

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Voline
Pogrom
1934

Retrieved on 24th September 2020 from
<https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/voline/pogrom.htm>
Originally published in the *Encyclopédie anarchiste*. Paris,
Librairie Internationale, 1934. Translated by Mitchell Abidor.

theanarchistlibrary.org

Pogrom

Voline

1934

Pogrom, noun, masculine.

Word directly adopted with a precise and even a special meaning by other languages, and in particular French.

Philologically the word pogrom is composed of the root “grom” and the prefix “po.” (Note in this respect that the word “progrom,” frequently employed by the French press in the place and with the meaning of pogrom is an error, a mutilation of the real term. The word “progrom” has no meaning, the prefix “pro” in Russian having a meaning that cannot be adapted to the root “grom.” The word “progrom” is thus non-existent.) Using the root “grom” the Russian language forms the verb “gromit” which means to devastate, sack, massacre. Taking that same root “grom” and adding the prefix “po” we get the noun “pogrom,” which means the act of devastating, sacking, massacring. (Adding to the same root “grom” another Russian prefix “raz” we obtain another noun, “razgrom,” which also means devastation, ruin. But while the word “razgrom,” aside from its special meaning of military debacle, means a purely material devastation or disorder, provoked by natural or unavoidable forces, the term “pogrom” clearly means an act of sacking or massacre that is conscious, voluntary, and premeditated rather than spontaneous,

carried out by several people with the goal of devastating, sacking, destroying, pillaging, harming, assassinating, or massacring.)

We thus mean by pogrom, in the general meaning of the term, every voluntary act of more or less serious devastation or destruction of material values as well as human life; an insane savage act carried out by several people, or rather an unleashed mob pushed to this crime by blind hatred and anger, by a nearly pathological thirst for vengeance, violence, blood.

But if we used this term only in its general meaning there would be no reason for it to be borrowed from Russian by foreign languages. The word massacre, for example, would largely suffice in the French language. And in fact, all the “pogroms” that have taken place throughout history, in France and in other countries, religious, political, and other pogroms, are qualified as massacres in French.

In borrowing the word pogrom from the Russian language the aim was to designate something completely special, something specifically Russian. In fact, in Russian the word pogrom signifies, aside from its general meaning, especially and above all a mass massacre of Jews. Massacres of this kind: pogroms, periodically took place in Russia from the end of the nineteenth century until the fall of Tsarism, and even beyond. And it was in this specific sense that the word pogrom was adopted by foreign languages. Struck by the monstrosity of such proceedings in the heart of the twentieth century, carried away by a feeling of repulsion against such abominations, the peoples of other countries took the habit of calling these horrors by their original name.

The reader will find more detail on pogroms in the entry [in the “Encyclopédie anarchiste”] for “Anti-Semitism.” We will complete it here.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century tsarist absolutism began to be increasingly seriously threatened by all kinds of revolutionary and popular movements, the natural consequences of a

Jews:” this appreciation is current in the USSR. It is thus possible that in the hurricane of the fight and in an access of hatred the entire Jewish population will become the object of the hatred of the unleashed mob. We can only hope that the working masses will again find within themselves enough good sense, will, and strength to not allow a salutary movement against the true oppressors degenerate into a new Massacre of the Innocents.

revolting political oppression and the horrible material and moral situation of the working masses.

In order to face down these movements the government found nothing better than to resort to the tried and true recipe, notably, increasingly severe repression along with the canalization of popular discontent towards manifestations less dangerous for the regime. In order to do this the government did not hesitate to exploit the credulity, the ignorance, and the religious prejudices of the masses, as well as appealing to the lowest instincts of the “human animal” so as to place responsibility for all misfortunes on the Jews and to orient the people’s anger in their direction. The governmental and right thinking newspapers carried out systematic propaganda against the Jews. They were accused of treason, of anti-national plots, of all possible crimes and vices. And from time to time they sent out against them groups recruited from the lower deaths of the police and the unemployed elements of the cities. We must hasten to say that the real working population remained more or less foreign to these acts of savagery and that the proletariat of the cities often organized the defense of the Jewish population against those who carried out the massacres. As for the police, even when they didn’t directly lead the massacres they prepared them behind the scenes. Closing their eyes to what was happening they only intervened when the events threatened to go beyond the pre-established framework and take on “exaggerated” dimensions.

