Farming the Red Land
Farming the Red Land
Jewish Agricultural Colonization
and Local Soviet Power, 1924–1941

Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen

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To my father, Abe Markowicz
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### Abbreviations, Transliterated Terms, and Translation Equivalents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Agitpropotdel</td>
<td><em>Otdel agitatsii i propagandy</em> Propaganda and agitation department of the communist party</td>
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<td>Agro-Joint</td>
<td>The Joint Agricultural Corporation of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambijan</td>
<td>American Committee for the Settlement of Birobidzhan, composed mainly of Ikor members</td>
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<td>ARA</td>
<td>American Relief Administration</td>
</tr>
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<td>artel</td>
<td>A cooperative association of workers or peasants. After 1929, this also referred to a form of kolkhoz that allowed private ownership of a household plot and some livestock.</td>
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<td>ASJFSR, or “the Society”</td>
<td>The American Society for Jewish Farm Settlements in Russia, Inc.</td>
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<td>ASSR</td>
<td>Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>bednota</td>
<td>The poor (collective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brigade</td>
<td>The main work unit in a kolkhoz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desiatin</td>
<td>1.09 hectares or 2.7 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evsektsiia</td>
<td><em>Tsentral’nyi biuro evreiskikh sektsiy</em> Jewish Sections of the communist party</td>
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gigantomania | Soviet policy during the “Great Turn” that mandated a Stalinist penchant for gargantuan enterprises and projects
---|---
Gosplan | (Государственный плановый комитет) The State Economic Planning Committee
GPU | (Государственное политическое управление) Political police, 1921–1924
Gulag | (Главное исправительно-трудовое лагеря) Chief Administration of the Corrective Labor Camps
Heder | Jewish religious primary school
Hehalutz | Zionist pioneer movement in the USSR. Founded three communes in Crimea in 1923–1924 as training grounds for members before emigration to Palestine. Outlawed by Soviets in 1927.
Ikor | (Идиш Колонизаци́с_ORGANIZACIÉ) The American branch of Ozet. Also the name of a Jewish colony in Crimea.
JAC | Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee
JAS | Jewish Agricultural Society
JCA | Jewish Colonization Association. Also known as ICA in English and EKO in Russian.
JDC, or the Joint | American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Komzet | (Комитет по земельному устройству трудящихся евреев при Президиуме Совета Национальностей Центрального Исполитевского Комитета СССР) Committee for the Settlement of Jewish Laborers on the Land under the Council of Soviet Nationalities for the Central Executive Committee of the USSR
kolkhoz | Collective farm
kolkhoz-giganty | Giant kolkhozes, composed of many villages
kolkhoznik | A member of a collective farm
Komsomol | Communist Youth League
korenizatsiia | Soviet nationality policy of “indigenization,” in force from 1923; remained in effect, at least nominally, until 1937
Krasnyi Krym | Communist party daily newspaper in Crimea; succeeded by Krymskata Pravda after 1945
kulak | Wealthy peasant; derived from the Russian word for “fist.” In

Abbreviations
Soviet times, this term denoted any peasant who allegedly “exploited” the labor of others.

lishentsy (lishenets, singular) People disenfranchised and deprived of full rights by the 1918 constitution because of their so-called membership in the “exploiting classes”

mir Village government; widely used to refer to the peasant commune

MOPR (Mezhdunarodnaia organizatsiia pomoshchi bortsam revoliutsii) The International Society for Aid to Fighters of the Revolution

MTS (Mashinno-traktornaia stantsiiia) Machine Tractor Station. A technical unit established by the state in 1929 to provide mechanized and other services to the kolkhozes.

Narkomnats (Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsional’nostei) Peoples’ Commissariat for Nationality Affairs

Narkomsnab (Narodnyi komissariat snabzheniia) Peoples’ Commissariat of Supply

Narkomzem (Narodnyi komissariat zemledeliia) Peoples’ Commissariat for Agriculture

NEP New Economic Policy

NKVD (Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del) Peoples’ Commissariat of Internal Affairs; from July 1934, included the political police

obkom (oblastnoi komitet) Provincial party committee

oblast Administrative province

OGPU (Ob”edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politcheskoe upravlenie) Political police, 1924–1934

ORT (Obshchestvo remeslennogo zemledelecheskogo truda sredi evreev v Rossii) Organization for Rehabilitation of Jews through Training. Originally founded in 1880; Sovietized after the Bolshevik Revolution.

ORT-Farband (Obshchestvo rasprostraneniia remeslennogo i zemledelecheskogo truda sredi evreev raznykh stran) Founded in Berlin in 1921 by former leaders of the original ORT who had fled Russia after the 1917 revolutions. Also known as the World ORT Union.

Osoaviakhim (Obshchestvo sodeistviia oborone i aviatsionnokhimicheskому stroitel’stvu SSSR) The Society for Support of Defense and Aviation-Chemical Development in the USSR
Ozet  
* (Obshchestvo po zemel’nomu ustroistvu trudiaschchikhsia evreев) The Society for the Settlement of Jewish Toilers on the Land

pud  
Old Russian measure of weight = 16.38 kilograms = 36.11 pounds (1 ton = 61.05 puds)

raikom  
District party committee

raion  
Administrative district, subordinate to oblast

raispolkom  
District party executive committee

RKI  
*(Raboche-krest’ianskaia inspektsiia)* Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate

RSFSR  
*(Rossiiskaia Sovetskaia Federativnaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika)* Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

selsoviet  
Village council, or soviet; the lowest level administrative unit in the USSR

shtetl  
Jewish town or village in the Pale of Settlement

Sovnarkom  
*(Sovet narodnykh komissarov)* Council of People’s Commissars

SOZ  
*(Tovarishchestvo po sovmestnoi obrabotki zemli)* Cooperative land association

TOZ  
*(Tovarishchestvo po obshchestvennoi obrabotki zemli)* Comparable to SOZ

trudoden’  
Workday; the basic unit used to calculate payment for kol-khoz work, weighted according to job

(Tovarishchestvo po mezle’nomu ustroistvu trudiaschchikhsia evreев)

TsIK  
*(Tsentral’nyi ispolnitel’nyi komitet)* Central Executive Committee of a Soviet republic

25,000ers  
A group of young, urban, communist activists sent to the countryside to implement collectivization in the winter of 1929–1930

VTsIK  
*(Vserossiiskii [later, Vsесoiuznyi] tsentral’nyi ispolnitel’nyi komitet)* Central Executive Committee of RSFSR, later USSR

Yahudim  
A somewhat derogatory term denoting American Jews of German descent

Yidn  
American Jews of Eastern European descent

Yishuv  
The Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate

ZOA  
Zionist Organization of America
Note on Transliteration

In transliterating Russian, I have followed the Library of Congress rules. For Hebrew and Yiddish, the rules of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (14th edition) were used, except for the omission of diacritical marks. The letter *tsadi* has been rendered as *ts*, except for words like *kibutz*, where the *tz* form is now in common usage. All translations are my own, except where otherwise noted.

Place-names are usually offered in their Russian form, unless there is a familiar English variation. Personal names are presented in a variety of forms, on the basis of their common usage in existing texts—for names like Trotsky—or in order to assist the English reader. Hence, the spelling “Grower” was preferred over the more exact transliteration for the name “Groer,” and the spelling for the city “Simferopol” was preferred over “Simferopol’.”
Sometime in 1947 or 1948, Dr. Joseph Rosen of Croton-on-Hudson, New York, consigned to the fire the sole copy of a manuscript he had written on the Jewish colonization project in Soviet Crimea and southern Ukraine between the world wars. Shortly afterward, the noted agronomist died from the lingering effects of the malaria he had contracted years earlier while seeking a haven in British Guiana for German-Jewish refugees. Thus were left obscure many pivotal details of Jewish and Soviet history, for until now, this story has been shrouded by the disappearance of the settlements themselves during the Holocaust, the inaccessibility of archives in the Soviet Union, and the focus of Jewish historians on the Zionist narrative.

With the fall of the USSR, we can now reassess this lost chapter of Soviet-Jewish history, in which hundreds of thousands of impoverished Jews were integrated into early Soviet society. Since the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century, the main body of Russian Jews had been physically confined to the Pale of Settlement—an increasingly overpopulated, poor, and politically volatile set of western provinces of the empire. A look at the Jewish colonization around
the Black Sea offers an unexplored vista onto the issues of survival in the Soviet countryside as well as the state of relations between the purportedly totalitarian government in Moscow and its citizens outside the major population centers. No less important was the impact of American-Jewish philanthropy on the Soviet periphery. In addition, as the newly opened archives in the former Soviet Union reveal, the progress of Jewish colonization in some ways anticipated the heavy-handed rural policies imposed by the central Soviet government at the end of the 1920s.

Although it transpired in the land of Lenin, much of the colonization project was actually driven by people and forces at the heart of Jewish organizational life in America. In many ways, the extraordinary yet modest Joseph Rosen personified a world in turmoil as well as the turbulent period for Russia’s Jews that began with the wave of pogroms in the early 1880s and continued until the destruction wrought by Nazi armies. Born into the small, elite Jewish community of Moscow in 1877, he studied agronomy—a rare profession for Russia’s Jews—and quickly advanced in the rural administration of the Ekaterinoslav region. The inequities of tsarist Russia pushed Rosen, like so many other Jews at the time, toward revolutionary parties. Arrested for subversive political activities, he managed to escape and emigrated to the United States in 1903. Remarkable for both his professional skills and his readiness to assist his new community, Rosen quickly rose to prominence as a world-class agronomist and, later, as a Jewish communal activist.

Throughout his journeys into American life, he retained close contacts with Russian family members and former comrades in the revolutionary movement. He returned to his homeland in 1921 as part of an American delegation seeking to aid the victims of the wartime chaos that had engulfed Russia and its Jewish community since 1914. Joseph Rosen dedicated his considerable skills and energy for the next seventeen years to the agrarianization of Russia’s Jews in Soviet Crimea and southern Ukraine under the auspices of the Manhattan-based American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint)—a philanthropic organization created in 1914 primarily to provide assistance to the Jewish refugees in Eastern Europe. The Joint quickly became (and remains) the premier public service organization in the Jewish world, funding humanitarian missions around the globe.²

His personal sacrifices as director of the Joint Agricultural Corporation (Agro-Joint)—the JDC’s colonization agency in Soviet Russia—were immense: it kept him away from his family for months at a time in a volatile, increasingly dangerous country. In addition, he shouldered alone much of the
financial, political, and human pressures of this controversial mission. Even worse, the murder of Russian-Jewish colleagues and employees from Agro-Joint during Joseph Stalin’s purges in the late 1930s overshadowed the remainder of Rosen’s life.

When he set his manuscript alight, we lost a firsthand look at Joseph Rosen’s work during the interwar period. Only by merging materials from the Soviet archives with other resources can we attempt to reconstruct the history of the bold project that he fathered, and of the rural environment in which it developed.

Joseph Rosen and the JDC went to Soviet Russia during a risk-filled era. Among Russia’s Jews, trapped in traditional Jewish towns (shtetls) throughout the former Pale of Settlement, despair ran deep. From the time of the partitions
of Poland in the second half of the eighteenth century, the tsars had restricted Jews to this region along the western and southern borderlands of Russia and applied increasing limitations on access to education and legal protection. True, in 1917 Jews seemed poised for integration into the post-tsarist society that promised full emancipation. The short-lived Provisional Government (established after the February Revolution of 1917) did abolish the Pale of Settlement and the other legal inequalities from which the Jews had suffered under Russia’s tsars. But years of continuous warfare in the region and the spread of pogroms after the two revolutions of 1917 and the civil war that followed had devastated Jewish communities throughout the Pale. Furthermore, the demographic weight (and hence, the political relevance) of Jews in Russia had fallen precipitously from 5.22 million to 2.67 million between 1897 and 1926, owing to mass emigration in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and more importantly, the loss of territories with large Jewish populations after the revolution, especially in Poland and Bessarabia. At the same time, governments in the West feverishly debated policy toward Soviet Russia. The new state was a pariah: it preached a militant communism that sparked a “Red Scare” in the West; it had unilaterally withdrawn from the recent world war; and it had nationalized foreign-owned property.

In the chaos of the early 1920s, American and West European Jews sought to help their impoverished and disenfranchised brethren in the Soviet Union. This required great effort and finesse—the United States and most other countries in the West had cut diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia; most Americans (including the patrons of Jewish colonization) harbored grave suspicions toward the Bolshevik regime; and Washington’s refusal to join the League of Nations disengaged the United States from international affairs. At this moment, the JDC entered the arena and would play an unexpected role in international politics.

The Joint could not work alone. Rather, a triadic working relationship gradually emerged between ostensibly irreconcilable parties: Soviet commissars; American statesmen; and the bankers, lawyers, and others who led the JDC. Together, this unlikely diplomatic triangle fostered the resettlement of more than 150,000 Jews from the shtetls to approximately 250 new colonies that had been allocated a total of nearly 1 million acres in Crimea and southern Ukraine. By the time it left the USSR in 1937–1938, the Joint had invested $17 million (worth more than $200 million as of the year 2003) in this astonishing project and had witnessed the formation of five Jewish autonomous districts in the areas of colonization.
If compassion guided the Joint, the Soviet regime took part in this venture for other reasons. Pressure had mounted on Lenin and his successors to solve Russia’s perennial “Jewish question”; Russia’s elites had argued for decades over whether the millions of Jews in the Pale, along with most of the empire’s minorities, should be incorporated into the nation or kept apart. Yet in this area, as in most others, there was a huge gap between the aspirations of the young Bolshevik state and its actual capabilities. Given the myriad difficulties it faced after the devastating civil war of 1918–1920, the communist party had few resources to rule the cities, never mind the vast expanses beyond. Because organized Jewish colonization grew within the resultant administrative void in the countryside, its local effect was immediate and disproportionate. Simply put, Agro-Joint (and to a lesser extent, two other Jewish philanthropies from abroad) deployed a more efficient and attentive administrative apparatus in their areas of operations than any Soviet counterpart. Consequently, Jewish colonization took on unexpected forms and generated a wealth of experience in the conduct of rural affairs.

THE “JEWISH QUESTION” IN THE RUSSIAN STATE

For more than 120 years, from the partitions of Poland when some half a million Jews were brought into the tsarist empire until the revolution of February 1917 that brought an end to the Romanov dynasty, Russia’s Jews mostly felt either the heel or the neglect of tsardom, interspersed with grudging acceptance. On one hand, Jewish life was restricted to the Pale of Settlement, and the Jews lived in the shadow of recurrent pogroms perpetrated with near impunity, at times with the sanction of government officials. On the other hand, periodic relaxation of the state’s repressive policies allowed slight, but important, improvements for those Jews considered “useful.” From above, Russian Jewry hardly knew what to expect: “Jewish policy wavered between encouraging assimilation by selective concessions [during the reigns of Alexander I and II], enforcing it by coercion [under Nicholas I], and preventing it [from 1881 to 1917] in order, it was explained, to protect the nation from Jewish exploitation and intrigue.” Colonization constituted part of the tsars’ vacillations on the “Jewish question.” Since the reign of Tsar Alexander I in the early nineteenth century, Russia had allowed, and at times promoted, Jewish agricultural settlement, particularly in southern Ukraine. These colonies, mainly concentrated around Kherson and Odessa, offered their members comparative safety in
which to farm and also to practice their faith. Whatever the size or achievements of these nineteenth-century colonies, they set important precedents for future programs of Jewish agrarianization, even if they were not always models of prosperity or rural integration.7 Quantitative data vary, but it appears that between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand Russian Jews made their livelihoods through agriculture in 1900, with very little outside assistance before the 1890s.8

From 1860 onward, Russia’s Jews could look westward for assistance and support. Jewish communal organizations in Europe took steps to ease the ongoing crisis, even if the tsarist regime did not always welcome such efforts. The French Alliance Israélite Universelle placed great emphasis on providing relief to Russian Jews, while other organizations aided emigration to the West. Most important for the agrarianization of Russia’s Jews, the Paris-based Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) began to support colonies in southern Ukraine in the early 1890s. Through the generosity of its founder, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, the well-endowed JCA issued loans, encouraged crop diversification, and provided some agricultural instruction. As a result, several dozen colonies reached standards of living that were comparable to, if not better than, those of the surrounding villages during the decade before World War I.9

The concept of agrarianization spread in many forms among Russia’s Jews in the late nineteenth century, but all agreed that going to the land would solve the inherent poverty and moral degeneration of the shtetl. With increasing intensity after the pogroms of 1881–1882, Russian Jewry sprouted organizations, beginning with Am Olam and Hovevei Tzion, that encouraged the establishment of agricultural colonies, to be peopled by new immigrants to the Americas or Palestine. The most effective of the homegrown groups (and the only Russian-Jewish philanthropy to survive the October Revolution), the Organization for Rehabilitation of Jews through Training (ORT), had been established before the pogroms, in 1880, and pursued another route—vocational education for residents of the Pale. As a result of these domestic and foreign-based activities, Russia’s Jews and perhaps the new Bolshevik regime already held certain expectations about Jewish philanthropy by the time the Joint arrived in Soviet Russia.

During the waning years of the Romanov dynasty, the national debate over the “Jewish question” had intensified, owing in part to the last tsar’s heavy-handed antisemitism. But Tsar Nicholas II knew that if pushed too hard by the regime, Jews would gravitate in even larger numbers to the radical movements that threatened his reign. Nicholas also understood that uncontrolled pogroms might escalate into general riots and endanger Russia’s prestige abroad and its
ability to fight the coming world war. Official antisemitism hid a more complex national discourse, however. Judging from the mass-circulation press, the nation attached great importance to resolution of the “Jewish question” before 1914, a source of anxiety equal to that associated with the Poles. The discourse generated by the press gave nationwide resonance to the “Jewish question” and kept it (and multiculturalism) high on the national agenda after 1917.10

The Commissars and the “Jewish Question”

A different sort of “Jewish question” had emerged since the 1890s in Russia’s Social-Democratic Labor Party (SD), where some leaders—many of whom led the Soviet Union after October 1917—questioned whether the Jews constituted a nationality at all. This was an old debate; in the early 1900s, both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the SD dismissed ideas of national autonomy for Jews as un-Marxist, nationalistic, and a threat to the proletarian unity of the socialist movement.11 Given Russian backwardness and Marx’s dicta that revolution in Russia could succeed only if part of a broader European revolution, internationalism was seen not only as vaguely desirable but as a necessity. The second congress of the Russian SD, in fact, refused to recognize a separate Jewish faction—the Bund—and forced it to withdraw from the party in 1903. Considering this orientation, it seemed unlikely that Lenin’s party would ever support the creation of a Jewish autonomous territorial unit.

The Bolshevik victory in the civil war seemed at first to bode well for the Jewish communities but in fact delivered mixed blessings. Promises from party propagandists to rectify tsarist-era repression at first reinforced a sense of relief in the shtetls. There were certainly signs of improvement under the new Soviet order, and people of Jewish descent were clearly visible in the Bolshevik leadership.12 Yet fears arose among Soviet leaders during the early 1920s that the same visibility of Jews in the upper ranks of the party might encourage a resurgence of popular antisemitism or further alienate the citizenry from Bolshevik rule.13 Worse still, in accord with the categories of class enshrined in the 1918 Constitution of the Russian Republic, nearly half of the country’s Jews soon found themselves disenfranchised citizens (lishentsy)—a disproportionately high rate among the ethnic groups that comprised the Soviet Union. The lishentsy were considered to be “nonproductive” as members of the petit bourgeois professions and were deprived of civil rights, employment, housing, and higher education for their children.14 Because so many Jews had dealt in commerce under the tsars, they found no immediate remedy, even if lishentsy could normally redeem their civil rights by five years of productive labor in industry or agricul-
ture. Weighed down by the daily burdens of *lishenets* status, numerous shtetl Jews gravitated to murky business dealings, further imperiling their fate. In sum, this social and economic distress constituted a critical precondition for the appeal of colonization.

