramount importance for the Anglo-Jewish establishment to make the Jewish community of Britain worthy of living in the 'land fit for heroes' that was promised after the war.

Many anglicised Jews of Britain sought to do their duty to King and to the country. Others, against a background of feverish jingoism and xenophobia, sought to avert anti-Semitism. For those that did not serve for these reasons, such as Isaac Rosenberg, or the 700 Russians who attested under the Derby scheme,¹⁶⁸ the Jewish establishment at least gave the impression that they were motivated, if not by patriotism, at least out of gratitude to the country that had given them refuge. Efforts were made to publicise the glorious

¹⁶⁶ Levene, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.71

¹⁶⁷ Abraham, Philip, *The Failure of Social Reform: 1918-20* in Past and Present no. 24, April 1963, pp. 43-64 p.46

¹⁶⁸ See above, p.33

contribution of Britain's Jews and every possible action was taken such as the liberal interpretation of religious law. It was important not to make waves; a dispute between Revd. Adler and the Jewish chaplain to ANZAC troops in which the Revd. David Freeman suggests that Adler and the English establishment were not in fact doing enough to attend to the religious well being of the British troops, illustrates this point.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the Board of Deputies, in a letter to the Chief Rabbi, stated its belief that in light of the adverse press coverage of conscientious objectors, it would not object to the moves by the Home Office to cancel leave for them, even for Jewish holidays. This acquiescence by the Board to what amounted to religious persecution was justified on the grounds that such individuals were 'offenders against the law, having been subject to court-martials.'¹⁷⁰ No effort was made to transfer some concerned conscientious objectors at Princetown to a camp where better facilities were provided for religious observance, even though some Catholic objectors had been successful in a similar claim to the authorities.¹⁷¹

What was hoped by the Anglo-Jewish leadership to end the anti-Semitic accusations, conscription created as many problems as it solved. Whilst forcing British Jewish citizens into uniform, it brought to the surface a very embarrassing truth; whilst there were many Jews who were previously unable to enlist, there were a significant number who, now that the choice had been removed, refused to do so in defiance of the law. But whilst non-Jews had the right to oppose the conflict under the title of 'conscientious objection', this was a right denied to Jews by their own leaders. Two issues emerged from the existence of Jewish anti-war feeling; that of the previously unchallenged hegemony of the Chief Rabbi, and that of Jewish identity. In a broader context, the latter is more important.

A Jew could seek exemption as a citizen, but not as a Jewish believer.¹⁷² Whilst legally this seemed to have been the case, the controversy surrounding the Revd. John Harris and Emmanuel Ribeiro

¹⁶⁹ Papers of the Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz, PML, MS 175 30/2

¹⁷⁰ Board of Deputies to the Chief Rabbi, 13 September 1917, LMA, ACC2805/4/4/3

¹⁷¹ A committee of 24 conscientious objectors at Princetown work camp to the Chief Rabbi, 18 November 1917, LMA, ACC2805/4/4/3

¹⁷² Cesarani, *An Embattled Minority*, p.66

suggests that Jews could not even seek exemption as citizens *because* they were Jewish. That Ribeiro was prepared to endure his horrific treatment – if he was prepared to die by starvation - rather than take up arms and fight, he proved beyond doubt that he must have been a genuine conscientious objector, and not someone shirking his duty under the law. Both individuals had attempted to act as emancipated citizens, but they were treated not as citizens, but as Jews, which added to the fear of, if not inspiring, the actual manifestation of anti-Semitism.

Emancipation was a double-edged sword. Whilst it guaranteed political and legal equality, the price was that Jews should stop being Jews. They were to disappear into English society. At worst, they were to become Englishmen of the Jewish faith. In theory, anti-Semitism would then also disappear. But what political emancipation could not do was end such prejudice in reality even when Jews had eschewed their 'Jewishness'. In the words of Tony Kushner:

Anti-Semitism was seen as being incompatible with liberalism; the former's survival was viewed as the Jews' own fault. Thus in ... war, the government refused publicly to admit the existence of anti-Semitism and therefore was unable to deal effectively with ... hostility to Jews. Its failure to differentiate between forms of anti-Semitism ... was a reflection of the inability of liberalism to deal with the problem of those who did not regard Jews as 'nationals of a different religion'.¹⁷³

Although Kushner is referring to the Second World War, his insight remains valid for the Great War. Indeed, if these problems still existed twenty years after the Great War ended, then it is clear that the image fostered of impressive Jewish involvement had achieved nothing. There was no need for the anglicised establishment's desperate attempts to 'prove' the loyalty of Jews. Nothing they could do, it seemed, could change the perception that Jews would remain the outsiders. Neither did Jewish participation dispel the myth that Jews, *as a collective*, were cowardly and weak.

