

## 2015: How did European states manage relations with the Jewish community during the period 1871-1914?

‘Down with Judas!’ chanted the French crowd in the midst of the Dreyfus Affair, an event which captured the rising antisemitism in Europe from 1871-1914. This essay will examine the relations with the Jewish community in France and Russia during this period. It will firstly examine France, with particular attention to the Dreyfus Affair, followed with Russia with regard to Pobedonostev, pogroms, and the Beiliss Affair.

Prior to 1870, antisemitism had existed in France but not to a large public extent. However, France was experiencing shocks to national morale as it rebuilt from the Franco-Prussian war, creating societal tensions. Furthermore, historian Robert Guildea states that the military was highly present in everyday life, and its parades were a source of pride for many French people. This gave the military high influence of society and distrust of those it deemed enemies. At this time, Eduoard Drumont also ran “La France Juive” which spread antisemitic content based on false ideas of the Jewish community. When the French Bank went bankrupt in the 1870s, many Jewish financiers suffered the brunt of the blame. Thus, this loss of pride, high presence of the military in daily life, and growing tensions contributed to French antisemitism, encapsulated in the Dreyfus Affair.

The Affair was also preceded by the Panama Scandal, which further fuelled antisemitism in France. When the canal suffered financial losses, 750,000 small investors lost their life savings. It later emerged that Jewish bankers had been involved in bribing police to avoid news of the scandal going public. Similarly to the collapse of the French Bank, this fuelled antisemitism and distrust. This was linked with the false idea of a Jewish conspiracy, with its roots in historic antisemitism going back to the medieval myth of ‘blood libel’ which had been used as an excuse for discrimination against the Jewish community.

Antisemitism in France came to a head with the Dreyfus Affair, which lasted over a decade and led to deep division in society, particularly with regard to the military. Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish soldier from Alsace who had worked his way up the military ranks. However, he was accused of selling

military secrets to the Germans and found guilty, despite a lack of strong evidence against him. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island, with his badges removed and his sword ceremoniously broken as the crowd shouted 'down with Judas'. The case drew great attention and highlighted French distrust of the Jewish community, as well as a lack of fair legal and societal treatment.

However, even after Dreyfus had been sent to Devil's Island, military secrets continued to be leaked. Colonel Picquart discovered that the handwriting in "Dreyfus" letters/memoranda actually belonged to Major Esterhazy. Rumours began to fly in the press, however the military maintained they had evidence that proved Dreyfus' guilt, they just couldn't share it. Esterhazy was found not guilty, and Picquart was dismissed. Yet, to many, this seemed like a continued disgrace and injustice against Dreyfus.

In response, writer Emile Zola wrote "J'Accuse" in which he called out the actions of the military and establishment. To the President, he wrote "but what filth this wretched Dreyfus Affair has cast [on you]." This was a clear demonstration of the growing tensions around the Affair, and the feeling of the presence of injustice. Zola was accused of libel and forced to flee to England, as tensions continued to grow.

The case was reopened again in 1899. By this point, Dreyfus had lost the ability to speak, forbidden to talk to his guards and able only to see the sky. The military came forward with evidence that "proved" Dreyfus' guilt. However it then emerged that the letters were a forgery by Colonel Hubert-Joseph Henry, who then took his own life. Colonel Henry became a "martyr" figure for those who opposed Dreyfus, and those who supported Dreyfus viewed the development as an antisemitic farce. In spite of this, Dreyfus was found guilty again and returned to Devil's Island.

Dreyfus was eventually pardoned in 1906. The impact of the Dreyfus Affair on French society and relationships with the Jewish community continued to be felt. Society was divided in two: Dreyfusards and Anti-Dreyfusards. Anti-Dreyfusards consisted of monarchists, the Catholic Church, and the military. They disliked the new Republic, and distrusted the Jewish community. Dreyfusards were much more liberal, and wanted to republicanise the military. Eventually, pro-Dreyfus moderates gained power, seeking to modernise the Republic. The Dreyfus Affair was emblematic of wider issues of antisemitism, highlighting prejudice, corruption and distrust and is a key example of poor handling of relationships with the Jewish community by France at the time.

Antisemitism was also visible in France through Action Française, established during the Dreyfus Affair. It was established by Charles Maurras, and wrote antisemitic articles, stirring up hatred in France. In WWII after the fall of Vichy, the Action Française was outlawed and Maurras was sentenced to life imprisonment. However, similarly to “La France Juive” it demonstrated strong and hateful antisemitism in France during this period.

On the other side of Europe, relationships with the Jewish community were managed extremely poorly in Russia from 1871-1914. At this time, the majority of Jews in Russia lived in the rural “Pale of Settlement”, far from cities and opportunities. Antisemitism was strongly present, and saw a rise with the involvement of a Jewish girl in an attempted assassination of Alexander II. The Tsar brought in Konstantin Pobedonostev as his advisor, who stated “one-third must assimilate, one-third must emigrate, and one-third must die”. This led to a series of discriminatory laws against Jews in Russia.

The laws introduced directly discriminated against the Jewish community in a number of ways. They were forbidden to live in rural areas, even the Pale of Settlement. Quotas were introduced in schools and universities to limit the number of Jewish people accepted. They were banned from practicing at the bar or as doctors. Their right to vote in local elections was also rescinded. This showed a discriminatory handling of relationships of the Jewish community,

Antisemitism in Russia was also visible through the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” and through pogroms. The “Protocols” were produced by police in St. Petersburg and claimed to be proof of a global Jewish conspiracy. The documents were proven to be false, but found their way to Vienna to a young Adolf Hitler and further stirred antisemitic sentiment. Pogroms were attacks on Jewish communities, often encouraged by the Tsars and aided by the police. Pogroms occurred in 100 areas following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, often started by or ignored by the police force. The Jewish community also received blame for the 1905 October Revolution, led by Christian Orthodox priest Father Gapon. Pogroms occurred in many areas following this, leading to many deaths and 100,000 Jewish people being forcibly removed from their homes. This fuelled antisemitism, and was a visual demonstration of the hate and discrimination present.

Another example of the poor handling of relationships with the Jewish community was the Beiliss Affair. When a young boy was found dead, Jewish man Mendel Beiliss was accused. At the boy’s funeral, the antisemitic group the Black Hundreds handed out leaflets claiming it had been a ritualistic

killing- rooted in the false idea of Jewish 'blood libel'. After a lengthy legal process, Beiliss was acquitted due to a lack of evidence, and the trial sparked international criticism of antisemitism in the Russian Empire.

In conclusion, the period 1871-1914 saw rising antisemitism and poor handling of relationships with the Jewish community in France and Russia. France, facing damaged national pride and growing antisemitism, was divided by the Dreyfus Affair and hate was stirred by publications such as "La France Juive" and "Action Française". In Russia, the Jewish community faced a series of discriminatory laws, violence and injustices such as the Beiliss Affair. This period saw 200,000 Jewish people flee Russia.