**KEY ISSUES**

The colonization program launched by the Joint and the Soviet government in 1924 departed from previous models. Nothing on this scale had been attempted in America or Russia, and a number of important factors mitigated against its success. Indeed, the project coincided with ongoing, bitter debates within American Jewry. Support for the resettlement of Russia’s desperate Jews might well have served as a unifying factor for American Jews, yet in fact it had the opposite effect—a subject to be explored further in the following chapters.

If Jewish colonization in communist Russia was not an obvious choice for American-Jewish support, it also challenged a long-standing Bolshevik doctrine. Given the party’s rejection of nationalism, how could it permit organized settlement in extensive regions—a move that suggested a territorial solution for the “Jewish question”? Moreover, how could a radically socialist regime explain cooperation with “bourgeois” foreign philanthropies, especially on behalf of a single ethnic group? After all, there was no comparable foreign assistance in sight for Russia’s other minorities, many of which remained steadfastly committed to national autonomy. In this respect, the regime had to choose between ideology and pragmatism.

This project carried short-term risks with, at best, only a vague prospect of long-term benefits for its principal sponsors both in New York and in Moscow. Continuous, stinging criticism fell on leaders of the Joint, whereas benefit for the settlers themselves would become visible only years later. Given the pressures involved, it is important to see the policy options open to the Kremlin, to discern who articulated them, and to consider how government authorities—central and regional—sought to resolve differences and implement policy. One might assume that the “monolithic” Soviet regime spoke with one voice on colonization and its goals. But the Agro-Joint episode reveals the degree to which the early Soviet regime was an amalgam of personalities. Finally, the introduction of a new, very different population into the Soviet countryside inevitably affected relations between local leaders and their overlords in Moscow.

Colonization embodied a major dilemma for most Russian Jews at the
time—the desire to integrate into secular Soviet society versus the inherited loyalties to traditional, paternalistic life in the shtetls. As time would show, relocation from the Pale to the farms around the Black Sea had an enormous effect on family and religious life. Moreover, did resettlement transform this small, but significant, part of Soviet Jewry into committed farmers? Settlers felt pressured from all quarters because colonization also overlapped with a watershed in Soviet policy: from the late 1920s until the mid-1930s, the Kremlin shifted from relative liberalism to coercive collectivization and industrialization. Could the presence of a foreign philanthropy insulate the colonists from the worst burdens of this harsh decade?

The colonization episode opens an extraordinary window for us not only onto Jewish life but also onto the Soviet countryside during a period for the most part devoid of central state authority. The primary geographic focus of this study is the Crimean peninsula, which was an ethnic mosaic, hence a crucible of interplay between resident cultures and the newly arrived Jews. Crimea was also the site of the longest-lasting presence of Agro-Joint. The secondary focus of this study is on southern Ukraine. (See maps in Appendixes 1 and 2.)

Existing scholarship has generally equated colonization in Crimea and southern Ukraine with tragedy. There is a consensus among the authors that the Soviet regime dictated colonization policy, controlled the everyday lives of the settlers, eventually wrecked the colonies with the policy of collectivization, and victimized them during the Great Purges of 1937–1938. No less common, many scholars assumed that the Nazis’ slaughter of those who did not evacuate the colonies in the autumn of 1941 signaled the final failure of the project. Such conclusions are deficient on several counts. First and foremost, previous research made virtually no use of unpublished materials in the former Soviet Union, where archival censorship—no less rigorous than that which supervised the media—effectively banned the study of the problems of minorities in general and Jews in particular. Without these unpublished materials, which reflect the way things really were (and not the way foreigners imagined and the Kremlin wished), it is impossible to go beyond the stereotypes and distortions of the media, memoirs, and mythmakers. Scholarship outside the Soviet Union had its own axes to grind, since the colonization project was, and remains, a highly controversial issue—above all because it appeared to many as a dangerous alternative to the Zionist vision for Palestine as the sole homeland for the Jewish people. Finally, while Jewish historians have given some attention to colonization, it has been almost entirely neglected in post-Soviet scholarship. The latter has been Moscow-centric, in concentration and source base,
and even now still tends to examine non-Russian history from the vantage point of the Kremlin and its policies.22

Archival material suggests different conclusions about Jewish colonization in Crimea and southern Ukraine. To be sure, the present study makes use of the rich lore of memoirs and other printed sources, including some (such as Russian-language pamphlets) that previous researchers did not incorporate. But the published sources serve mainly to complement the treasure of newly available materials, not only from central but also from local archives, which provide an unmediated, grassroots picture of colonization with its achievements and problems. Given the significant involvement of Jews outside the Soviet Union, especially in the United States, this study has closely examined non-Soviet documentation, with particular focus on the archival holdings of the Joint.23 Those documents have been supplemented by oral history interviews with former colonists and administrators; these shed light on questions that other memoirs and the media have ignored, but are critical for understanding how colonization actually worked.24 The goal, in short, is to explore the issues (and to use documentation) from the perspective of all three actors: the decision-makers in Moscow, the organizers of assistance in America, and the Soviet Jews who actually settled the land.

Thus we may gain a fresh perspective on early Soviet politics and on the Jewish Diaspora, as well as the roles played by a relatively small group of settlers in the construction of a new regime. The factors that drew the foreign organizations to support the project, and those that led them to eventually withdraw from the Soviet Union, are critical to understanding both the priorities of Diaspora Jews and the subtleties of interwar Soviet politics. At its core, the colonization enterprise explains much about the process of rural modernization in an agriculturally backward nation. The story of Jewish colonies between the world wars also throws light on the persistence of otherwise incomprehensible antisemitic myths in Soviet and post-Soviet politics that have alleged Jewish-American conspiracies to “steal” Crimea from its rightful owners.25 Above all, we can better see how Jewish and non-Jewish peasants weathered these turbulent, often brutal, times in the Soviet whirlwind.
Destitute and desperate, Russia’s Jews (and the Soviet regime itself) needed help in 1921. For most Jews, however, experience with the Russian state and the previous seven years of turmoil had taught caution toward political change and deep suspicion toward the central authority. In any case, the unstable, penniless Soviet state was in no position to revitalize Russian Jewry. To achieve significant improvement for themselves, the Jews of the shtetls needed some other patron. The entry of the JDC into the Black Sea littoral—with no mandate for operations in Russia—was motivated by a philanthropic urge to assist fellow Jews. But at the same time, the hobbled Soviet regime had left the gate open for the Joint and other philanthropic organizations.

The Joint’s representative, Joseph Rosen, talented as he was, could not single-handedly launch a colonization enterprise of this magnitude. His role was preceded, in fact, by a series of calamitous events in Russia and a passionate debate throughout the Jewish world over where and how to achieve its own rebirth. Such a background, joined with the nearly unbearable life in the shtetl, and international conditions that blocked all obvious escape routes for
Jews at risk, placed this newest experiment in Jewish colonization at a historical intersection.

THE STATE AND COUNTRYSIDE IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

The Bolsheviks’ willingness to enter a long-term commitment with foreign capitalists on behalf of Jewish colonization has to be understood in the light of the grim state of affairs in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s. Russia’s new rulers knew that their country was in ruins and lacked a responsive infrastructure. At the end of the civil war in 1921, national agricultural output stood at 54 percent of its 1913 level; the prospects in industry and foreign trade were even bleaker because the meager industrial base begun during the last decades of the Romanov monarchy stood abandoned or wrecked, and moreover, the Western nations had cut diplomatic relations. Tight control over economic policy during the civil war (called “war communism”) had efficiently confiscated output but did not reenergize the national economy. A famine during 1920–1921 had added to the suffering, and popular unrest spread throughout the country. Given its international isolation, Russia’s hopes for foreign investment also eroded and fears grew of a renewed capitalist military intervention.

Soviet Russia’s rural economy showed few encouraging signs in the early 1920s. On the positive side, the state had kept its revolutionary promise to the peasants for a redistribution of land, by far the most explosive issue from 1905 to 1917.1 This policy helped to restart production but did not increase productivity and sales of grain. Instead, both the poor and newfound “middle” peasants continued the traditional practice of consuming rather than marketing output. The war years had been particularly destructive; massive urban depopulation coincided with widespread abandonment of farmland in the battle zones.2 Their aggressive vision of economic modernization aside, the Bolsheviks presided over an agrarian nation accustomed to subsistence farming—Russia’s peasants could hardly feed themselves, let alone finance the reconstruction of industry.3

Even as the Bolsheviks consolidated a one-party dictatorship at the center, the village and the geographic periphery remained a world unto itself. Although Lenin had established a modicum of authority in the periphery during the civil war, in practice, Moscow’s grip over the village government (mir) and peasant culture was more myth than reality in the early 1920s.4 Soviet authority was bound to generate conflict with village life in other ways as well. If in the
cities, the radical Bolshevik policy on marriage and the family caused considerable instability with the widespread dissolution of traditional household units, in the more conservative villages and periphery, it was received with even less understanding. Moreover, because the Bolsheviks suspected the worst of religious villagers and their priests, the Soviet antireligious activists (bezbozhniki) targeted the villages in their campaign to do away with Orthodox Christianity. Yet, for the most part, these activities proved counterproductive for the Soviets during the 1920s—they actually served to mobilize the rural clergy and antagonize large segments of the peasantry instead of excising religion from the countryside. Therefore, until they devised a way to effectively rule the peasantry and extract its produce to finance industrialization, Lenin and his colleagues had to proceed cautiously.5

Recovery and Change

Faced with economic stagnation and social chaos, Russia’s leaders opened themselves to innovative, if ideologically questionable, solutions. On the economic front, the party responded in the early 1920s by invoking the New Economic Policy (NEP). This series of short-term tactics sought a stable basis for the development of state industry and a modus vivendi with peasants, seemingly on the verge of revolt. The policy, however, failed to deliver steady supplies of grain and produced seemingly “dangerous” outcomes; among them, severe socioeconomic stratification caused by the newly permissible free rural market economy, and its personification—the NEPman.6

These were not the only causes for concern. The same distance from government supervision that allowed free trade also resulted in rural neglect: the Soviet state invested little or nothing in agriculture. Instead, the technological gap widened between Russia and the West. Simultaneously, the NEP fostered reurbanization while liberalized social laws and youth flight dissolved families and led to the parcelization of villages—key ingredients to small household tracts and low agricultural output.7 The mixed messages from Moscow about private ownership also discouraged membership in rural cooperative associations.8 These factors helped to perpetuate the Bolsheviks’ disrespect for the peasants, especially for small farming units. This tension would also make the regime more receptive to alternative models of rural development.

The desire to jolt the economy into motion put the Soviets in a dilemma: Russia’s future depended on trade with the West, but they needed ideologically acceptable terms and limits for cooperation with capitalists. Fortunately for the economic planners in the Kremlin, Western manufacturers of agricultural ma-
chines still competed for contracts in Russia, notwithstanding the Bolsheviks’ nationalization of foreign assets and an absence of diplomatic ties between their nations. These foreigners eyed the Russian and Ukrainian steppes—still cultivated mostly by draught animals—as testing grounds for new machines.9

The outward signs of crisis in Soviet agriculture and industry partly obscured systemic shortcomings. To begin with, the tsars had bequeathed a sparse scientific establishment. Added to that, the first generation of Soviet professional and intellectual elites (many of them vulnerable to repression as former bourgeois “specialists” in tsarist industry and administration) had to exercise caution in the adaptation of Western methods lest they provoke attacks by radical ideologues.10 Under these conditions, the Soviet economy desperately needed an injection of foreign expertise and machinery, without which stagnation might become permanent. As the Soviet authorities discovered, however, this was easier said than done. Early attempts to attract private businesses did not always succeed, and most agricultural experts from American companies could not adapt their skills to the primitive and chaotic conditions in the Russian countryside.11 Therefore, Soviet Russia needed new paths of cooperation with Westerners to help propel the nation forward.

COMPROMISE WITH THE SOVIET PEOPLES

Dealing with the myriad ethnic groups in the Soviet Union presented no less a problem for the regime than attracting Western business. Despite their ideological aversion to national particularism, the Bolsheviks performed a political U-turn and formed Jewish Sections of the communist party (Evsektsia) in 1918, comparable to sections created for other ethnic minorities. Lenin hoped that this tactical retreat would mollify the ethnic minorities in the geographic periphery during a period of tenuous Soviet authority. The Evsektsia embodied much of the personnel and most of the policies and disputes that had occupied Jewish political life before 1917, including debates over the advisability (and location) of a distinct national territory for Jews as well as the importance of a unique Jewish culture.12 As part of its political program, the Evsektsia encouraged secular Yiddish culture to combat the study of Hebrew—a key part of religious observance and Zionism. For these and other reasons, the communist party enjoyed a brief honeymoon among Soviet Jews in the four years following the revolution: twenty thousand new members joined its ranks, and disproportionately large numbers of Jews served in the Red Army and Cheka (political police).13

Early party and Soviet congresses seemed to deepen the political compro-
mise with the ethnic minorities of the empire. These gatherings invoked indigenization (korenizatsiia) as the official nationality policy that granted cultural and limited local political autonomy; they also formed eighteen Peoples’ Commissariats for Nationality Affairs (Narkomnats) to protect the interests of minorities. On the surface, korenizatsiia promoted the development of native political elites, languages, and cultures. In reality, however, the regime intended these measures to implant Bolshevism among non-Russian citizens through gradual indoctrination of overarching Soviet themes via local party and government institutions in the native languages. In this way, integration and fusion of the nation’s minorities would be achieved through education, the professions, and even intermarriage. Thus, as Stalin envisioned, schools and popular culture would expose Soviet citizens to socialist messages wrapped in local—and in the Jews’ case, Yiddish—form. A centralized state could accordingly be constructed while nationalism and anti-Russian sentiments were defused.

Jewish colonization grew just as the Soviet regime acted to placate the nationalistic ambitions of the country’s minorities. The 1924 constitution created a federation of nominally autonomous national territories, and it awarded autonomous republics (the Soviet Socialist Republics [SSRs]), regions, and national territories (called Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics [ASSRs]) to ethnic groups ranging from Ukrainians to Kalmyks. From Moscow’s perspective, the creation of such autonomous units demonstrated that socialism had “solved” the national issue. Engineered while Lenin was still alive, the implementation of this policy continued after his death in early 1924 and expanded further during the first years of Stalin’s rule. Nevertheless, not all the national minorities in Soviet Russia, particularly the Poles and Finns, wanted just cultural autonomy; they longed for independence.

Moscow’s Distant Voice in Crimea

The choice of Crimea had great importance for the Jewish colonization enterprise and the country as a whole. This peninsula occupied a special place in the Russian consciousness, igniting and surviving political storms both before and after the revolution. Associated for generations with leisure and aristocratic privilege, few actually had the chance to enjoy Crimea’s rare treats. Moreover, Crimea had a rich agricultural history before 1914; its wheat had garnered praise, even in American markets. Russia’s civil war, however, had decimated the peninsula. Rural depopulation near 40 percent led some officials to estimate that farming could return to prewar levels only after twenty to forty
years. In 1923–1924, the visionaries of organized Jewish colonization would see depopulation as a momentary opportunity in a most attractive land. There was still much to covet in Crimea despite the damage of war: a warm climate, fertile soil, strategic location, and (yet to be discovered) fresh water resources.

Although battered, the peninsula was not a political vacuum. Above all, the Tatar natives of Crimea had a political consciousness and voice. Crimean Tatar nationalism did not wait for the revolution; rather, it emerged with force in the years before 1917. Inspired by the successful revolt of the Young Turks against the Ottoman sultan in Constantinople during the first years of the century, Tatar activists had popularized the idea of a national homeland among Crimea’s peasants and linked that longing to demands for land reform (also a key component of the Bolshevik platform). Amid the chaos of revolution, the Crimean nationalists declared an independent state in November 1917. After the Red Army conquered the peninsula in 1920, it co-opted the leading Tatar nationalist party (Milli Firka) and installed its members as the government of a new ASSR in October 1921. The co-opted leaders of Milli Firka were henceforth called “Tatar communists.” The Crimean Autonomous Republic—now led by the former head of Milli Firka, Veli Ibrahimov—exercised significant, albeit incomplete, autonomy and oversaw a renaissance of Tatar culture.

While the Tatars were seemingly preeminent, an ethnic mosaic in the peninsula appreciably offset the titular political status the Soviets granted to the Tatars. Sizable emigration to the Ottoman Empire after the Crimean War (1853–1856) and savage fighting during the Russian civil war had greatly depleted their presence (particularly in the countryside), reducing the Tatars to one-quarter of Crimea’s population in 1921. Thus, Ukrainians and Russians constituted 51 percent of the general population of 720,000 and Germans 6 percent, together with an assortment of other ethnic groups. The rural Tatars who had not fled were overwhelmingly devout Muslims, socially conservative, often illiterate, and consequently resistant to Bolshevik ideology. A Jewish community in Crimea had existed for centuries, composed mostly of urban merchants and shopkeepers. Similar to the overall depopulation in Crimea, the war years reduced the number of Jews from sixty thousand to thirty thousand, making them approximately 7 percent of the peninsula’s population in 1921.21

The ethnic puzzle in the region arose, in part, from a history of organized settlement by non-Tatars for more than a century before Joseph Rosen proposed Jewish colonization there to the JDC. At the invitation of Tsar Alexander I, German (and some Swiss) colonists had settled near Simferopol in 1804; they
quickly prospered, proliferated, and integrated into the national economy. The Germans first learned from, and then surpassed, the indigenous Tatar farmers. Specifically, they introduced some high-yield agriculture to the peninsula and absorbed lands vacated by Tatars after the Crimean War. Although contributing much to the rural economy, the German colonies had few social ties with indigenous Tatars or other national groups. The presence of these Europeans probably sensitized the Tatars in general, and the Tatar communist leaders of the early 1920s in particular, to the potential benefits and dangers of colonization by “outsiders.”

The First Years of Soviet “Power”

Colonization was able to grow because of the peculiar politics of the NEP. Until the late 1920s, the Soviet leadership was an amalgam of political traditions and personalities; a mix of old Bolsheviks, socialist revolutionaries, former Mensheviks, Bundists, and relative newcomers to socialism who populated the heights of power. In addition, former tsarist officials and specialists who continued to work under the new Soviet regime created a degree of intellectual openness and bureaucratic fluidity. Most members of high party and state organs held concurrent posts in parallel or subordinate agencies. Thus, founding members of the Soviet committee ostensibly responsible for organized Jewish colonization (called Komzet, discussed below) from mid-1924 also worked at the crossroads of national economic and administrative life—the Central Committee, the State Bank, and the Commissariats of Finance and Agriculture, to name but a few. This overlap ensured crucial support for colonization and a high degree of resonance within the upper reaches of government. Of no less importance to the colonies, Komzet members who held concurrent posts in regional and national government eased bureaucratic hurdles for Agro-Joint and individual settlements into the 1930s.