¹⁷³ Kushner, Tony, The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society During the Second World War, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989, p.161

But maybe their efforts were insufficient in both getting Jews to serve and in publicising their service, and that the war did have the potential to be the start of a glorious new chapter in the history of Anglo-Jewry. Given the extreme efforts taken to ward off anti-Semitism, to the point of almost denying the religious facet of Jewish identity, this is unlikely. Anti-Semitism continued throughout the war. Gentile society continued to view the Jews as a separate collective. The 'liberal compromise' was shown to be meaningless.

Leopold Greenberg realised this in 1908. In January of that year, he urged the Board of Deputies to press for the repeal of the 1905 Aliens Act. What he wrote sums up the whole issue of Jewish identity in Britain, and the futile actions of the Anglo-Jewish leadership:

The political emancipation of Jews in England is reduced to a sham when its representative body feels that, because an Act specifically affects Jews, Jews must put up with it – with bated breath and whispering humbleness proclaim sufferance to be the badge of our tribe – when Jews feel that they may not do what every citizen in the land jealously cherishes the inalienable right to do – to protest against it and to appeal for its removal.¹⁷⁴

In this sense, the maverick Greenberg was very similar in outlook to the Reverend John Harris in Liverpool. Both had realised, consciously or subconsciously, the paradox in the actions and outlook of the Anglo-Jewish leadership – by keeping a low profile and not making any waves, to the point of near subservience, they themselves, by not taking advantage of the political emancipation that they had achieved in the previous century, were undoing all that had been achieved on paper. By their refusal to make a stand on issues that they undoubtedly all realised did affect them specifically as Jews, such as the Aliens Act in 1905, or, later on, the war, conscription and internment of co-religionist aliens, they were merely serving to shackle themselves in the very chains from which they had struggled to free themselves. Surely then, it was preferable that

¹⁷⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 January 1908, quoted in Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry*, p.111

their subservience was self-imposed rather than dictated by an outside force.

In this sense, it could be argued that by 1914, Anglo-Jewry as a collective, with the exception of a few individuals, had not achieved full emancipation. The actions of the more-English-than-the-English leadership during the war did not further the cause of complete acceptance that they were trying to pursue.

Benedict Anderson discusses the concept of an 'imagined community'.¹⁷⁵ Sense of nationality and belonging, he argues, is based on the individual imagining that he/she is part of some wider community of people with whom they feel they have things in common. Part of the positive reaction to military service, and the Anglo-Jewish establishment's reaction to the negative response to it illustrated that the 'liberal compromise' had failed. For all their efforts, Jews, both alien and English, were repaid with hostility. They were not part of the British imagined community, even if they considered themselves to be.¹⁷⁶

This proved to the Zionists such as Weizmann and Jabotinsky what they had believed all along - that Jews could only be free from prejudice in a country of their own. Zionism, they claimed, was the answer to the 'Jewish question', not emancipation. Zionism was the solution to anti-Semitism, not its cause.

However, Jabotinsky used Britain's chronic shortage of manpower to turn the situation to his and the Zionist advantage to secure a Jewish fighting unit dedicated for a Zionist/Jewish purpose, and the 'Balfour Declaration' of November 1917.¹⁷⁷ That the Jewish battalion received such limited support suggests that not only was

¹⁷⁵ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1991 edition

¹⁷⁶ At the first 'national' commemoration of British war service, held at the Cenotaph in 1919, Russian Jews were excluded from the parade. Risking death for Britain did not mean civil acceptance. Levene, Mark, *Going Against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18*, p.89

¹⁷⁷ The British had no real sympathies towards Zionism, especially the pro-Arab EEF Command. Now that now that Britain was at war with the Ottoman Empire, it was necessary to install a friendly regime in Palestine to safeguard British interests in Egypt. I believe that if Turkey had not sided with Germany and declared war, there would not have been a Balfour Declaration and even though there may have been a Jewish Battalion given the shortage of manpower, they might not have been dedicated to the Palestine campaign, despite Jabotinsky's insistence that that would guarantee a favourable response.

Zionism not as strong as its leaders have made out, but that (Russian) Jews were determined to keep out of the army.

Jews in Britain were stranded between many conflicting notions of identity and allegiance that affected their outlook. Placing the Jews of Britain into the traditional assimilationist/Zionist, rich/poor, English/alien categories in terms of identity is sufficient when discussing Anglo-Jewry before 1914. But the war, and military service in particular, raised many complicated questions that render obsolete these labels. This simple dichotomy is no longer helpful: some anglicised establishment Jews opposed the war; some poor Eastern European immigrants supported it; some Zionists objected to the idea of a Jewish battalion and refused to fight in it. Responses to military service were based on a multitude of issues that affected each individual in different circumstances in a different way. It is difficult to assign categories to the variety of opinions that were prevalent at the time any more specific than pro- and anti-war, but given the highly individualistic factors that determined the response to military service, even these labels will not always be helpful.

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