What happened during “non-exaggerated” pogroms surpasses in horror anything that could be imagined. Apartments, sometimes even entire houses sacked; property stolen and carried away with the savage cries of triumphant beasts; men killed en masse with unheard of cruelty; women attacked and disemboweled amidst the ruins; children seized and skewered on sabers or crushed against walls. And little distinction was made between wealthy Jews and the poor Jewish working population. The detailed descriptions of certain large-scale Jewish pogroms, descriptions made by eyewitness-

nesses, produce a terrifying impression, to such a point that it is impossible to read them through in one sitting. And as for those who had the misfortune to be the victims of a pogrom, or to have witnessed one, they more often than not lost their reason. We must add that precise, certified documentation concerning pogroms is abundant, both in Russia and in other countries.

It was especially in the first years of the twentieth century, along with the growth of popular discontent against the absolutist system, that pogroms took on a certain periodicity and appeared in a virtual series. These are the principal ones: Odessa in October 1905; Kiev, October 1905; Tomsk, October 1905; Gomel, January 1906; Bialystok, June 1906; Kishinev, several pogroms in 1905 and 1906;. The victims of these large-scale pogroms can be counted in the hundreds, sometimes in the thousands. And aside from these large-scale pogroms there were dozens of lesser importance. After 1906 the wave of pogroms fell as if by magic, the government feeling itself to be more secure after having smashed the revolution of 1905.

The revolution of 1917 and the fall of tsarism did not bring the practice of pogroms to a complete end. Wherever counter-revolutionary elements momentarily got the upper hand (the Petliura, Denikin, Wrangel, and Gregoriev movements, among others) Jewish pogroms started up again, on the orders of or at the very least under the benevolent eyes of the leaders, who sought to in this way obtain popularity and to flatter the unhealthy instincts of the masses they depended on.

Can we at least say that currently pogroms in Russia are nothing but nightmares of the dark past and that they can never be revived? Alas, no. This cannot be affirmed. At the risk of surprising certain readers we must admit in all honesty that anti-Semitism still exists in Russia and that pogroms are still very much to be feared in the future.

Modern Russian anti-Semitism, it is true, no longer has the same basis or meaning as in the past. Its basis and meaning have become

more vast, more profound, and clearer. Its effects will be all the more disastrous. It is no longer suggestions from above that nourish them, but rather appreciations born and spread in the popular strata themselves. At the current moment it is smoldering under the ashes. But it could break out one day in a terrible explosion.

What is the appearance of the new anti-Semitism in the USSR?

Despite the contrary opinion of many people overseas who, momentarily duped by the intense propaganda and the skillful *mise en scène* of the Bolsheviks, are totally unaware of current Russian reality, the Bolshevik regime is not stable. We affirm this categorically. A famous phrase is attributed to Trotsky that he perhaps never said, but which, independently of its author, depicts the true situation of the USSR. Trotsky is supposed to have said, at the beginning of the Bolshevik regime, responding to someone who doubted the solidity of the new statist system: "300,000 nobles were able to govern this people for three centuries. Why can't 300,000 Bolsheviks do the same?" The analogy between the two possibilities, the old and the new, perhaps surpasses human thought: it is total. Current Russian reality is perfectly expressed in it: a people oppressed by a privileged stratum which maintains itself in power by any means necessary. People were right to call tsarist Russia a "giant with feet of clay," for the entire edifice of the time had as its basis the oppression and enslavement of the masses. History proved the truth of the expression: the giant collapsed. But the new giant, the USSR, also has feet of clay, for like the other one, it maintains itself by means of the oppression and enslavement of the masses. It will thus also inevitably end up collapsing. And in the current conditions it cannot possibly maintain itself, even as long a quarter century.

And so the day when events in the USSR take an unfavorable turn for the masters of the moment the people's anger will inevitably fall on the heads of the masters it will consider responsible for all the miseries and failures of the revolution, and there are many Jews in the ranks of the Russian Communist Party, particularly among its leaders. "We are oppressed by foreigners and