Other people at the heart of the NEP hierarchy advocated the colonization project. We know that Joseph Rosen had many old friends in Soviet governmental life. But there were additional benefactors among key economic planners and administrators who formed a human link between policy decisions in Moscow and events in the Jewish colonies. Aleksei Rykov, the chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), served as the primary political patron for most of the high-ranking specialists associated with Jewish colonization. Both Rykov and Iurii Larin (a leading Soviet economist, statesman, and publicist, as well as a founding member of the Soviet support system for Jewish colonization) had strong ties (ideological and personal) to Nikolai Bukharin, a
prominent member of the Politburo. This powerful political constellation gave colonization a support network at or near the highest echelons of Soviet power for most of the 1920s. To the detriment of Jewish colonization, these men (many of them part of the Right Opposition) began to disappear from government service—like hundreds of other prominent officials in Moscow and the regional capitals in the later part of the decade—as Stalin consolidated his power.

No matter who presided in the commissariats, Crimea did not lend itself to easy control: a single railroad line passed through a land area approximately the size of Belgium; passable roads, radios, newspapers, and telephones were rare, at least until the end of the 1920s. Moreover, the low literacy rate in rural Crimea, as elsewhere in the country, was an impediment to political indoctrination from above. Further complicating the problems of control, the Soviet regime had granted to the Muslim Tatar communists titular power over Mennonite Germans, Lutheran Estonians, Orthodox Slavs, and a maze of other national groups. Most of these minorities in the northern Crimean steppes had no allegiance to Simferopol. On the contrary, many resented the Tatarization of the region’s bureaucracy brought on by korenizatsiia. Hence, the Tatar communists elicited the loyalty of, at most, the 25 percent of the peninsula’s population that was ethnic Tatar. Even among themselves, deeply rooted tensions and prejudices divided the Tatars of the southern part of Crimea from those who traditionally inhabited the central and northern steppe.

Crimea typified the party’s troubles in the periphery. In theory only, the Soviet regime could offset its weakness there (as had the tsars) by installing ethnic Slavs or sympathetic indigenous leaders willing to rule the regional capitals in the name of the state. Unfortunately for the Bolsheviks, the party did not possess an army of loyal, capable communists and was still an alien element in most of the non-Slavic borderlands. The percentage of indigenous party membership varied directly with distance from the center, dropping to single digits in the farther-off regions. Crimea fared particularly poorly in this respect: Tatars accounted for only 10 percent of the republic’s party membership in 1922. Even after intense rural recruitment campaigns of the NEP years, their proportion increased only to 10.7 percent. This situation had forced the Soviet regime into a marriage of convenience in Crimea with the Tatar communists at the head of an autonomous national province (oblast) and had given Ibrahimov (and other local leaders elsewhere in the USSR) considerable latitude in the early 1920s to correct perceived injustices perpetrated by the tsars and commissars. Although not part of the original plan, Moscow had empowered indige-
nous groups more than it had bolstered its own authority. In retrospect, how-
ever, it is clear that regional leaders throughout the Soviet Union had little more
control over their territories than did Moscow. Crimea fitted this mold: Veli
Ibrahimov’s reach—blocked by primitive communications and the ethnic di-
visions mentioned above—stopped at the northern steppe region.31

A political tug-of-war between the Soviet state and the Tatar communists fed
upon ethnic tensions and only heightened the unease of the central regime. At
bottom, Soviet leaders saw Crimea as a foreign land and its people (bred by
class, culture, and religion) as anticommunist. The Tatars—non-Slavs with a
troublesome recent history—were suspect in Moscow, even before their depor-
tation in 1944 to Central Asia.32 Because the other indigenous minorities in
Crimea had little natural affinity for urban, Russian communism and appeared
to be “under the influence” of hostile wealthy peasants (kulaks) and clerics, the
Soviet regime harbored deep fears about them as well. Ethnic mistrust repli-
cated itself within Crimea. Reports from the provincial party committee
(obkom), authored by ethnic Russians and Tatars, for example, condemned
Crimea’s Germans as irreparably bourgeois and under the influence of their
clergy.33

Although in the formal sense korenizatsiia continued into the 1930s, the So-
viet regime began to react in the 1920s against its more troublesome political
consequences. Unable to contain national ambitions in the leadership circles of
many non-Slavic republics, the Kremlin gradually resorted to coercion. In
1924, it launched a campaign against local nationalists with the removal of
Mirza Sultan-Galiev—Ibrahimov’s political patron—from official posts in the
communist hierarchy.34 This started a political tidal wave that swept away most
local Muslims, including the Tatar communists, from leadership positions. Be-
cause organized Jewish colonization grew in the midst of this ethnic and polit-
ical conflict, it remained subject to pressures from above and below even if it
had well-positioned benefactors in Moscow.

“GOING TO THE LAND” FROM THE SHTETLS

While the political interplay in Simferopol and Moscow surely shaped orga-
nized colonization, the Jews of the Pale had far more immediate concerns. Owing
to a blend of wartime devastation, underemployment, and disenfranchise-
ment, the shtetls teetered on the brink of disaster in the early 1920s. Contrary
to the hopes of the regime, the NEP had not remedied chronic unemployment
or other problems in the former Pale. At the same time, the Evsektsiia faithfully
pursued Moscow’s orders to eradicate the Jewish community’s autonomous institutions while its clumsy antireligious campaign intensified Jewish alienation from the regime. Consequently, while Soviet Jews were theoretically equal to other Soviet citizens, in practice the majority remained impoverished with their traditional social structures besieged from above.

If millions of shtetl Jews had fled poverty and persecution under the tsars by emigrating to the Americas or other westward destinations from the 1880s until 1914, international conditions now demanded other solutions. Promulgation of the Reed-Johnson Act in 1924 (limiting immigration of all nationalities to the United States) and similar legislation elsewhere in the West, together with a restrictive British policy on the immigration of Jews to Mandatory Palestine, choked most avenues of exodus for the lishentsy. Whatever the policy of its British caretakers under the mandate granted by the League of Nations, the appeal of Palestine among Russia’s Jews during these years was limited. Although highly motivated Zionist pioneers continued to leave for Palestine, they were a tiny minority among Soviet Jews in the early 1920s: the secularism and priority placed on emigration to a still underdeveloped Palestine embodied by Zionism deterred many. As a result of these and other factors, as few as seventy thousand Soviet Jews left the USSR between 1919 and 1939. They were effectively trapped: the new communist regime in Moscow surely attracted some, but given the choice, most probably preferred to leave. Because this was now difficult, the salvation of Russian Jewry would have to materialize inside the new Soviet borders.

This predicament joined with troubling reports from the Jewish community to push the communist party toward radical solutions. Both the local Evsektsiia and the political police (GPU) identified the gravitation of Jewish youth toward Zionism during 1923–1924. If left unchecked, it seemed that Zionism might jeopardize the ideological monopoly of the party in Jewish life. Cognizant of its limitations, the GPU told the party that it could not defeat Zionism solely by force. Government functionaries insisted that the only bulwark against this Jewish nationalist surge was drastic, immediate improvement in the living standards of shtetl dwellers.

Solutions were not readily at hand in the early 1920s. Although the economic life of the shtetls stabilized somewhat in the year or two after the civil war, a monetary crisis (the first “Scissors Crisis”) in 1922–1923 once again threw them into chaos. To compensate for food shortages before and after this most recent economic calamity, Russian Jews often “went to the land” on vacant parcels adjacent to the shtetls. This form of settlement had its limitations: most of the
available strips near the Ukrainian shtetls were occupied that winter. In Belorussia, the situation was worse. Joseph Rosen noted that the lack of available land forced a wide dispersal of small holdings, a situation in which the settlers complained that their children grew up “neither human beings, nor Jews.”

This shortage led the youth of the Belorussian shtetls to uproot to larger towns and cities more quickly than their counterparts in Ukraine. Finally, strict land regulations prevented the substantial expansion of the nineteenth-century colonies in southern Ukraine—a move that could have eased overcrowding in the shtetls.

Spontaneous Settlers Discover the Road Southward

These problems compelled hungry Jews to look farther afield. Most people from the first small wave of spontaneous migration out of the shtetls in 1921 and 1922 headed to the old Kherson colonies, where years of civil war and pogroms had severely depleted the communities. At the same time, small groups—with no material support from the state—sent emissaries to investigate vacant land in Crimea and southern Ukraine. Why these regions? At least in part, word-of-mouth testimony popularized the movement: the emissaries and assorted journalists spread news in the Pale about the availability of vacant land as well as the success of the old Kherson colonies and a handful of Zionist communes in Crimea. The spontaneous creation of new settlements by semiorganized groups from the shtetls began in the spring of 1923, augmenting the migration to the old colonies of southern Ukraine. By the end of the year, seventy-six thousand Jews farmed in the USSR; among these, approximately eleven hundred settled in fifteen new colonies in Crimea, with thousands more in southern Ukraine.

The very dearth of state authority actually assisted this type of spontaneous resettlement. At the time—without any formal statutes governing colonization or foreign aid—these settlers occupied old estates, negotiated directly with the regional commissariats of agriculture (Narkomzem) for permission to settle on government land, and then invested their own capital for equipment and livestock. Because former gentry estates (confiscated from the previous owners by the state after the revolution) formed the core of the land available for Jewish colonies, some conflict was inevitable between the newcomers and the indigenous populations; the local peasants believed that the revolution had entitled them to these same lands.

Another key component of early Jewish colonization came to the Crimean
steppe around this time. The *Hehalutz* Zionist youth movement first identified the peninsula as an ideal spot for agricultural settlement. After an abortive attempt in 1919, it established three small communes in Crimea from 1922 to 1924 designed to prepare young people for their imminent emigration to Palestine and the rigors of farming once they arrived there. At their zenith in the mid-1920s, the total population of these Zionist communes probably did not exceed 350, but their effect on the wider colonization enterprise outweighed these numbers. As the first stage of their training, the Hehalutz members underwent agricultural apprenticeships in the old Jewish colonies of southern Ukraine. While there, they transmitted a degree of naïve ambitiousness to the older colonists, wearied by years of war.

The three Hehalutz communes (Tel Chai, Mishmar, and Maayan) would shortly fill a critical role as the geographic and professional hub for a much larger resettlement movement from the shtetls. Because the young Zionist pioneers had gained some experience by 1923, newer arrivals from the shtetls could obtain there some measure of professional guidance, cultural activity, and emotional support otherwise absent: the state had almost no administrative presence in northern Crimea, and the JDC was still not active in support of colonization. Although the existing historiography often exaggerates the importance of the Hehalutz communes, they did energize the colonization enterprise at critical moments. Finally, exposure to these Zionist communes during 1922–1923 triggered Joseph Rosen’s subsequent action on behalf of mass colonization; they had a similar effect on Soviet-Jewish publicists and officials.

The Politics and Ideology of Colonization

Jews in the overpopulated areas of the former Pale quickly seized upon the probable benefits inherent in resettlement. Community leaders and townspeople wagered that colonization, especially at a safe distance from the vulnerable shtetls, could stabilize economic and social life. Repeated pogroms and tenuous relations with their Christian neighbors had made many shtetl dwellers skeptical about the future of Jewish life in the traditional towns of the Pale. They therefore reasoned that investment in land and equipment, settlement in compact areas by healthy colonists, and relatively benign neighbors at the southeastern edge of the former Pale might insulate Jewish property against potential pogroms better than the crowded towns of Ukraine and Belorussia. Local Jewish leaders also assumed that the state would never repossess land in the countryside (from Jews or farmers of any other faith) lest they incite a revolt.
What were the assumptions about colonization among its future benefactors in America? In retrospect, a radically altered world presented American Jewry with new choices after 1917. Until the conquest of Palestine by Britain during World War I, the development of institutions and infrastructure there was slow and by no means assured. By recognizing the right of the Jewish people to a national homeland in Palestine, and with a vague promise to establish a state, the Balfour Declaration reenergized an old debate on both sides of the Atlantic: what resources should be redirected from the needy in the Diaspora to the building of a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land?50 On another front, Jewish leaders had to develop a strategy to deal with the Bolsheviks. Attitudes among America’s Jews toward Russia’s new rulers spanned the political spectrum—from membership in the communist party to staunch anticommunism. But no matter how they viewed communism, the fact remained that nearly 3 million of their brethren lived under the new regime.

The sharp political divisions in the Jewish world during the early 1920s echoed the disputes of previous decades, especially over the role of Palestine in the regeneration of the Jewish people. Many leaders questioned the wisdom of settlement there, particularly as a refuge for the oppressed Jewish masses of Eastern Europe. Some of the more significant figures (the “territorialists”) who doubted its potential had campaigned from the turn of the twentieth century until the eve of World War I for the creation of a Jewish national home in less-contested areas, such as Uganda and Madagascar. These schemes, whatever their practical potential, enjoyed wide popularity in the Diaspora, particularly among wealthy Jews. Territorialism was a double hazard to Zionists: by diverting public attention away from Palestine as the sole solution to the “Jewish question,” it threatened both their purse and prestige. Therefore, although the territorialists disappeared as a major political force after the Balfour Declaration, Zionist leaders remained vigilant for any reappearance.

Plans for the relief of Russia’s Jews in the 1920s had to overcome a longstanding curse in American Jewry: it spoke in many, often conflicting, voices. In contrast to the relatively centralized leadership in their fellow communities of Western Europe, an assortment of public organizations in America—ranging from labor socialism to religious orthodoxy—espoused distinct ideologies and political agendas. Zionism provided a fairly clear (but not the sole) demarcation between them. Influential and wealthy so-called “German” Jews formed the American Jewish Committee in 1906. It became the preeminent non-Zionist organization for the decade before World War I, and its members later comprised the bulk of the JDC board. The Joint was formed from three communal
organizations during the war with a mandate to dispense public funds among needy Jews in Eastern Europe; its financial muscle and the national renown of its leaders immediately propelled it to prominence (but not preeminence) in American Jewry. Its formation joined other signs that the center of Jewish organizational life had shifted from Western Europe to America. During most of the interwar period, its foremost figures were Felix Warburg (the scion of a major international banking family) and Louis Marshall (an outstanding constitutional lawyer, an important figure in the Republican party, a delegate of the American Jewish Congress to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the president of the American Jewish Committee, and undisputed leader of American Jews of German descent).

Politics, prestige, and fundamental differences of opinion about Palestine separated Joseph Rosen and other leaders of the Joint from American Zionists. Between the world wars, non-Zionists and a smaller number of anti-Zionists (who rejected the premise of a Jewish homeland in Palestine) led the JDC; neither ever adopted the creation of a Jewish state as their mission. Instead, the JDC’s non-Zionist leaders adhered to the vision of Ahad ha-Am in the early twentieth century, which dreamed of the Holy Land as a Jewish cultural and spiritual center. From the start of its operations during the war, the Joint chose to dispense relief and reconstruction programs throughout Eastern Europe and Palestine according to a utilitarian, not political, spirit. From the perspective of organizational Realpolitik, the high political and financial standing of the American Jewish Committee and JDC was an ongoing concern for American Zionists. Despite significant personnel changes during the interwar years, these basic splits remained.

No matter the goals for future philanthropy, a huge task of fund-raising faced the JDC. America’s Jews seemed beleaguered by appeals in the early 1920s. Louis Marshall felt that such conditions endangered the capacity to collect funds for any work abroad. He observed that American Jews “seem to be completely exhausted by their efforts for the relief of their European brethren from 1914–1922. The fact that there are a dozen different delegations from all parts of Europe now in [the United States] conducting vocal or silent drives, all of which are failures, has disgusted the most generous [Jews]. In the face of such a situation, the time is rapidly approaching when it will be impossible to raise money. I am, therefore, so skeptical as to the advisability of doing anything further in this colonization work, that I would regard any effort in that direction defeated before it has begun.” Many American Jews questioned why they should get involved at all in a long-term solution for Russia’s “Jewish
question.” Despite a consensus that something had to be done for the lishentsy, there was an opinion that European philanthropies were better suited for the task. Even among leaders of the JDC, doubts lingered; enriched largely through the banking industry and corporate world, hence acutely suspicious of Bolshevism, some opposed any activity whatsoever in the Soviet Union after 1923.54

Part of the decision-making concerning Soviet Jews undoubtedly derived from a tradition of European and American philanthropic experiments in mass agrarianization during the three decades before the creation of Agro-Joint. Herein, wealthy Jews (Baron Maurice de Hirsch of Vienna and Baron Edmund Rothschild of Paris) founded settlement organizations (most important among them, de Hirsch’s JCA) and contributed vast sums toward the establishment of farming colonies in South America, and to a lesser extent in Palestine, for Jews in flight from the pogroms and economic troubles of Eastern Europe.55 These efforts, and the audacious but ill-planned Am Olam communal settlements in the United States in the late nineteenth century, inspired the creation of the Jewish Agricultural Society (JAS) in 1906—an organization formed by established American Jews to finance the resettlement for tens of thousands of recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe on farms throughout the eastern United States.56 Over time, the JCA and the JAS put greater emphasis on large-scale, concentrated resettlement; early attempts at settlement in the Americas had shown that isolated Jewish colonies usually failed.

Even if some leaders of the Joint hesitated about philanthropy in Soviet Russia, many already had an affinity for large-scale agrarianization from contact with these earlier projects. Many future leaders of the JDC had acquired practical experience as officials or friends of the JCA and JAS and “learned” while in their service that agrarianization could in and of itself guarantee the livelihood of the colonists. In addition, a prior familiarity with the workings of the JCA and ORT probably contributed to a replication of their patronal character among leaders of the JDC. In essence, these older philanthropies were composed of circles of wealthy, secular (for the most part), prestigious individuals committed to reconstructive projects for Jews whose lives were totally remote from their own. Nonetheless, these elder organizations had attempted “to make human beings who are capable of work, who would otherwise become paupers, into useful members of society” by gradually weaning them from contributions to businesslike loans; for them, philanthropy should not be almsgiving.57

The continuity between the leadership of the Joint in the 1920s and its pre-
decessors was at once institutional and individual, best personified by Joseph Rosen. After completing his doctoral studies in Michigan and receiving U.S. citizenship, he briefly served as director of the vocational school of the JAS in Woodbine, New Jersey. He then helped to found the society’s Baron de Hirsch agricultural training school in Peekskill, New York, in 1915. Others among the American employees of the Joint’s Reconstruction Department (the forerunner of Agro-Joint) acquired their expertise in the farms and schools of the JAS.58 Similar experiences had acquainted many of the future leaders on the American side of Agro-Joint with the principles and dilemmas of major projects to increase productivity: among them, James Rosenberg (the future president of Agro-Joint and an accomplished corporate attorney), Felix Warburg, Lewis Strauss, James Becker, David Bressler, Boris Bogen, Cyrus Adler, and Julius Rosenwald.59 In Russia, some of the first proponents and managers of organized colonization had worked with the ORT, had lived in the early pioneer settlements of the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine (the Yishuv), or were familiar with the language of agrarianization through their contact with socialist Zionism.

Social Engineering and Productivization on the Steppe

Whomever the patron or the site, organized colonization intended to make Jews more productive. This idea did not originate in the 1920s or among Jewish philanthropists. Rather, it had circulated among maskilim (members of the Jewish enlightenment, or Haskalah, in Central and Eastern Europe) during the nineteenth century. The discourse continued during the first two decades of the twentieth century as Jewish political groups questioned whether the anticipated socioeconomic renaissance in the impoverished Pale should spring from farming or other productive professions. Another split emerged between those who promoted the solution in the countries of origin and those (Zionists and territorialists) who argued for productivization in a region overseas set aside for Jewish settlement—be it in the Yishuv or elsewhere.60 Wherever the proposed location, most advocates of social engineering agreed that the transition to some form of physical work would reinstatethe Jewish people.

Ideas of agrarianization evidently made some headway at the grassroots in Russia before 1917. Gatherings of the old Kherson colonies openly discussed large-scale Jewish land settlement, and Jewish political parties (socialist factions and Zionists) that vied for preeminence in Russian Jewry flooded the prewar
Pale with rhetoric about a radical new society that could be forged by “going to
the land.” Therefore, when Russian Jewry emerged from the revolutionary pe-
riod, agrarianization was already a recognized part of the debate on the perpet-
uation of the Jewish community, even if the specific Jewish political parties no
longer existed.61 Such talk had little practical effect, however, before the arrival
of the Joint. The Evsektsiia, while active in the productivist dialogue after 1917,
lacked the infrastructure and budget to implement this or any other construc-
tive policy.62

Benign discussion of race, bloodlines, and lineage had enjoyed great popu-
ularity in American Jewry since the second half of the nineteenth century and
contributed a small but distinctive cornerstone to colonization in the early
1920s. These ideas grew amid a wider intellectual discourse in the United States
led by John Dewey. He focused on cultural conditions, experiential education,
and rural values as the building blocks of human development. Central figures
in the New York offices of the JDC promoted similar visions of social engineer-
ing.63 Their image of a regenerated biblical Jew on the Crimean and southern
Ukrainian landscapes was, in fact, never far from the fund-raising campaign.64
As Rosen wrote to a potential donor later in the 1920s: “We are working in Rus-
sia on a purely scientific problem in human eudemonology, in a thoroughly
practical way. Looking at the problem from a broad, scientific way, we are try-
ing to work out a plan of mass adaptation to a new environment created by a
revolution, which may justly be called ‘a human volcanic eruption.’ We have
large groups of people of a given psychological and biological essence, whom
we are trying to adapt to a new environment, thereby changing their psycho-
biological substance.”65 Like other visitors to the colonies from the JDC dur-
ing the 1920s, James Rosenberg obtained firsthand “evidence” of the results of
social engineering and moral renewal: “As I look at these bronzed young Jews,
the hygienic and eugenic aspect of this work is one of its weightiest assets.”66

The political and social turmoil throughout the Soviet Union during the win-
ter of 1929–1930 did not substantively alter the vision or the belief that the re-
birth of the biblical Jew was within grasp: “The eugenic value of this undertak-
ing cannot be overestimated. The revitalizing effect of this land settlement
work is of far reaching importance to the Jewish population in Russia. The plan
of remolding the great mass of the declassed and poverty stricken Jews in Rus-
sia into a virile, self-supporting class of agriculturists, has appealed strongly to a
large number of Jewish leaders in [America].”67 Although the frequency of ref-
ences to benign human engineering diminished over time, it resurfaced spo-
radically into the mid-1930s, after the rise of European fascism. Thereby, ideas
of Jewish productivization generated by maskilim in the nineteenth century first found practical application in the Americas and Palestine, then later in Soviet Russia where the fine “pioneering material” seemed to justify the support of colonization among the leaders of the Joint in New York. Closer to the core of the colonization enterprise, however, ideas of social and moral regeneration had only minor appeal among Agro-Joint agronomists; they focused on construction of profitable settlements that affixed colonists to the land. Toward the end of the 1930s, the JDC extended the rebirth paradigm, forged in Russian colonization, to its vocational training programs in Germany and Eastern Europe.

Clear boundaries separated ideas of social engineering popular in the West (including the JDC) and the heinous version employed later by fascist regimes. Western eugenics in the first two decades of the twentieth century spoke of deep but gradual modification of the social environment, promoted largely through change in the professional orientation of the target group. By contrast, the fascist model (and an abortive experiment in Soviet agriculture in the late 1930s) proposed human intervention in biology to engineer a physical and behavioral transformation.

While Western ideas of social engineering stirred some early interest, it never garnered wide public appeal in Soviet Russia, and then faded in the second half of the 1920s. Productivization and agrarianization, not eugenics, constituted the philosophical backbone of the Soviet economic recovery after the civil war and the state of mind in the government surrounding the solution of the “Jewish question.” Nevertheless, the momentary popularity of eugenics in mid-decade indirectly helped Soviet proponents of colonization by enlivening a wider national discourse in Russia on the rapid transformation of people through the environment, not heredity.

The productivization of Russian Jewry made political sense for Moscow: the Jews’ literacy rate was nearly twice the national average, even higher among the youth. In addition, Jews had a disproportionately high representation in Soviet vocational schools west of the Urals. At least in theory, such people might help elevate the Russian peasantry. A contemporary Soviet study reinforced this finding; compared with many of the indigenous peoples in Crimea, Jews possessed superior intellectual traits. The Soviets had two further motivations in this area: ideas of “going to the land” had great resonance in liberal Russian thought, and the delegitimization of “primitive” shtetl life was an important element of Soviet policy toward the country’s Jews throughout the 1920s. So even without an effective plan or available resources, the regime had concrete
reasons to support the agrarianization of Jews on an equal basis with the rest of the population.  

Ideology may have eventually required the Soviet regime to address the “Jewish question,” but a specific event triggered action. The exhibits of the old Kherson colonies and the Hehalutz communes of Crimea at the 1923 All-Union Agricultural Exposition in Moscow caught the attention of a group of energetic party officials and nonparty journalists, most of whom had no previous connection to Jewish affairs. Within months, these men launched a campaign for colonization that led to momentous results.

The JDC in Soviet Russia

Inclusion of the JDC in organized colonization did not suddenly occur in 1924. Rather, it was made possible by a historical coincidence. The Joint arrived in the Soviet Union in 1921 as a partner in Herbert Hoover’s American Relief Administration (ARA), together with other American philanthropies. This huge humanitarian undertaking—sparked by a horrific famine in the grain-growing areas of Russia and Ukraine—was a clear sign that the Bolsheviks were willing to accept the outstretched hand of foreign capitalists and were prepared to innovate when necessary. Having completed its work by the close of 1922, the ARA gradually withdrew. Its original tasks fulfilled, and without a mandate for continued operations, the Joint (like most of the other participants in the ARA) also prepared to leave Russia.

Involvement in the ARA was of great importance in the Joint’s forthcoming endeavors. First, this early activity in 1921–1922 exposed the staff of the JDC to the general conditions and particular needs of Russian Jews. Most important, famine relief brought Rosen and Boris Bogen (both of them JDC officials in service of the ARA) into personal contact with the old Jewish colonies in southern Ukraine. This introduced them to the local crisis and suggested the applicability of wider colonization schemes. For Rosen (already renowned in America for development of an improved type of rye), service with the ARA also allowed for experimentation with advanced agricultural techniques, some of which were still largely untested in America; these whetted his appetite for ambitious undertakings and eventually became the cornerstone of Agro-Joint’s farm system. In addition, contact with officials and other philanthropies engaged in the ARA forged important working relationships and legitimacy for the JDC in the American political establishment, even if relations with ARA counterparts were not always harmonious. Lastly, the ARA readied the Soviet government for future undertakings with American philanthropies.
As the ARA wound down its activities in Russia, the Joint began independent operations thanks to the resolve of Joseph Rosen. In mid-1922, he and Bogen appealed to the JDC for a new reconstructive, not just palliative, effort. New York responded with an allocation of $1.2 million for work with the JCA and ORT-Farband to supply tractor service, seeds, and loans to the nineteenth-century Kherson colonies and the Hehalutz communes. Several months later, the JDC approved Rosen’s supplementary requests for aid to the spontaneous settlements that had sprouted during 1923. The most salient feature of these years was the assembly of ten tractor teams composed of eighty-six American machines that worked under short-term agreements with the Ukrainian government. They plowed one hundred thousand acres in 1923, of which 70 percent were in non-Jewish villages—an accomplishment that Soviet authorities noted appreciatively. Following the implementation of this reconstructive program and the depletion of its budget, the JDC again perched on the edge of liquidation in 1924.

The real pressure for organized colonization came from Rosen in Russia, not from JDC officials in New York. Because Rosen found it difficult to persuade JDC members that they were best suited to direct a program of organized colonization, the JDC first sought the counsel, if not the guidance, of older philanthropies. As an intermediate step (in parallel to Rosen’s contacts with the Crimean and Ukrainian governments in 1922–1923), the JDC had tried to draw a former partner from the ARA—the American Friends Service Committee (the operative arm of the Quakers)—into collaborative colonization work, but the two sides could not agree on a site. Despite this setback, the Joint and the American Friends conducted a serious dialogue during which many of the farming and managerial practices implemented later by Agro-Joint emerged in embryo.

Rosen’s blueprint for colonization coalesced in these first years and remained mostly unchanged thereafter. Crimea (and to a lesser degree, southern Ukraine) seemed to offer prime conditions: vacant land, abandoned buildings, congenial climate, and a history of successful farming by Germans and Jews before 1914. As long as Soviet authorities supplied land, lumber, transport, and tax exemptions, colonization appeared to be “the most expedient and cheapest form of reconstructive work” for the lishentsy compared with resettlement elsewhere in the world. Nonetheless, neither Rosen nor his superiors in New York believed that colonization could relieve the full distress of Soviet Jewry.

Local Agro-Joint personnel—and not the central offices in the United States—greatly determined the contours of the organized colonization project.
Rosen’s work in the countryside from 1922 to early 1924 established important institutional and behavioral norms. As his network spread, conditions in the existing colonies and communes improved dramatically, thereby multiplying enthusiasm as stories filtered back to the shtetls about abundant land and welcoming neighbors. These positive reports also reached the JDC offices in New York, building confidence among those already predisposed toward Jewish agrarianization but still hesitant about investing in Soviet Russia. On the ground, Rosen’s earliest decisions shaped the future financial relations with colonists—the JDC dealt only with cooperatives that reinvested funds, with Rosen’s approval, in equipment and livestock. Back in New York, the Joint grew accustomed to exceeding its original commitments under pressure from Rosen, who regularly overspent on unforeseen, urgent needs in Russia.87 Finally, Rosen established the core of agreements still to be made with national agencies when negotiating limited contracts with regional authorities from 1922 to early 1924: aid to indigenous villages adjacent to Jewish parcels, JDC investment in return for enhanced rights and benefits for settlers, and reciprocity from the Soviets—in principle, if not in matériel.88

The JDC’s style of reconstructive aid was by no means universal. Renewed support for the nineteenth-century Jewish colonies by the Sovietized ORT,
ORT-Farband, and the JCA in the early 1920s differed considerably. When the European philanthropies returned to the existing colonies in Soviet Russia and Bessarabia, they resurrected their cautious package of inexpensive loans, sporadic agricultural instruction, and industrial training; they had no intention of implementing radical solutions to the “Jewish question.”

Even so, guarded collaboration began in 1923, with joint efforts to establish Jewish trade schools, to import grapevines, to distribute high-quality seeds and livestock to old colonies, and to establish cheese factories. But within months of starting its agricultural activities, the JDC began to question the reconstructive capacity of these venerable philanthropies. For their part, the Soviets hoped that the Europeans would eclipse the Joint in support of spontaneous colonization. Moscow felt more comfortable with them because it knew so little about the Americans. Quite early, however, all sides concerned recognized that the JCA and ORT could not cope with the scale and character of mass resettlement.

CONCLUSION

Years of crisis had readied the Kremlin for unconventional and ideologically distasteful remedies by the early 1920s. The “solutions” to the dilemmas of the state, however, often arose locally. Among them, Jews from the traditional areas of the former Pale set off in search of vacant farmlands just as larger waves of non-Jews migrated to Siberia. In both cases, the weak state could, at best, try to regulate them. Spontaneous migration of Jews to the land presented an exceptional opportunity for the Soviet regime. In the short term, agrarianization might help to solve Russia’s “Jewish question.” With any luck, it could also attract Western aid for Russia’s ruined economy.

Given that the Joint’s founders intended to extract the organization from Russia after 1922, the inspiration for methodical colonization had to come from below. Having seen spontaneous colonization at work, Rosen sensed the potential that agricultural resettlement might hold for the relief of Jewish masses in the Pale. In his favor, no one in New York doubted that the Joint’s record in the ARA had been positive. Not only had the organization reached its philanthropic targets, Rosen’s agricultural expertise had drawn praise from Soviet leaders—not least among them, the chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, Khristian Rakovskii. Furthermore, the results achieved in the spontaneous and in the old colonies—particularly the introduction of tractor teams—hinted at what might be possible on a larger scale. Taken together, these made Rosen’s position all but impregnable in New York. As a last factor in
his favor, policy decisions in the Joint emanated from a small inner sanctum
during the early 1920s. Therefore, Rosen and other proponents of a major col-
onization effort had to sway only a handful of people, not the entire member-
ship.93

Unique circumstances—absent before and after the early 1920s—embold-
ened the JDC toward colonization as a partial remedy for the lishentsy. Several
of its pivotal figures had a predilection for agrarianization and ideas of social en-
gineering. Contemporary events simplified their decision-making: large-scale
emigration to the West and Palestine was unlikely.94 Finally, the “Red Scare”
had mostly abated, and serious Americans now did business in the USSR.95
The presence of private, respectable companies surely bolstered the confidence
(if not the dedication) of JDC’s leaders after the withdrawal of the ARA. At the
start of 1924, the heads of the Joint could look back on the short-term projects
of the previous two years with considerable satisfaction and confidence: Soviet
regional authorities had proved cooperative and appreciative.96 Whatever the
JDC decided henceforth would be another step in a relationship, not a jump
into an abyss.

Soviet Jewry was primed for change in 1924. It had been withered by years of
hardship, and the new regime had delegitimized the traditional economic base
of shtetl life. At the same time, the revolution had released the shackles of the
Pale and even promised a measure of cultural autonomy. Therefore, Russia’s
Jews may not have arrived in the promised land of prosperity, but a pathway
seemed to exist toward social integration. Because their problems now looked
more economic than legal or political, the postrevolution crisis might be navi-
gated with creativity and ambition. In the meantime, they—like most other
Soviet citizens—waited as the new regime struggled to establish order and a
sense of direction in a devastated, unruly country.
Chapter 2 Building a Colonization Movement: Theory to Practice

Armed with experience, industriousness, and inspiration, Joseph Rosen and his colleagues still had no “road map” to guide them. As for America’s Jews, persuading them to fund famine relief was one thing; support for massive agricultural resettlement in a land other than Palestine was another. On top of that, the Joint somehow had to convert the spontaneous migration of Jews from the shtetls into a full-scale colonization movement. The logistical barriers were truly colossal. Equally urgent, Rosen had to foster a long-term partnership between mutually suspicious officials in the Joint and in the Soviet government. The sponsors of colonization then had to persuade reluctant Jews from the shtetls to transform their lives overnight. Taken together, these obstacle made the chances for success look no better than even. American-Jewish philanthropy in Eastern Europe was indeed at a crossroads in the early 1920s; palliative postwar relief for Jews had achieved its goals, but no one had yet decided what (if any) mission was next.

Joseph Rosen and the Joint first had to deal with Soviet Russia—a volatile state that had stumbled into the mid-1920s beset by huge ills. Lenin’s death in January 1924 further complicated matters for the
regime and encumbered its search for self-identity. No less worrisome for his heirs, the compromises necessitated by the introduction of the NEP had tarnished their ideological integrity without sufficient payoff: the policy had stabilized but not energized the economy. Communist party organs still emitted radicalism to the nation and beyond, but the Kremlin’s actions indicated an understanding that real progress would have to come from pragmatism, not only from propaganda. In regard to its Jews, Moscow acknowledged the plight in the former Pale but lacked the means to correct it. The Soviets faced a dilemma: could foreign involvement ease this emergency without causing lasting damage to Bolshevik ideology and national sovereignty?

Common sense suggests that a partnership with the JDC was imbalanced: how could a comparatively small “bourgeois” philanthropy like the Joint, an ocean away, operate on equal terms with a radical Marxist regime? In fact, relations were multifaceted, shaped by changing conditions, a pattern of cooperation established with the ARA, and internal debates on both sides. Whatever the momentum felt by JDC and Soviet leaders, nothing effaced the financial and philosophical issues that colonization raised in each of their political constituencies. Neither party had a set formula, but each expected to mold the project according to its own vision.

Questions about colonization intertwined with intense debates inside the Soviet Union on the character of the state and relations with its ethnic minorities. The ongoing adjustments to the colonization project also illustrated the extent of Moscow’s operational strength in the mid-1920s. Recruitment was the first challenge: could the regime construct a network of local agencies without encouraging decentralization? The main challenge of recruitment, of course, was to attract suitable candidates and dispatch them in orderly fashion—no small task for a state mostly devoid of a functional civil administration.

By the close of the 1920s, the colonists and Agro-Joint had become an integral part of the Soviet countryside. In mid-decade, however, few could have predicted that American philanthropists and their impoverished clients in the USSR would occupy such roles. How did such unlikely events unfold?

**EVOLUTION OF THE MOSCOW–NEW YORK PARTNERSHIP**

Necessity, not ideology or meticulous plans, drove Jewish colonization. By the time New York and Moscow entered into concrete discussions on organized resettlement in mid-1924, thousands of Jews already farmed parcels from Belo-
Russia to Central Asia (with the bulk in or near the population centers of the
former Pale). This spontaneous resettlement had been a sign of administrative
chaos. Therefore, the regime judged its options on organized colonization with
short-term politics in mind, without bothering to consider whether Bolshevik
ideology recognized the Jews as a historic nation deserving of a distinct terri-
tory. As will be seen, a conscious detachment of colonization in Crimea and
southern Ukraine from political philosophy became a consistent feature of the
Kremlin’s decisions.

Fifth Avenue, the Kremlin,
and Early Colonization

Once conscious of the possible magnitude and benefits of colonization, both
the Joint and the Soviets institutionalized it with striking rapidity. By June
1924, Joseph Rosen had concluded tentative agreements with the Soviet state
and the republican authorities in Simferopol (Crimea) and Kharkov (Ukraine).
These contracts allocated tens of thousands of vacant acres—mostly adjacent
to existing Jewish colonies—for the expansion of Jewish settlement under the
guidance of the JDC. With this promise in hand, Rosen obtained an initial in-
vestment of $400,000 from the Joint, with strong indications that more funds
would be forthcoming if this trial project flowered. Aware of these develop-
ments, the Soviets seized the opportunity to bind such generous foreigners to
the project. Moscow speedily concluded the first formal contract with the JDC
in late November 1924—at a pace uncharacteristic of the clumsy NEP-era bu-
reaucracy. During the intervening months, the functional bodies that would
operationalize, oversee, and support organized colonization were established:
on the American side, the JDC created Agro-Joint; on the Soviet side, the Polit-
buro established the Committee for the Settlement of Jewish Laborers on the
Land (Komzet) and the Society for the Settlement of Jewish Toilers on the Land
(Ozet).

A need for outside expertise made Agro-Joint particularly attractive for the
Soviet state. But as Joseph Rosen could attest, Russian curiosity about farming
practices in America was not new; he himself had reported on American agri-
culture as an employee of the Ekaterinoslav district before 1914. After the war,
Western economic models—particularly the scientific management and mass
production of Taylorism and Fordism—attracted many early elites and seemed
the best route to rapid recovery. Foreigners had worked in imperial Russia and
Western firms operated in Soviet Russia, but foreign sponsorship of Jewish col-
onization differed fundamentally. Business concessions and trade were com-
pact phenomena subject to tight regulation, whereas this colonization scheme occurred in regions at the edge of state control. As the largest and most ambitious foreign philanthropy, Agro-Joint became the chief interlocutor with the Soviets.7

A diversity of personnel, flexibility, and decentralization in the young Soviet administration during the mid-1920s allowed Rosen to wield his bountiful personal influence in the cause of colonization. Most indicative, he had already concluded an agreement with the Ukrainian Narkomzem for the allotment of seventy-five thousand acres in the Kherson area,8 and had made a gentlemen’s agreement with the chairman of the Crimean Narkomzem to settle a small number of families, several months before negotiations began on the formal Agro-Joint contract in mid-1924.9 After this contract was signed, Rosen discussed or even set the basic terms of future agreements with his contacts before institutionalized negotiations commenced.10 A naturalized American citizen with family connections in Russia, a past employee of the imperial government, and a former Menshevik activist, Rosen had retained many acquaintances in medium-level posts within the Soviet bureaucracy. These included the Russian Academy of Agricultural Science, the State Bank, the Commissariats of Finance and Health, and the Foreign Exchange Department.11

When he returned to Russia in 1921 with the ARA, Rosen forged new relations with important Soviet officials, most notably, Khristian Rakovskii. In addition to its value during negotiations, Rosen’s “insider” information from pivotal members of the political and financial establishments helped soothe anxieties in New York about the Soviets. Some of these contacts were “very good friends and greatly interested in our work, some [were] real good Jews [who] would not mislead us under any circumstances.”12 This feature should not be underestimated because at least one major figure in the JDC “was born with the strongest fear and hatred of Russia [and] had the idea that Russia and a Cossack were like a devil.”13 A confidential cable in early 1926 illustrated Rosen’s access to sensitive information and his (apparent) willingness to accept the regime’s actions (in this case, against Zionists) at face value:

Highest government office definitely decided last week [to] set aside Jewish settlement [in] all available lands [in] northern Crimea totaling about [1] million acres. This [is] not for publication as practical carrying out of plans will depend on funds available. About 200 Zionists were arrested last week. Attempt may be made by Zionists [to] connect these arrests with Zionist opposition [to] Russian colonization plan. For your information [the] real cause [for the] arrests are two illegal Zionist conferences held recently [in] Leningrad and uncovered [in] Moscow [as well as] two
secret Zionist printing shops issuing anti-government pamphlets [that discussed] not merely Zionist but general anti-government propaganda. These facts absolutely correct but I think [it] would not be proper for us to publish. Officials whom I spoke to privately assured me [that] most [of those] arrested will probably be released shortly.\textsuperscript{14}

A timely convergence of conditions allowed Rosen to negotiate with Komzet from a position of strength during the first five years of organized colonization: a shaky, but ambitious government bargained with a small but valued foreign philanthropy. In October 1924, he could dictate many terms of the first contract between the Joint and the Soviet government. Rosen won from Komzet and Sovnarkom absolute independence for the dispensation and management of Agro-Joint’s resources. Perhaps most impressive, the 1924 contract gave Agro-Joint veto power over the appointments of local Komzet officials.\textsuperscript{15}

In general, Rosen capitalized on the Joint’s assets but did not press too hard in areas devoid of leverage, most notably on Bolshevik policy toward organized religion.

Discussions in 1928 for the renewal of the 1924 contract illustrated similar power configurations, despite the increased involvement of the Politburo.\textsuperscript{16} Aware of the turmoil surrounding Stalin’s defeat of the Left Opposition in the winter of 1927–1928, Rosen cabled JDC chairman Felix Warburg on the eve of negotiations: “[The] present government [in] desiring [to] counteract insinuations [of an] antisemitic flavor in defeating [the Left] opposition [is] more than ever disposed [to] facilitate Jewish work and acting promptly we can now secure very desirable tracts [in Crimea].”\textsuperscript{17} Sensing susceptibility, Warburg pressured Rosen to seek additional concessions: “We are giving them something which they cannot get anywhere in the world at present. Incidentally, [the Soviets] are probably in a rather subdued frame of mind, as their enterprise in Jewish colonies in [Birobidzhan] has been, as far as we can judge, a decided fizzle. This makes it all the more important to close the transaction while the land is available and while the psychological conditions in Russia are such that we can receive the most favorable treatment.”\textsuperscript{18} While Agro-Joint remained the Joint’s operative arm in Russia, an important change accompanied the renewed contract. Komzet recognized the formation of a new organization for the finance of colonization: the American Society for Jewish Farm Settlements in Russia (ASJFSR, or the Society). Henceforth, bonds purchased from the Soviet government by a handful of wealthy American Jews—most of whom were JDC board members—would fund colonization.\textsuperscript{19} The new Society promised greater fiscal stability for the colonization program and effectively removed the
Joint from direct competition with American Zionists in mass fund-raising campaigns in synagogues and other communal institutions. Until 1928, the unpredictability of yearly collections from thousands of small donors, coupled with the urgent needs of colonization, had resulted in chronic budget crises. By design, creation of the new Society remedied this and other pressures: it allowed the Joint to solicit only those potential patrons with the pecuniary wherewithal for large, multiyear commitments.\textsuperscript{20}

The JDC had critics in Moscow, both real and imagined, even at the height of its appeal. Given the merits of the project, the Kremlin evidently ignored such grumblings from the lower ranks. For example, the laments of Aleksandr Merezhin—the secretary of Komzet, a respected member of the Evsektsiia, and former Zionist and Bundist—about the acceptance of the ASJFSR drew no sympathy in the government. Specifically, Merezhin rebuked the Joint for an apparent abandonment of mass fund-raising in America in favor of an elite cohort of investors—a move that cut off the masses of Diaspora Jewry from colonization work in Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{21} Like others in the regime, Merezhin saw

[To view this image, refer to the print version of this title.]

Agro-Joint not only as a cash resource, but also as a vehicle for reaching American Jews.

On another front, JDC leaders suspected that the Evsektsiia tried to undermine Agro-Joint by floating counterproposals for colonization in areas other than Crimea and southern Ukraine. Suspicion also abounded that the Evsek-


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tsiia poisoned attitudes toward the Joint among the party leaders, particularly Grigorii Zinoviev. If nothing else, these perceived injuries increased caution among JDC officials when dealing with the Soviets. In truth, the Evsektsiia could indeed feel threatened since a foreign, Jewish, “capitalist” organization had supplanted it in a major field of Soviet-Jewish life. Criticism aimed at Agro-Joint and Komzet, whether the product of institutional jealousy or sincere concern, also surfaced periodically among state and party officials at the provincial and national levels. Nonetheless, neither Merezhin’s misgivings nor the complaints of the Evsektsiia altered the overwhelming sentiment among Soviet officials in favor of Agro-Joint as a necessary evil, tolerable as long as needed for colonization.

The contracts with Komzet and Sovnarkom in 1924 and 1928 invested Agro-Joint with prestige and influence beyond its material importance. Empowered with this political muscle, Agro-Joint leaders then leveraged both their own employees and Soviet counterparts by invoking the “will” of American sponsors. This found its most immediate expression in overcoming local resistance to expanded land allotments in late 1924. So, for example, Samuil Liubarskii (a respected Jewish agronomist and future assistant director of Agro-Joint) helped to break the resistance of the Ukrainian Narkomzem by informing leaders of the local governments that the JDC considered the seventy-five thousand acres under discussion as a practical experiment “on the basis of which the Americans will decide.” Faced with the specter of losing these dollars, the Ukrainians relented. Agro-Joint leaders used similar allusions to foreign aid in order to evoke greater efforts from agronomists and instructors, lest they all lose the goodwill of their sentimental patrons in America.

BLIND FAITH: ORCHESTRATING SOVIET-JDC COOPERATION

Joseph Rosen’s effect on more tentative members of the JDC cannot be overemphasized. Worried that Soviet offers of large land tracts might be withdrawn or seized by others, Rosen gave the debate in New York an urgency that bordered at times on hysterics. He usually broke down American caution with warnings that hesitation would result in forfeit of attractive new parcels—after all, many ethnic groups coveted Crimean lands. Consciously or not, Komzet reinforced this atmosphere with dire admonitions for action before other minorities claimed the allotted land. Consequently, Joint officials found it nearly impossible to balance budgets under the pressure of Rosen’s spiraling demands. This real and imagined competition among Soviet nationalities precipitated action by the Joint and caused tension between Rosen and his superiors.
Rosen managed to overcome doubts in New York regarding legal and political issues both before and after Stalin gained ascendancy. Shortly after ratification of the 1924 agreement, reservations surfaced over the status of land colonized by Jews: since the Soviet Union permitted neither private ownership nor rent, could the state or the former owners reclaim the land? Rosen solicited reports from Soviet-Jewish jurists to soothe these worries. Later, Joint leaders feared the antisemitic connotations attached to defeat of the Left Opposition and its implications for Agro-Joint. Rosen assured them that the fall of Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Grigorii Zinoviev from the heights of Soviet power was in the best interests of the colonization project; their belligerence toward the peasantry was a far greater burden to Agro-Joint than their religious affiliation—all three were Jews by birth.  

If Rosen’s familiarity with the older generation of Bolshevik leaders was beneficial, Soviet ignorance of the political subtleties prevailing in American-Jewish life complicated relations and imperiled the project. In the first year of organized settlement, Komzet officials wildly exaggerated Agro-Joint’s fund-raising capacity and assumed that it could accommodate any scale of migration. Blissfully ignorant of the limitations on potential contributions from abroad and imbued with great enthusiasm, Soviet-Jewish activists helped precipitate a huge wave of registration in the winter of 1924–1925 that overwhelmed Agro-Joint’s resources in the settlement tracts. Only later did their evaluation of American aid acquire more realistic proportions. 

Soviet data on the Joint was evidently quite abundant but rarely accurate. In keeping with the common practice, GPU spies planted in Agro-Joint’s Moscow office apparently provided some material. Second, the chairman of Sovnarkom, Aleksei Rykov, received periodic reports, clippings, and letters from Merezhin on the accomplishments of colonization. Merezhin’s silence about the political divide between American Zionists and the JDC gave his superiors a distorted picture. Only one Soviet commentator understood the troubles faced by the Joint, particularly concerning the disbursement of the $15 million collected by the United Jewish Campaign in the mid-1920s: “What part of this will be assigned to the settlement program is difficult to say right now. We should not forget that the activity of Agro-Joint meets harsh attacks from the Zionists, as well as from the enemies of the Soviet state among different political groups, particularly from ‘socialists’ in the Forverts [a Yiddish-language socialist newspaper published in New York].” Evsektsiia reports and publications by other Soviet bodies illustrated and bred misperceptions of American Jewry. Just as Rykov may have been uninformed on Diaspora issues, other observers of the American
Zionists and the JDC overestimated the conflict induced by the National Conference of the United Jewish Campaign at Philadelphia in September 1925. This gathering, though intended to produce consensus on the distribution of philanthropic resources from the American-Jewish community, ended in discord when the Joint refused to submit to demands from the Zionist attendees for greater appropriations to Palestine versus Russian colonization. This led some Soviet observers to the erroneous conclusion that the success of Russian colonization was undermining Zionism among American Jews.35

Given the Soviets’ lack of accurate information, Rosen’s activism fed misconceptions in the USSR of Agro-Joint’s political weight. By lobbying on behalf of Hehalutz members imprisoned after the regime outlawed the organization’s urban activities in the mid-1920s, he inadvertently “convinced” Moscow that the Joint was the undisputed leader of world Jewry. In response, the Soviets tried to shift the financial and legal responsibility onto Agro-Joint for the transfer of the jailed Zionists to Palestine.36 Notwithstanding these miscalculations, Soviet officials openly applauded Agro-Joint during these initial honeymoon years. At the same time, Soviet-Jewish luminaries believed that the American benefactors could contribute even more. Or, as Abram Bragin (a respected publicist and promoter of Jewish agricultural colonization) put it in 1926: “Until now whenever I am asked about the wealth of Agro-Joint, I said that the Americans are rich, but Agro-Joint is poor. Even these sums which we have received are not proportionately large for American Jewry.”37 Ozet kept abreast of the developments in the United States connected to colonization but then projected them to the Soviet readership through an ideological prism that distorted the true picture.38

Religious issues strained relations between New York and the Soviet regime, although neither side put them at the head of their respective colonization agendas. Unlike economic and political issues, however, religious affairs had permanent, vocal constituents whom the JDC (and other major Jewish organizations) could not ignore—namely, Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora. Although committed in theory to promoting religious freedom, Joint officials harbored deep doubts about their ability to influence state policy. In practice, they avoided what seemed to be futile confrontations in favor of efforts to help their impoverished brethren become more productive.39

Concerning the religious issues, officials closer to events in Russia proved more assertive than the directors in New York. If Warburg and Rosenberg exercised caution, Bernhard Kahn (the Joint’s European director in Berlin) and Rosen confronted or circumvented Soviet institutions on religious matters,
confident that the disorderly Soviet policy afforded them sufficient maneuvering room, at least until April 1929. On one side of the Atlantic, Rosen pressed the reluctant JDC to try to head off a Soviet campaign to convert synagogues into social halls in the shtetls. On the other side, Cyrus Adler (chairman of the JDC’s Cultural Committee and a renowned Judaic scholar in Philadelphia) set his colleagues in New York against the plan of Rosen and Kahn to test the promise made by the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment (Anatolii Lunacharskii) to allow formal instruction of the Hebrew language in Soviet cities.  

Whether it was within the Joint’s power to alter Soviet religious policy is immaterial. Rather, it is noteworthy that caution toward Soviet institutions almost invariably came from New York, not Agro-Joint leaders in Europe.

Relations steadily improved between the leaders of the JDC and the commissars during the second half of the 1920s. Meetings with Soviet leaders during trips to Russia reinforced confidence, often bordering on infatuation. This merged with a growing respect for Soviet economic recovery (common among American economic elites), particularly after the commencement of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, which proclaimed the desire for rapid industrialization and the modernization of the agricultural economy. Ironically, Joint leaders came to trust the non-Jewish Soviet leaders more than their fellow Jews in the Evsektsiia. The euphoria of JDC officials over the government’s visible aid to Jews—through colonization and in laws against antisemitism—was remarkable. The immensity of the change from tsarist to Bolshevik policy blinded many in New York. In particular, James Rosenberg perceived huge moral and political implications in the creation of the semi-independent Ozet; he could not or would not assess its real value. Furthermore, while many of the highest JDC officials connected to colonization were outspoken critics of organized labor and the communist party in America during the 1920s, they separated ideology from their dealings with the Soviets. Even so sober an observer as Louis Marshall concluded: “Whatever may be the experience of the Russian people at the hands of their government so far as the outside world is concerned, my observation [is] that the Soviet would scrupulously keep its contracts with the citizens of other nations.”

The “Republican” Debate: Pragmatism over Ideology

Although often overvalued in the existing historiography, desires for a Jewish homeland did constitute a leitmotif of this colonization episode and the triangular relationship between the settlers, the JDC, and Agro-Joint. Dreams of a
A self-governing entity for Jews around the Black Sea enjoyed support in the Kremlin only for an instant, made possible by a fleeting political environment from 1923 to 1925—years suffused with a wider discourse on national autonomy. An outline for a Jewish republic emerged in a pamphlet in late 1923 (The Fate of the Jewish Masses in the Soviet Union) by Abram Bragin and Mikhail Kol’tsov. In a remarkable coincidence, it appeared just as Joseph Rosen solidified his strategy for organized colonization; hence, although they were not coordinated acts, Rosen put forth the “nuts and bolts” of systematic resettlement to American and Soviet audiences just as two Soviet-Jewish publicists circulated a wishful treatise on the potential of Jewish colonization.

Although one cannot know to what degree Bragin and Kol’tsov were informed, their proposal echoed existing ideas. As noted in the preceding chapter, not only had Jewish political thinkers debated territorialization since the mid-nineteenth century, philanthropists and pioneers had practiced organized colonization in Palestine and the Americas for decades. Closer to the contemporary events, modest ideas for a Jewish agricultural movement had circulated in the old Kherson colonies between the revolutions of 1917. Unlike this, and another limited proposal after the October Revolution, the spontaneous settlement movement inspired a grand vision in Bragin and Kol’tsov. Although the authors deplored the notion of “a Soviet Palestine,” they argued for a sprawling Jewish territorial unit from Odessa to Kuban, largely underwritten by world Jewry.

Amid the general discourse on nationalism that swept the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, ideas for a Jewish republic in Crimea even enjoyed a momentary triumph in the Politburo. Bragin and Kol’tsov did not invent the concept of territorialization but popularized it, promoted it in the state’s highest bodies, and mobilized other proponents of a Jewish republic. Cautiously avoiding overt references that could be interpreted as chauvinistic, their pamphlet was highly suggestive nonetheless because the idea of a homeland in Russia for toiling Jews had many supporters in the aftermath of civil war carnage and pogroms. Although Bragin was not a party member, his high stature in Moscow helped him to spread the vision of Jewish territorialization in the press and public venues. In December 1923, the Politburo accepted his proposal for a Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Crimea. The victory was short-lived, however; an appeal by Commissar of Agriculture A. P. Smirnov in February 1924 persuaded the Politburo to reverse its decision. Smirnov argued that Jewish colonization would breed conflict with the indigenous populations, thereby playing into the hands of Russia’s antisemites. He also questioned the wisdom of
pursuing an enterprise based mostly on foreign capital. Instead, the commissar recommended that Jews be granted parcels adjacent to the shtetls under the supervision of existing state agencies, not Komzet. Thus, the dream of a Jewish republic around the Black Sea died several months before Agro-Joint and Komzet began work.

Despite Bragin’s failure to carry the Politburo, his campaign produced important political results. He put Jewish colonization, and the principle of a territorial solution for the “Jewish question,” solidly on the agenda of the communist party. Protocols of the Politburo from 1924 to 1926 reveal continuous interest in colonization, even if it did not intervene in the negotiations with Agro-Joint. After the rejection of Bragin’s proposal, the Politburo and Sovnarkom nonetheless allocated large tracts of government land, established Komzet and Ozet, and lifted restrictions on Jewish land settlement. True, the Kremlin waited until the autumn of 1924—after the JDC had expressed interest in long-term involvement—to commit itself to organized colonization, but Bragin’s lobbying at the top had fostered a receptive atmosphere toward the project. He also helped refocus mass Jewish agrarianization away from Belorussia, where the severe shortage of arable land made substantial expansion improbable.

The dream of a Jewish republic along the Black Sea littoral may have been doomed before its birth, no matter what Realpolitik considerations influenced the regime. Ideology—an aversion to “petite-bourgeois nationalism”—deterred most revolutionary leaders from adopting strategies that could be seen as nationalist. As “old Bolsheviks,” most Politburo members in the mid-1920s associated Jewish autonomy with the Bund or Zionism, movements that under Soviet rule had already been repudiated. True, Lenin had led a tactical change with the policy of korenizatsia but older, internationalist attitudes remained fundamentally unchanged. Neither korenizatsia nor the Politburo’s mandate for colonization legitimized blatant Jewish nationalism. Hence, Komzet officials tactfully avoided direct reference to the creation of a Jewish republic and statements that smacked of nationalism. Rather, political common sense and, for many, a practical predisposition brought them to focus on the humanitarian and economic justifications for colonization. So while Bragin and others in Moscow envisioned Jewish autonomy on a grand scale, most Soviet-Jewish activists pursued far narrower goals.

Nonetheless, echoes of the “republican” idea reverberated long after the Politburo had rejected Bragin’s proposal. Perhaps the most effectual Soviet patron of colonization, Iurii Larin, campaigned tirelessly for a truncated version
of Bragin’s plan from 1923 until his death in January 1932. After 1928, Larin also counterbalanced the official promotion of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Birobidzhan as the site for Jewish territorial autonomy; from his point of view, Crimea and its environs was the only worthy site for any sort of Soviet-Jewish territory. Other, lesser advocates dangled the “republican” dream as long as it enjoyed currency in the general nationalities discourse. From below, the regime was able to stir interest in the shtetls for “republicanism” into the mid-1920s. Hence, a significant proportion of the early settlers to the Black Sea littoral may have believed that it would eventually become a Jewish republic. Even pockets of Jews in Siberia took up notions of agrarianization and autonomy that rippled outward from the discourse in Moscow.

The frequency of “republican” rhetoric declined steeply toward the end of the 1920s. In part, it fell victim to the growing monopolization of power in Stalin’s hands. In contrast to party policy earlier in the decade (much of which he authored), Stalin became increasingly hostile toward national autonomy for ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the expansion of Agro-Joint settlements into the Kerch peninsula in 1929 briefly rekindled talk of a compact Jewish territory along the east bank of the Azov Sea. Most debate during the second half of the decade, however, focused on the utilitarian facets of colonization. Thereafter, few spoke explicitly of a “republic,” but the geographic boundaries drawn by Bragin and Kol’tsov remained the conceptual boundary for colonization into the 1930s.

The “republican” idea had comparatively little effect on officials of the Joint in New York and in Russia. At their most wistful, prominent Soviet-Jewish supporters of colonization hoped it would raise the status of Jews in Russian public opinion and reduce the potential sources for pogroms in the traditional areas of the Pale. Rosen mixed consistent disavowal of republicanism with the argument that pogroms could be deterred by agrarianization in areas where vacant land was plentiful and antisemitism historically weak. James Rosenberg (by now the president of Agro-Joint), though receptive to visions of a moral rebirth for Russian Jewry, understood that talk of a republic could hurt colonization. As he told Komzet officials during his visit to Moscow in 1926, the creation of a Jewish republic must resemble the “growth of a tree, not a mushroom.” Local Agro-Joint personnel seconded this conviction: “We will not embark upon an excursion in the sphere of abstract, psycho-physiological thinking, into the realm of peasant romanticism. We are interested in the strength [moment] of migration and the transformation of landless people into productive workers as one of the basic factors in the establishment of agricul-
tural production.” Because utilitarianism drove the Joint and its employees in Russia, they quickly detached themselves from the official Soviet campaign launched in 1928 for a Jewish autonomous region in Birobidzhan. Several considerations fueled this move, even if some Joint officials speculated about the eugenic promise of colonization in the Soviet Far East. Without doubt, the extreme physical conditions in Birobidzhan and the proximity to the volatile border with China contradicted Agro-Joint’s functional approach to colonization. Moreover, an awareness of the organization’s logistical limitations as well as the unique structure and personnel in Crimea—impossible to replicate along the Amur River—deterred New York. Pragmatism also dissuaded most Soviet-Jewish activists from support for Birobidzhan. Already convinced of the practical benefits of southern Ukraine and Crimea, most Komzet and Ozet personnel hedged as far as they dared against the official policy.

Moscow minimized the Evsektsiia’s role precisely because it resolved to separate ideology from the daily supervision of colonization. From the party’s perspective, the Evsektsiia not only lacked a functional apparatus, but also projected an antagonistic ideological extremism. Thus, exclusion of Evsektsiia from most colonization work guaranteed a more dispassionate handling of settlers and smoother relations with the foreign philanthropies. Indeed, once the Politburo neutralized talk of a Jewish republic in early 1924, the Evsektsiia had no obvious role in the project and had little or no say in policy decisions. Moscow also barred the Evsektsiia from recruitment duties in the shtetls; as it was already alienated from the Jewish public, its participation would have been counterproductive. The Evsektsiia, in fact, did little more than observe settlements and report to the center. Even this proved difficult for local cells suffering from chronic shortages of personnel; the Evsektsiia never employed more than twenty-two hundred activists.

The Logic of Colonization

From the outset, organized Jewish colonization brought a new version of farming to the Soviet countryside. Indeed, Joseph Rosen’s approach to agricultural settlement foreshadowed and perhaps molded how the state tried to modernize the countryside. The Joint’s earliest studies found that colonization could succeed only if it departed sharply from the farming practices of the Russian village. A report from a survey headed by Samuil Liubarskii underpinned Rosen’s—and, in turn, Komzet’s—rationale for settlement in Crimea and southern Ukraine. After they assessed the financial, demographic, and agricultural implications of the spontaneous colonies and Hehalutz communes, Li-
ubarskii’s team suggested that future settlements focus on high-yield (or intensive) agricultural products (such as corn, sorghum, Sudanese hay, commercial vegetables, orchards, commercial livestock and dairy farms, tobacco, and vineyards) in place of traditional grains. These advanced crops would provide a solid financial base for the colonies and lend themselves to the introduction of modern machinery by the Joint. According to Liubarskii, the colonists would compensate for an absence of agricultural traditions through modern farming operations, made possible by their “superior intelligence” compared with the indigenous villagers. These conclusions became the permanent operative mantras for Agro-Joint.

Why Crimea and southern Ukraine? During these first years of colonization, Joseph Rosen presented a persuasive list of tangible benefits to the directors of the Joint: favorable climate, proximity to profitable markets along the Black Sea coast, abundant land, and—given the favorable exchange rate between dollars and rubles—extremely high yields on JDC cash investments in Russia. Other leaders of the Joint concurred with Rosen’s approach. David Brown (who, along with Jacob Billikopf, led the fund-raising campaigns for the JDC during the interwar period) clearly expressed the financial rationale for Russian colonization: each new household there cost the JDC between $200 and $250, compared with $5,000 for resettlement in the Yishuv. A later recalculation raised the price per unit to slightly more than $1,000, but this was still very much cheaper than Palestine. The levelheaded Billikopf added that the JDC supported colonization simply because the Soviet government allotted land without cost.

Compelling financial and political considerations persuaded the Kremlin to join organized colonization. Already in December 1923, Stalin’s deputy at the Commissariat of Nationalities wrote the Politburo that massive resettlement would correct the historic repression of Jews, undermine international Zionism, arouse support for the Soviet Union in international Jewry, and attract foreign financial support for Soviet agriculture. Evidently, the Soviets also saw colonization as a remedy for overcrowding in the shtetl and an easy means to increase the overall tillage of soil. The readiness of the Joint to underwrite colonization allowed the Soviets to put these theories into effect. This utilitarian rationale remained unchanged for at least the next decade. The last outstanding issue—determination of the site_quickly found resolution: Komzet settled on Crimea on the basis of an abundance of vacant government tracts, light population density, extensive railways, adequate precipitation, good soil, and positive “ethnic” conditions.
Komzet and a member of the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee (VTsIK), summed up the Soviet perspective: “The revolution that brought new hopes to everyone spelt death to the average Jew, because in the years of privation he could not adapt himself to productive work. The Soviet government was immediately faced with a highly intricate Jewish problem. The Soviets were not in a position to build factories and give the Jews employment. Considering the question from all angles, the only thing the government had to give was land, and that was given freely and willingly. And so the idea of Jewish colonization began to develop, the plan being to settle 100,000 Jewish families in 10 years.”

Whatever its anticipated benefits, colonization carried risks for the Soviets. Unlike cultivation on parcels bordering the shtetls, large migrations could spawn conflicts and affect the whole nationalities policy because the new Soviet autonomous entities tended to guard the purity of the titular ethnic majorities. Likewise, indigenous populations did not always welcome “outsiders”; Crimea and Ukraine were no exceptions.

The New York–Moscow partnership worked during the second half of the 1920s because of a certain compatibility of separate interests and a tacit acceptance of insoluble differences. Relations became so good that the sides even conspired to withhold potentially problematic information from their constituencies. The decrease of talk about a Jewish republic along the Black Sea also helped matters. On the whole, pragmatism guided decision-making below a din of ineffectual rhetoric from the proponents of “republicanism.” When such ideas resurfaced in connection to the Jewish Autonomous Oblast of Birobidzhan, almost everyone in Russia regarded them as little more than fanciful propaganda.

AGENCIES OF COLONIZATION

Who were these newfound Jewish colonists? Whatever the dreams of the benefactors of colonization, the settlers themselves would have to be recruited from among very real folk with very immediate needs. Given the turbulence of the period throughout the Soviet Union, the process through which settlers were solicited opens a window on local conditions and the exercise of power. Undoubtedly, the selection and dispatch of proper candidates from among thousands of former merchants, peddlers, and tradesmen—most of whom knew nothing about farming and maintained a wary attitude toward the state—was no simple matter. Closer to the land itself, the difficulties only increased. Grand
ideas of agrarianization were one thing; operating an elaborate colonization program under volatile political conditions was another.

Komzet and Ozet: “Friendly but Incompetent”

Resolved to advance colonization, the Soviets needed an operative arm. Already hard-pressed to impose order in the countryside, the Kremlin had to act; it could neither tolerate the chaos of spontaneous settlement nor abandon colonization to foreign, “bourgeois” organizations. For the reasons cited above, the Evsektsiia did not figure as a candidate for this assignment, and Narkomnats was already gone in 1924. The Politburo formed Komzet for this purpose in mid-1924 under the Central Committee of the USSR. Komzet was a professional organization composed of prominent officials of the central government, republican leaders, agronomists, and Evsektsiia activists. The Politburo set an unequivocal mission for Komzet: land settlement for multitudes of Russia’s Jews. Although possessing a formidable membership, the committee suffered from a scourge common to state agencies of the time: lack of funds and relevant expertise. Despite its shortcomings, the creation of Komzet visibly attached the regime to solving the plight of Jews in the shtetl through a Soviet variant of affirmative action that prioritized land use for Jewish lishentsy.

Beyond its mandate for colonization, Komzet assumed larger roles from the late 1920s until 1937. The formation of Komzet conformed to Moscow’s preference for state over explicitly party bodies as administrative organs: if the Evsektsiia was undeniably an arm of the party, Komzet at least looked governmental. Its imposing list of leading members guaranteed an immediate eclipse of the Evsektsiia as the preeminent Jewish political body in the Soviet Union, even if some of its principals were not themselves Jews. The marginalization of the Evsektsiia, together with the regime’s gradual assault on signs of nationalism among the Union’s ethnic minorities, had actually begun in the mid-1920s. Once the party disbanded the Evsektsiia in 1930, it left a leadership void—nominal or otherwise—for Russia’s Jews. No less important, the aggressive publicity campaign launched on behalf of Jewish colonization in the mid-1920s (discussed below) greatly augmented the image of Komzet among readers of both Russian and Yiddish. For these reasons, Komzet inherited from the Evsektsiia, mostly by default, the de facto political leadership of Russian Jewry in the late 1920s.

The mere formation of Komzet and Ozet sparked otherwise nonexistent ideological and personal animosities in the Evsektsiia. Many felt betrayed because some of their activists—Merezhin, Simeon Dimanshtein, and others—as-
sumed high-profile positions in the new organizations and thereby enhanced their political status. Moreover, while Komzet paralleled the JDC’s pragmatic approach to colonization, some in the Evsektsiia saw colonization around the Black Sea as a possible step toward Jewish territorial autonomy and greater national identity, particularly through the institutionalization of Yiddish. Finally, from the Evsektsiia’s perspective, relations between Agro-Joint and its Soviet counterparts were always too cordial. An envious Evsektsiia spent much of the second half of the 1920s attacking Komzet policies and actions.

When the Kremlin formed Ozet in January 1925 to enlist popular support for Jewish colonization among the general public, this move was in keeping with the Soviet practice of mobilization campaigns under the NEP. In the emerging political culture of Bolshevism, mass mobilization had to accompany any important national goal. Born of this perception, Ozet was a voluntary, nominally nonparty, “public organization.” Its initiators hoped to equal the achievements of similar societies, particularly the International Society for Aid to Fighters of the Revolution (MOPR) and the Society for Support of Defense and Aviation-Chemical Development in the USSR (Osoaviakhim), which had shown that significant numbers of Soviet citizens could be enlisted for the support—financial and moral—of national projects. Why was Ozet necessary in addition to Komzet? In Moscow’s view, the composition of Komzet facilitated administrative and logistic action, but not propaganda; therefore, another agency was necessary. The considerable public enthusiasm that accompanied the formation of Ozet quickly spawned dozens of urban cells.

Directed from the headquarters in Moscow, Ozet assumed different tasks over the years. The local Ozet branches focused on the recruitment, registration, and transportation of new candidates from the shtetls and the smaller urban Jewish communities to the colonies. Next, the government—unwilling to totally forsake settlement responsibilities—gave Ozet direct authority over colonization of the Evpatoria district in Crimea, the Jewish colonies in Belorussia, and those in the Nikopol region of southern Ukraine. Without a source of sizable foreign aid, Ozet’s leaders hoped that mass participation in its urban factory and office cells would generate financial support for its settler-clients. The early proliferation of offices in Soviet cities encouraged high expectations: by 1926, Ozet operated more than forty offices in Ukraine, ten in Belorussia, five in Crimea, and single cells in Azerbaijan, Leningrad, Rostov, and Dagestan. Moscow also made Ozet an intermediary for the settlers’ loans from Agro-Joint and gave it authority over the supply of construction and farming equipment to settlers living outside the latter’s territory.
Ozet’s greatest contribution came as a fund-raiser and propagandist at home and abroad. It functioned as a pamphleteer, movie producer, and travel agent that ferried dozens of workers’, soldiers’, and foreign delegations to the colonies. Although not high on its original agenda, these roles eventually eclipsed all others. Annual, nationwide lotteries—their earnings dedicated to Jewish colonization—became the focus of its activity from the late 1920s. Urban cells of Ozet came to interpret their relative success through the sale of lottery tickets; these reached into the millions and included luxury prizes (three-room apartments in the preferred areas of the USSR), tax exemptions, travel to the United States, motorcycles, and more basic fare (razor blades and phonographs). Ozet also devoted considerable energy to the development of fraternal or subsidiary groups abroad.89 These foreign organizations perhaps contributed some moral support but delivered little material aid.

As with much of early Soviet rural administration, Ozet’s record was mainly one of failure, particularly as a settlement organization. Lacking trained and committed farm instructors, this duty quickly overwhelmed the organization. Moscow transferred the responsibility for Jewish colonization in the Evpatoria district to Agro-Joint authority in mid-1929, and in Nikopol to the JCA in 1927.90 Recruitment tasks gravitated toward Komzet in the early 1930s, following Ozet’s mixed record in this field. In the role of creditor to colonists and as the conduit to Agro-Joint, it fared better, though not without incident.91 Those of its urban cells that were closer to the colonies were more effective than elsewhere but still did not provide adequate service.92 From the late 1920s, Ozet experienced severe cash flow difficulties; by 1935–1936 it barely met its salary obligations to employees. Judging from Ozet’s journal Tribuna and other pamphlets, the organization’s focus on colonization evaporated, together with its Jewish membership, from the early 1930s.93 Thereafter, Ozet was no longer a Soviet-Jewish organization, but rather, a Sovietized body that served general party policy.

The state’s need for outside assistance created a warm environment for interaction between Agro-Joint, Komzet, and Ozet. No less significant, a vacuum of state authority in the countryside gave Komzet and Ozet functional maneuverability vis-à-vis the center. Interaction between Agro-Joint and these Soviet counterparts was exemplary during the first years of colonization: local staff meetings produced businesslike arrangements for cultivation, the assignment of new colonists, tractor service plans, and the distribution of construction supplies. Agro-Joint and Ozet differed over the preferred styles of housing units, but overall, they collaborated as equals.94 The political climate chilled some-
what in the late 1920s, as Komzet came under growing pressure from the Kremlin—characteristic of the greater centralization of power in Moscow.

Recruitment: “Silly Rules and Regulations”

The absence of state institutions outside the major cities raised questions about the recruitment of colonists before the ink dried on the 1924 contract. Whatever the logistic challenges ahead, both the Soviet and Agro-Joint administrators faced an impasse: how could they attract appropriate candidates from the overcrowded, poverty-stricken (but familiar) shtetls of the former Pale to the bleak conditions in Crimea and southern Ukraine? No less important, how might they exclude undesirables without offending the sentimental American donors? There was also a logistical imbalance between the institutional partners: Agro-Joint had mobilized resources from New York to meet the needs of the first wave of organized settlers in the winter of 1924–1925, but Ozet was not yet equipped to solicit recruits.

Recruitment proved problematic given the gap between the good intent of the Soviet authorities and their ability to deliver timely assistance. Eager for quick results, some local governments in the former Pale preempted the central authority and dispatched recruits in early 1924. These premature arrivals—dejected by the dreadful conditions in the settlement tracts before Agro-Joint reached them—quickly returned home, and their experiences overshadowed subsequent recruitment drives. Timing proved to be a key factor: the agricultural colonies (new or old) could best absorb recruits during the short spring sowing season; arrival at any other time aggravated shortages of fuel, housing, and employment. On the basis of this calendar, organized recruitment was concentrated in the autumn and winter. State agencies and Agro-Joint then had to outfit the recruits for the journey southward, support them during the first weeks, provide loans, and coordinate details with authorities in the districts appropriated for Jewish settlement.95

As in many other aspects of Soviet administration, commitment to colonization overmatched capabilities in the mid-1920s. True, the 1924 agreement had allocated 210,000 acres for tens of thousands of new families, but both Komzet and Ozet were still in their infancy: neither possessed adequate personnel or experience to handle recruitment on this scale. In actuality, they established local infrastructures in the shtetls only toward the end of 1925. Hence, a patchwork of state and party agencies organized recruitment during the first year. These combined to handle 75 percent of the forty-five hundred families who migrated to Jewish colonies throughout Soviet Russia in 1925. It is also possible that per-
sonnel later connected to Agro-Joint helped to organize this first effort.\(^9^6\) Even if true, Agro-Joint deliberately detached itself from recruitment after 1925 as it had no offices in the shtetls, and the leaders of the Joint wanted to avoid the controversies involved in the selection process. These responsibilities thus fell wholly on Ozet branches dispersed around Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine. To guarantee a measure of coherence among those sent to the tracts, regulations for the first organized recruitment drive in 1924 stipulated membership in co-operative associations (artels); individual households did not qualify.\(^9^7\)

Financial and administrative conditions in the shtetls and on the ground in Crimea, not class policy, determined who would depart at the outset for the organized colonies. The Kremlin probably preferred that resettlement first address the needs of the shtetls’ poorest residents to offset the relatively affluent profile of the spontaneous colonists from 1922 and 1923. But neither Agro-Joint nor Moscow could shoulder the full cost of resettlement. Komzet could offer each household a maximum of 150 rubles—a sum that did not even cover the 300-ruble registration fee.\(^9^8\)

In order to maximize finite resources and, thus, the number of settlers in the short term, it became necessary to weed out the neediest cases in the first year or two of organized settlement. The only exceptions were those fortunate households that received additional credit from foreign philanthropies or artisans with a prized agricultural skill.\(^9^9\) In addition, the recruiting agencies apparently gave some, but not blanket, preference to Red Army veterans. Even with these exceptions, the high registration fee meant that most recruits came from rather affluent families. Therefore, the first wave of settlers organized by the Soviet authorities and Agro-Joint greatly resembled the relatively high socioeconomic profile of the spontaneous colonists.\(^1^0^0\) Because they could do little to remedy this “unfortunate” situation, some JDC leaders concerned with the very poor pointed out that resettlement at least helped to ease overcrowding in the shtetls and thus indirectly benefited those who remained behind. Despite these difficulties, organized recruitment brought quick growth as authorities in Belorussia, then Ukraine, lifted legal barriers to colonization in mid-1924. If 76,000 Jewish farmers were on the land at the close of 1923, their numbers reached 100,000 at the start of 1925 and approximately 130,000 at mid-year.\(^1^0^1\)

Over time, the enlistment of candidates came to reflect more closely the regime’s focus on productivization as well as some of the nation’s nagging troubles. This can be seen by the changing trends of recruitment in the latter part of the decade. Because Komzet increasingly saw colonization as a means to ease the plight of downtrodden shtetl residents, beginning in 1927 it discouraged
the resettlement of those with gainful jobs. Henceforth, recruitment refocused on unemployed lishentsy—former merchants, artisans, service workers, and the like.\textsuperscript{102} Therefore, local communities and the local offices of Komzet made common cause: the former could conveniently trim excess residents, while the latter achieved its quantitative targets of several thousand households per year. According to some reports, the first wave of settlers came from recently urbanized Belorussian Jews who had not yet established roots in the city. Given that urban anonymity troubled the Soviet authorities in the 1920s, it is not unreasonable that local authorities in the Pale acted to push new arrivals toward colonization.\textsuperscript{103} Finally, nationwide economic crises also influenced recruitment efforts. For example, Agro-Joint concluded that severe grain shortages irreparably damaged the 1927–1928 campaign.\textsuperscript{104}

Encouragement from above and interest from below triggered exponential growth and reflexive adjustments after 1925. Within two years, Ozet operated 355 recruitment offices and planned to open others in towns with more than one hundred Jews. Instructions for recruitment in 1925–1926 were both more detailed and more permissive than those of the previous year: artels were encouraged but not mandatory, and individuals now qualified for resettlement. In addition, artels could henceforth choose their own members; heretofore, the recruitment authorities had often formed them arbitrarily from small clusters of candidates.\textsuperscript{105} In practice, most recruits still joined artels after 1925, thus embedding cooperativism in almost all the new colonies. Lastly, the new instructions set a timetable: working-age members should migrate first, to be followed within two years by their families.

A flood of recruits in the winter of 1925–1926 proved a mixed blessing for the settlement organizations. The enthusiastic response evidently derived from both the economic crisis in the shtetls and greater public awareness about the colonization project produced by Ozet and Agro-Joint. Whatever its cause, this wave exposed several weaknesses. Caught unprepared for the large numbers, it forced Komzet and Agro-Joint to install a more restrictive economic categorization of candidates at the points of origin in order to protect the fledgling recruitment infrastructure and an unripe settlement network.\textsuperscript{106} While this change may have refined the selection system for Ozet, it was in fact a defensive reaction. Lacking the requisite resources, Rosen and Komzet resorted to the use of a detailed questionnaire in order to limit or deter recruits.\textsuperscript{107} Categorizing became even more sophisticated in the 1927–1928 campaign, when applicants were obliged to provide personal and financial data for each household.\textsuperscript{108}

In much the same way as Soviet citizens refined their survival skills during
the NEP, irregularities surfaced as recruits sought to capitalize on opportunities and chronic gaps in state supervision. Observers noted that many candidates enjoyed the benefits of colonization without actually resettling; they returned to the shtetls after “staking a claim” on the steppe—usually by constructing a dugout (zemlianka). Moreover, nearly half of the Ukrainian Jews approved for resettlement in the first two to three years of organized recruitment either declined or deferred migration. Evidently, the tightened regulations provoked tensions between some candidates and the recruiting offices. As one candidate grumbled: “They are too smart in that [recruitment] office. They asked us too many questions and we got confused. We returned home. A little money was raised [from everyone’s personal savings]. And do you think they were satisfied? After that we had to fill out I don't know how many papers with all kinds of questions, and the people from Agro-Joint and from the government came and asked us more questions. The troubles we had! But finally, thanks to the Upper One [God], it was over and four of us went out to look at the land. We didn’t want to. What should we know about land? But they have those silly rules and regulations just as in the Tsar’s time. So we went.” In addition, about 45 percent of all candidates never sold their homes in their places of origin or sent poor relatives to stake claims in the tracts until the situation stabilized. It appears that many recruits delayed full settlement until the service organizations constructed homes and facilities; others chose to winter in the shtetls. Moreover, by the late 1920s, migration to the colonies had evidently become a sanctuary for tax evaders and debtors. Rosen apparently knew of such fraud but accepted it as a minor bump in the road meant to rescue the masses of lishentsy who were otherwise excluded from the national economy. Finally, documents from the Narkomzem suggest that scams did not cease even during the dark years of Stalinist terror. In the late 1930s, some people defrauded the state by repeated registration and fictitious resettlement, presumably to renew eligibility for the grants and tax exemptions given to colonists.

Weak central supervision from the state also invited abuses and manipulation by local recruitment authorities. For example, the Komzet chairman in Crimea protested vehemently that the Belo-Tserkov district committee (raikom) had repeatedly dispatched to the colonies “cripples” and families without working members. This exemplified a troubling (but understandable) practice local authorities employed in Ukraine and Belorussia: government-supported colonization presented local communities with a golden opportunity to jettison social welfare cases or recent, unwanted arrivals. As mentioned above, this practice must be seen in its proper context—an era of great
tension caused by widespread urban anonymity. Responding to complaints from local authorities and journalists about the quantity and quality of settlers, Komzet moved in 1932 to prohibit the resettlement of households that lacked working members.\textsuperscript{114}

Increased class-consciousness from above—a central characteristic of Soviet policy in the late 1920s—led to adjustments in the regulations governing recruitment. In the first years of organized settlement, the majority of colonists came from the former “bourgeois” sectors, with a significant minority of social welfare cases. From the winter of 1929–1930, recruitment instructions gave unequivocal priority to unemployed, unskilled poor people (\textit{bednota}). To enforce conformity with the more radical socialist ideals current in Moscow at the end of the decade, the new regulations also forbade the dispatch of recruits to individual farms (\textit{edinolicniki}); henceforth, all candidates had to settle in collective farms (\textit{kolkhozes}). Since an overabundance of recruits from higher economic categories could no longer be tolerated, Komzet lowered the prerequisites; economic stability was no longer necessary, only an absence of debt.\textsuperscript{115} On a more practical level, Komzet also instructed recruiters to avoid unmarried candidates; experience showed that they were most likely to leave the colonies.

Ozet, and then Komzet, employed a number of tactics to attract candidates. Nevertheless, most oral histories indicate that the greatest impetus for resettlement came from neighbors or relatives who had already gone to the land.\textsuperscript{116} Aware that familiar faces often encouraged recruitment, Komzet altered procedures from the winter of 1930–1931 by sending veteran settlers back to their points of origin. It was assumed that, as recognized locals, they probably brought greater credibility to recruitment drives. These unmonitored settler-recruiters, however, produced mixed results in 1931. To avoid a repeat, Komzet made sure that the next group had better “political education” and “self-control.”\textsuperscript{117} The settler-recruiters left an ambivalent mark on contemporary literature as well, as shown in a children’s book, \textit{Deti evreiskoi kommuny} (“The Children of a Jewish Commune”). Here, the enthusiasm of an Ozet settler-recruiter was met with skepticism in the shtetl, particularly among the elders.\textsuperscript{118} The most common recruitment tool was the local public “evening” (\textit{vecher}), featuring Komzet spokespeople, veteran settlers, and popular entertainment.\textsuperscript{119}

Overall, recruitment did not have a uniform effect. On one hand, the great waves ceased after the First Five-Year Plan began, as more Jews migrated toward industry. On the other hand, recruiters successfully replenished the ranks of colonies so that, despite persistent flight, their population gradually grew. In
southern Ukraine, they expanded from approximately seventy-five thousand people in 1924 to nearly one hundred thousand in 1939; in Crimea, the colonies hovered between fifteen thousand and twenty thousand from 1928 until 1941. According to Rosen, the total Jewish farming population and acreage in Russia jumped fourfold between 1914 and 1927. Even if Rosen and other Agro-Joint personnel occasionally exaggerated the rates of growth, the fact remained that the farming population of the settlement regions had drastically increased.120

But crops could not wait for new or perfect recruits; intensive farming demanded a competent, stable labor force. Because of chronic shortages of skilled people, recruitment patterns and the demographic profile of the colonies would change in the early 1930s. In the meantime, colonization produced a strong resonance in the shtetls and beyond, as expressed in this popular Yiddish song:

When you go to Sevastopol,
Not too far from Simferopol,
There’s a little depot there.
Why seek your luck elsewhere?
It’s a special kind of depot.
In Zhankoye, zhan, zhan, zhan . . .

Jews, answer my question,
Where’s my brother Abrasha?
He who rides his tractor like a train.
Aunt Leah is at the mower,
Bella is working the thresher,
In Zhankoye, zhan, zhan, zhan . . .

Who says that Jews can only be traders,
And eat fat soup with soup nuts
But cannot be workingmen?
Only our enemies can say that—
Jews, let’s spit right in their faces,
Simply look at zhan, zhan, zhan.121

Building Colonization

What was the mandate and what was the room for maneuver for a foreign organization vis-à-vis a Soviet regime that oscillated between grand ambitions and functional weakness? Once recruits arrived in the countryside, they came under the tutelage of Agro-Joint (or the other foreign settlement organizations), not the state. For the most part, Joseph Rosen’s employees decided what
happened when the trains, wagons, and carts reached Dzhankoi, and to a lesser extent, Kherson and Krivoi Rog. To its advantage, Agro-Joint had—in addition to modern American equipment—a professional staff wholly unlike the hodgepodge of Ozet recruiters and Komzet administrators. This alone, however, did not guarantee success. Money was always in short supply and the proposed settlement sites were not always ideal. How did Agro-Joint, with Komzet looking over its shoulder, adjust to these and other challenges?

Rosen’s organization took on those duties that were, in fact, the least likely to be filled by the Soviet authority. Therefore, in addition to assuming all negotiations with state bodies on matters connected to colonization, a central part of Agro-Joint’s activity was the provision of low-interest loans to the settlers. But in the first years of organized settlement, Agro-Joint simply did not have enough staff to handle transactions with each household. It therefore delegated responsibility to the artels, which functioned as Agro-Joint’s disbursement and collection agents for loans to individual colonists. Notwithstanding the friction that arose, these loans alone justified Agro-Joint’s existence for the settlers; such credit filled the void left by the dearth of domestic banking services endemic to the early NEP. The Soviet state may have held the “commanding heights” of the national economy by way of the NEP, but it was almost entirely absent from the conduct of everyday business, particularly outside of the major population centers.

The credit policies of Agro-Joint changed little over time and served both functional and political roles for the settlers. In line with its aim of increasing production among the Jewish population, and alongside its budgetary limitations, the JDC generally did not offer grants but rather low-cost loans at 3 to 5 percent interest—more generous than prevailing international rates—but with rather strict rules. In the late 1920s, an enlarged Agro-Joint staff started to administer loans directly to individual households with no substantial change in the terms of payment. Throughout its existence, Agro-Joint officials carried out these credit operations free from any significant government intermediary. This system successfully insulated the settlers from a potential source of government coercion but perpetuated tensions between Agro-Joint, the settlement artels, and the colonists.

Consciously or not, Agro-Joint and the Soviet authorities worked toward a common goal—the rationalization and institutionalization of colonization—even if this did not mesh with the immediate wishes of the settlers. Like all Soviet citizens (particularly the peasants), Jewish colonists probably preferred decentralized authority and anonymity. Basic components of the colonization en-
terprise conflicted with these tendencies, especially the registration process and attempts by the foreign philanthropies to tie the settlers to the colonies year-round with the introduction of organized winter employment like hauling and construction. Furthermore, the Agro-Joint contract of 1924 obligated Jewish settlers to adhere to the national regulations governing land use. Komzet tried to enforce these land tenure laws and institutionalize the status of artels in the colonies. But like much else in Soviet Russia, gaps opened between official policy and reality. So at one level, government policies joined with Agro-Joint’s credit practices to shepherd early colonists into loose cooperative structures. Yet at another level, nothing appreciably limited the artels’ freedom of action in daily farm affairs.

The internal structure of the colonies reveals a striking contradiction within the project: the patrons of colonization in New York were successful American-Jewish capitalists, yet they gave their blessing to Rosen’s preference for cooperative forms. They agreed that conditions in Crimea and southern Ukraine in the first years warranted centralized administration and instruction to compensate for inadequate resources. Agro-Joint showed little tolerance for nonconformity in this regard and denied aid to colonists who did not comply with the rules on associations. Even if troubles in the artels raised momentary doubts among some agronomists during the mid-1920s, Agro-Joint remained committed to cooperative settlement in order to maximize its resources. Though documentation on this point is lacking, Agro-Joint may also have insisted on cooperatives to bolster its standing with the regime.

Organized colonization kept alive certain elements of the earlier spontaneous movement. As in those early days, representatives (khodoki) traveled to the settlement tracts several months before the intended arrival of each artel. They selected a parcel for settlement and resolved details with local Agro-Joint and Narkomzem officials. In most cases, the working-age males sowed spring crops and built proper homes using Agro-Joint, JCA, ORT-Farband, or Ozet loans. Their families usually followed during the autumn harvest or the next spring. In the interim, those working the tracts lived in communal barracks or dugouts.

AGRO-JOINT’S EFFECT: “THE AZOV SEA WILL SOON BE CALLED THE JEWISH SEA”

The exploits of an energetic, efficient foreign organization contrasted sharply with the administrative gridlock common to the NEP. From all indications, Agro-Joint functioned admirably, prompting a knowledgeable observer to remark, “I have never seen any public Jewish enterprise which involved so little
wasted motion.” Under these conditions, Agro-Joint drastically changed the agricultural and political environment in rural Crimea and southern Ukraine.

Within a short time Jewish colonization began to have a significant, if not always welcome, effect on life in the countryside, both for the settlers themselves and for their new neighbors. Pending the arrival of new colonists during the second half of the 1920s, teams composed of Agro-Joint and Komzet workers appraised tracts allotted by Sovnarkom and suggested solutions to particular problems. They immediately drew attention to the fact that the lion’s share of the proposed land was fallow, owned in most cases by specific villages or rented by the state to peasants and shepherds from minority groups under multiple-year leases. To facilitate Jewish colonization, local authorities repossessed these lands when the leases expired and then transferred the deeds to Komzet. Such actions no doubt left smoldering resentment toward the Jewish newcomers among the indigenous groups now denied access to pasture and farmland. A dearth of potable water in the allotments made the drilling of wells the next urgent task. The inspectors also found that most of the allotments were near...
non-Jewish villages, a factor that might expose the newcomers to pressures from their neighbors. In view of these findings, Agro-Joint adopted the surveyors’ proposal to unify smaller parcels into economically viable units of fifty to sixty households per colony. Thus, Agro-Joint policy was a benign foreshadowing of the vicious unification of villages carried out by the Soviets during total \( (splosnoi) \) collectivization in the winter of 1929–1930.

The quantity of land held for Jewish colonization fluctuated greatly and in accordance with the growing familiarity of the state with the emerging patterns of Jewish mobility. After debating whether colonies should be grouped together or scattered over the peninsula, Komzet and Agro-Joint opted to maximize the acreage held by the colonies, establishing a presence on as much of the government allocation as possible in successive settlement seasons. This resulted in the mild dispersion of settlements into several compact blocs. In the early 1930s, Komzet concluded that Jews could not achieve demographic predominance in Crimea. Judging by the flow of migrants from the shtetls to the new Soviet cities and industrial centers, it doubted whether sufficient recruits could be gathered to populate additional colonies. Komzet therefore released
one hundred thousand hectares of “Jewish” land to the Crimean government, thus reducing its vacant landholdings by 60 percent.  

The arrival of Jewish settlers led to important changes in the governmental configuration of the region. Lenin had ended an early dispute between the Ukrainian and Russian republics over incorporation of Crimea by appropriating it to the latter in October 1921. Then, in line with the general policy, the regime set up dozens of national districts in these regions. Among these, it created five national Jewish districts (raiony) from March 1927 to March 1935 in response to the large influx of Jewish agricultural colonists. These five districts then subdivided into 126 Jewish village councils (selsoviets), which contained clear Jewish majorities. Over the coming years, Jews became slender demographic majorities or large pluralities in three of the five national districts (Kalinindorf, Novo Zlatopol, and Larindorf); they composed approximately 30 percent of the population in the other two (Stalindorf and Fraidorf).

At the same time, the five official Jewish autonomous districts regrouped in an informal fashion: on the basis of the settlement patterns on the ground, groups of Jewish settlements crystallized into distinct (but unofficial) blocs, ranging in size from hundreds to thousands of colonists. They emerged as the government allocated, and Agro-Joint developed (from 1924 to 1929), new regions for colonization. In some cases, these blocs were outside or intersected the territorial boundaries of the official Jewish districts. Thus, although it was not imposed from above, Jewish settlement in compact blocs became the paramount, but informal, political result of colonization for the settlers. The compact blocs became considerably more coherent than the five formal Jewish national districts that, according to Benjamin Pinkus, had many shortcomings. Whereas Jews constituted only slim demographic majorities in three of the five formal national districts, they overwhelmed other ethnic groups in the informal settlement blocs. As will be seen in the coming chapters, the compact Jewish blocs also better described everyday life in and around the colonies.

Although important in their own right, these realignments of administrative units were not the most immediate and visible signs of change; the arrival of Agro-Joint’s tractor teams was the most obvious symbol of the new era. Whether Joseph Rosen brought the first tractor into the area is moot. One thing is certain, however: on the basis of its experience in the old Kherson colonies from 1922 to 1923, Agro-Joint introduced the first mechanized agricultural system to Crimea and southern Ukraine in the mid-1920s. Rosen’s predisposition toward the collective application of mechanized systems guided this work. Whereas Agro-Joint often supplied individual tractors to both the spon-
taneous and the first organized settlements, Rosen shifted to centralized teams that rotated between settlement blocs in the latter 1920s. The tractor teams worked without charge for the settlers and, time permitting, for their non-Jewish neighbors. Colonists paid only for fuel, repairs, and the drivers. Agro-Joint also pioneered an unprecedented maintenance network in a region in which local residents could barely fathom the most elementary mechanics. Initially, the central shop was set up in Mishmar, a Hehalutz commune, but later, Agro-Joint’s machine repair shop in Dzhankoi eclipsed this small garage.

Without an existing state infrastructure in the regions of colonization, Agro-Joint had to improvise. Like the spontaneous settlers of the early 1920s, Rosen relied on the Hehalutz communes in Crimea and the old colonies in southern Ukraine as springboards for organized settlement. In practice, they formed the axis around which the first blocs of Agro-Joint settlements radiated outward in 1924–1925: Tel Chai had an instructional station for new colonists, Mishmar hosted the machine-service shop and the first tractor team run by Soviet Jews, Maayan operated the only primary school, and Sde Menucha (in the Kherson area) was already a relatively major center for Jewish agricultural activity. Though not a Zionist himself, Rosen respected the spirit and accomplishments of the Hehalutz pioneers.

Because they seemed to contradict the “norms” of rural stagnation, Agro-Joint innovations were often at odds with inexperienced government personnel. At first, it had to weather criticism from Soviet counterparts about the construction of homes. Vindication arrived in 1929 when Agro-Joint assumed authority from Ozet over the Evpatoria region and discovered that the cheaper Ozet-style construction had proved defective, thus costlier in the end. Other conflicts arose as Agro-Joint began efforts to compensate for the poor soil by introducing foreign models of commercial livestock production and intensive crops, mechanization, strict seed selection, and five- or six-field crop rotation. In most cases, such techniques were simply beyond the grasp of local Soviet administrators.

Although not a subject of this study, it should be mentioned here that Agro-Joint also broadened its nonagricultural efforts, gravitating toward industrial work during the late 1920s. In this way, it tried to capitalize on the opportunities generated by the First Five-Year Plan: industrial employment for large numbers of shtetl dwellers. Rosen had always known that colonization alone could not solve the entire “Jewish question.” Therefore, once the shift in national economic priorities became apparent, he lobbied the Joint in New York for the expansion of trade schools throughout the former Pale. If the First
Five-Year Plan tended to relocate underemployed citizens to the new industrial centers that sprouted throughout Soviet Russia, he tried to find work for Jews closer to the shtetls by the establishment of weaving enterprises for those who could not resettle in the colonies.

The targets and resources of Agro-Joint, and not pressures from the state, determined the dimensions and directions of its work during the second half of the 1920s. Archives and secondary sources provide no consensus about Agro-Joint’s size. Perhaps erring on the side of caution, it can be estimated that Rosen’s organization started operations with perhaps two dozen agronomists and surveyors in 1924, peaked in the late 1920s at more than one thousand employees, and thereafter declined. From the late 1920s, the single largest body of employees worked in its machine repair shop at Dzhankoi. Drilling wells, organizing new colonies, and providing tractor work were the early missions, with a later shift in focus as the colonies stabilized.

Whatever its shortcomings, Agro-Joint was the flywheel of colonization in its regions of operation; the settlers had few doubts that their fate depended solely on Rosen and his staff. Somewhat more than half of the $17 million spent by the Joint in Russia (between the termination of the ARA and 1938) went directly to the colonists. More indicative of its relative importance, Yaacov Levavi concluded that Agro-Joint supplied more than half of the total yearly investment in Crimean colonization until 1931. It constructed approximately eighty-three hundred buildings (fairly evenly divided between Ukraine and Crimea): half were settlers’ homes and the rest an assortment of farm structures, workshops, schools, and social halls. Bountiful recruits, coupled with systematized work by the service organizations, resulted in rapid physical and demographic expansion of the settlement regions in the second half of the 1920s. This growth prompted Petr Smidovich (the chairman of Komzet) to exclaim: “If the present colonies keep on growing at the present pace, the Azov Sea will soon have to be called the Jewish Sea.”

CONCLUSION

Joseph Rosen must have been pleased at the end of the 1920s; organized colonization conformed to his utilitarian, institutional vision for the partial reconstruction of Russian Jewry. He and his contemporaries would have found odd statements in existing scholarship such as “Soviet Jews, seeking equality with other groups, naturally aspired to a Jewish SSR.” If the Soviet state, the JDC, and the settlers never made national autonomy a chief aim of this colo-
organization project, neither should historians. As far as can be determined, republicanism was off the Politburo agenda long before Stalin achieved preeminence, let alone dominance. In retrospect, even had a Jewish republic arisen around the Black Sea, its maneuvering room would have been minimal—as with other national autonomous regions throughout Soviet Russia.

The recruits themselves were reluctant volunteers who often were less enthusiastic than Agro-Joint. Colonists stayed only when the logistic capacity of the settlement organizations matched their material expectations. When it did not, the disgruntled settlers returned to the shtetls or sought their fate elsewhere in the country. As for the Soviet government, it could offer the colonists little concrete help but took the project seriously and sacrificed party interests for its success.

The regime was probably no less pleased than Rosen. Although the Joint’s total expenditure was a microscopic addition to the state budget, cooperation with Agro-Joint carried other benefits. The state had scored a propaganda victory at home and abroad by demonstrating a commitment to deliver on promises to national minorities. Thanks to the generosity of foreign philanthropies, Jewish colonization appeared to be an inexpensive, rapid (albeit partial) remedy for the severe distress in the western borderlands; it transformed chronic consumers into producers, or at the very least, into self-sufficient farmers. These colonies also became an example of farming unlike anything else in the USSR. Finally, as will be seen, the resettlement had important political ramifications on the periphery.

Colonization did not transpire in a bubble. Rather, it reflected contemporary conditions. The patterns of cooperative settlement and recruitment developed because of the weakness, not the strength, of the state and Agro-Joint. Ultimately, the mix of social welfare cases with wealthier colonists opened the steppe to new social pressures. Additionally, the project indirectly profited from the political upheavals in Belorussia and Ukraine, where korenizatsiia displaced many Jews from their leadership posts in the mid-1920s. These newly unemployed Jewish administrators often turned to management of the colonization project (and others to the Evsektsiia) as a solution to their professional plight.

As Rosen knew, the recruitment process prepared candidates (at best) for the initial hardships of relocation but did little to ease the adjustment to agricultural life in an unfamiliar environment. Because recruits shared neither the eugenic dreams nor the “republican” ideas of some benefactors of colonization, gaps between the inherent promise of “going to the land” and the harsh realities...
that awaited the colonists ignited new conflicts. Encouraged to resettle by relatives, settler-recruiters, and sheer desperation, Jews set off southward. Filled with conflicting images of what lay ahead, with only a railroad ticket in hand or perhaps a wagonload of belongings, they hoped for something better than the misery they had left in the shtetl.
By the mid-1920s, Joseph Rosen had pulled the JDC into the cause of Jewish colonization in Soviet Russia and established the core of the project. But the New York–based benefactors of the project soon discovered that their newfound enthusiasm was not shared by the entire Jewish community. A bitter conflict over Agro-Joint came to overshadow institutional politics in the Jewish Diaspora from 1924 until the early 1930s. Whatever its potential benefit for the settlers, colonization aggravated preexisting discords and ignited new hostility in America. Although the contemporary critics of Agro-Joint understood—even as late as 1934—that the resettlement of Palestine could not remedy all the acute problems of world Jewry, they still feared any diversion of resources from development of the Yishuv.1

Rivalry with Zionists was only the start of the JDC’s problems. The Joint was a disbursement agency wholly dependent on the goodwill and generosity of America’s tired, skeptical Jews. This same public had given generously to famine relief and other humanitarian projects in Eastern Europe, but no one knew whether they were ready for a grand commitment of time and assets in Soviet Russia.
The existing historiography duly records the competition between Zionists and the JDC in America but underrates the support for Agro-Joint. For example, Henry Feingold argued that the “barons” of the JDC were not in tune with Jewish communities, which clearly preferred investment in Palestine to Russian colonization. Other, more balanced studies still fail to explain the fund-raising and public relations success of the JDC, for their evaluations are read through the Zionist prism that has marginalized phenomena seen as competing with the drive to create the State of Israel. For the JDC and the European service organizations, these questions were mostly moot, for they saw themselves, above all, as transmitters of efficient solutions for the dire problems of their brethren, and only secondly as players in the political arena of the Jewish Diaspora.

Success carried unexpected consequences: considered the senior foreign service organization in the USSR, Agro-Joint drew attention from a variety of groups seeking sponsors, protection, or someone to shoulder burdens. The JDC also became the focus for anyone with a constituency inside the Soviet Union. In addition, the presence of lesser philanthropies in Soviet Russia (all ostensibly committed to similar tasks) thrust Agro-Joint into delicate interrelationships. Joint leaders had to navigate these perilous political waters; mistakes could damage the colonization enterprise or worse.

THE LONG SHADOW OF AGRO-JOINT ON THE DIASPORA

The same social and political disparities that had divided large segments of the American-Jewish community colored the debate over colonization in the mid-1920s. For decades, animosity had existed between working-class Eastern Europeans (the Yidn) and wealthier Jews of German descent (the Yahudim). Differences in adherence to religious tradition further exacerbated this divide; Yahudim tended toward Reform Judaism, whereas the Yidn tended to be more observant. In the political sphere, anti-Zionist or non-Zionist Yahudim predominated in the JDC and American Jewish Committee. On the other side, newer immigrants from Eastern Europe led the American Jewish Congress and Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the premier organizations associated with political Zionism—a movement that set as its goal Jewish political autonomy in Palestine.

Allowing for some subdivisions, the Yidn and Yahudim occupied the two political poles of Jewish communal life, each associated with distinct organs of the press. For example, Der Tog, a Yiddish daily read by the Yidn, blasted the proposal to raise funds for colonization through the ASJFSR in 1928 as a retreat
in which “American Jewry goes back from democracy into an oligarchy.” The paper preferred recent mass fund-raising campaigns to older models of elitist philanthropy in American Jewry—the domain of wealthy Yahudim. Perceptible hostility, interspersed by sporadic attempts at reconciliation, lingered at least until World War II. Until then, Agro-Joint found itself at the crossroads of ethnic passions, political controversies, and journalistic opportunism.

The conflict was not without its irony: in hindsight, Zionist fear of a possible Jewish republic around the Black Sea seemed to surpass the popularity of that idea among the settlers or in the Soviet leadership. The Zionists’ overreaction strongly resembled the antisemitic outbursts in Crimea’s cities following Ozet’s first propaganda campaign in support of colonization. In both cases, overestimation of the power of “republicanism” evoked disproportionate responses from everyone except the ostensible beneficiaries—Soviet Jews. In another irony, a fundamental feature of the JDC’s activities was lost in the fight with the Zionists: the Joint (as individuals and as an institution) never abandoned its substantial commitments to the cultural and economic development of Palestine.

The transition from ameliorative to reconstructive policy led to a frontal clash between the JDC and its detractors over financial resources. Famine relief and aid to the old Kherson colonies had not stirred Zionist resistance in the early 1920s, even if every dollar spent was a dollar lost for Palestine. At this stage, the Joint temporarily benefited from the chaos and internal power struggles that preoccupied Zionist leaders. This lull yielded to conflict in mid-1924 when the JDC announced plans for the organized colonization project, and some stability returned to Zionist institutions. Henceforth, the ZOA and individual Zionists applied their personal and collective weight against cooperation with “the Bolsheviks”—only the latest version of Russian rulers viewed with suspicion by most American Jews.

As would often be the case, Joseph Rosen was able to minimize the effect of this opposition. From the perspective of the Joint, dealing with the Soviet government through the venerable agronomist had proved surprisingly effective and simple. This impression may have been a bit too rosy, however. By crafting the information that flowed from the Agro-Joint offices in Moscow, Rosen was able to elicit greater enthusiasm for fund-raising in New York. Archival materials suggest that he concealed—consciously or otherwise—the full picture of the hardships, particularly in respect to friction with non-Jewish neighbors near the settlement tracts. He sent detailed reports only when discussing the legal intricacies of contract negotiations in 1924, 1932, and 1937. Rosen was usually more expansive about general events and Soviet high politics; indeed, his reports often
told JDC officials in New York more about the conflict surrounding the Left Opposition than about life in the colonies. Because Rosen left no explanations or memoirs, we cannot know with certainty whether this tactic was intentional. Secure in a state of partially uninformed bliss, Joint leaders confidently campaigned for the project and dismissed criticism from all quarters.

Internal stresses also plagued the Joint, thereby detracting somewhat from its colonization efforts. With the steady growth of accusations of paternalism within the JDC during the late 1920s, those who preferred mass fund-raising (like Jacob Billikopf) tried to promote at least an image of inclusiveness for the rank-and-file leaders. At least in the short term, their efforts did not succeed across the board. Some field workers felt excluded from the decision-making process while a disgruntled donor condemned attacks by JDC officials against a Zionist leader. He noted that Louis Marshall and Felix Warburg were fine leaders, but “they delegate a good many of their duties to others. These others act as though they were Marshalls and Warburgs. There is nothing more ridiculous than these pygmies parading about in the habiliments of these two giants. The time is coming when you will not be able to collect any funds even for the most worthy cause, if you persist in your present methods of acting through mediocre clerks and petty people.”

Most leaders in the inner sanctum of the Joint truly felt most comfortable in boardroom settings, not mass gatherings. For them, the creation of the ASJFSR in 1928 produced a helpful by-product: it streamlined the management of colonization. The transition to private funding was also the simplest means to avoid pressure from below. Even if the daily function of Agro-Joint (as the operating agency for colonization) remained unchanged after 1928, the new Society was a corporation, not a civic philanthropy. This arrangement released the directors from obligations to the public or serious review of their executive decisions. It also ended grassroots fund-raising in Jewish communities scattered throughout the eastern United States. The elitism embodied by the ASJFSR had less influence on other JDC projects closer to the American-Jewish political consensus; the Joint still raised funds from local communities for nonagricultural projects in Eastern Europe, Germany, and Palestine.

Zionist Opposition: “I Would Not Want My Enemy to Go through This Again.”

The first salvoes of frontal confrontation between the Joint and American Zionists were fired at the opening conference of the $15 million national United Jewish Campaign, which took place in Philadelphia (September 1925). Al-
though it was called to reach a consensus over the distribution of the campaign’s funds between Palestine and the Agro-Joint colonies, the conference generated the zero-sum environment that characterized the future discourse: money for Palestine was said to be squandered on Agro-Joint. As a symbol of the well-established Yahudim and a staunch anti-Zionist, Julius Rosenwald caused a storm with boasts that resettlement in Crimea cost one-tenth of the outlay for Palestine and carried none of the major impediments of colonization elsewhere.13 Rabbi Steven Wise, a central figure in American Zionism, summarily denounced the plan: “[Crimea] may be cheaper, but the Jewish people will not stoop to bargain at the counter of Redemption.” Privately, however, the implications of Rosenwald’s generous gift for Russian colonization disheartened Wise; he quipped to a colleague, “Jesus Christ, Maurice, I can’t argue against $5 million.”14 In a compromise, the JDC agreed to invest one-third of the anticipated $15 million in Palestine. Nevertheless, skirmishes over the distribution of the funds from the United Jewish Campaign vexed relations with Zionists for the remainder of the decade.15

Contrary to hopes in the JDC, the transfer of funding for colonization to individual donors (through the ASJFSR) did not extinguish the dispute. Although the archival documents undermine the historiographical consensus that Zionist pressure forced the transition,16 the fact remains that this change proved a public relations bonanza for Zionists: they proclaimed that rich, anti-Zionists were now “rewarding” Russia, the historic tormentor of Jews.17 That, however, was small consolation. By 1930, Zionist coffers were bare; they could hardly fund the trickle of immigrants still admitted by the British into Palestine. Yet even when the Zionist movement faced economic ruin, Chaim Weizmann (at the time, president of the World Zionist Organization and, from 1948, the first president of the State of Israel) nonetheless argued that Palestine better served the long-range interests of Jews than Crimea.18

Divergent conceptions of Palestine made the politically oriented dispute with Zionists almost inevitable. True, the JDC and its officials made impressive contributions to Palestine, but they never seriously believed in the promise of political autonomy, even after the Joint joined in 1929 the enlarged Jewish Agency for Palestine, the body entrusted by the British Mandatory authority with the development and administration of Jewish life in the Yishuv.19 Weizmann described this gap twenty years later: “For a great many non-Zionists, the peculiar merit of the Crimea scheme was precisely that it had nothing to do with Palestine and Jewish nationalism, and could in fact be used to deflect from Palestine the attention of Jewish groups. For us Zionists [settlement of Pales-
tine] was a movement of national regeneration; for [Warburg] it was one among the fifty-seven varieties of his philanthropic endeavors—perhaps bigger and more interesting than some others, but not different in essence.”20

Zionists distilled the conflict into apocalyptic or strictly political terms. Thus, any support for the Crimean plan was said to have “[sold] out the soul of Zionism.” Diaspora Zionists could not fathom why the JDC separated philanthropy from the pursuit of political goals. Specifically, they wanted the JDC to insist on significant political concessions for Soviet Jews as the price of further material aid.21 Because so many of their potential pioneers came from Russia, Zionists also worried that Soviet propaganda might divert future recruits from dreams of Palestine to the Black Sea littoral. Furthermore, Zionists feared compromising American Jewry by association with the Bolsheviks in an atmosphere charged by traditional anti-Russian suspicions, the residual effects of the “Red Scare,” the continued attempts of the Third Communist International to foment world revolution, and the diplomatic isolation of the Soviet Union. For some American Jews, this mistrust and fear overpowered humanitarian impulses: “Jews of this country, like myself, though they give freely to the cause of Russian-Jewish relief do not wish to have themselves identified in the public mind with the Soviet government. There could be no greater calamity than that our Gentile neighbors receive the impression that their Jewish fellow citizens are identified in any measure with the aims of the group of wicked men at present in charge of Russian affairs. Let us continue to contribute with the utmost liberality to the relief of our suffering co-religionists abroad; but let us also be ever jealous of our own good name and reputation in this country.”22

Rabbi Wise was perhaps the most outspoken critic of Agro-Joint. He rejected in principle the possibility that it could save Soviet Jewry because Russians (and by inheritance, the Bolsheviks) were chronic antisemites who could not be trusted. He and others also doubted the wisdom of resettling Jews from the shtetls in unknown rural surroundings.23 One author in the Yishuv deliberated: “If the experienced non-Jewish farmers can’t succeed, how can the inexperienced Jew be expected to do so? Colonization invites disaster. The colonies are exposed to a foreign, inferior Ukrainian culture and are subject to the pressure of the Evesktsia. All these are likely to destroy Jewish culture in the colonies.”24 Rabbi Wise continued his attacks in later years: “The astutest of the protagonists of this colonization were more concerned about Russia than about Jews.” He further argued that the vast majority of noncommunist Jews in the USSR would immigrate to Palestine if given the choice.25 The depth of hostility emerges from the response to Louis Fischer’s accounts of his travels in
the new settlements. The American Jewish Congress (chaired by Rabbi Wise) underwrote the renowned journalist’s trip, and Fischer wrote a glowing report, eventually publishing a short version in *Menorah* magazine. Angered by his applause for Russian colonization, the congress disavowed Fischer, repudiated the report, and refused to pay his salary.²⁶

Disparity widened as commitment to colonization intensified among JDC officials. Although some had initial doubts about the project or the implications of dealing with the Soviets, key JDC officers underwent an epiphany during voyages to the Soviet Union. These visits with Soviet leaders and Jewish colonists invariably energized the participants, even in the waning years of Agro-Joint activity.²⁷ The Joint officials returned home full of enthusiasm for colonization. Whether from direct contact with settlers, Rosen, or both, the visitors were henceforth even less inclined to tolerate criticism of the project.²⁸

Almost for the duration of Agro-Joint activity in Soviet Russia, spiraling invective between the parties narrowed the room for compromise, particularly among second-tier officials. The appointment of David Brown as chairman of the $15 million United Jewish Campaign fanned tempers in 1925. Despite the respect that Zionists voiced for Brown’s fund-raising skill, his caustic personality catalyzed mutual recriminations.²⁹ Rabbi Wise harbored particular dislike, and the usually congenial Weizmann commented after an encounter with Brown: “I would not want my enemy to go through this again. I was literally in bed the whole day after the [meeting]. I thought to myself, we had to live two thousand years, in all our checkered history, to land in this situation.”³⁰ Brown also showed little willingness for cooperation. He wrote to Warburg in 1925: “There is no possible chance to work out harmonious relations with [the Zionists]. They see red when any other kind of colonization is spoken of and are not to be reasoned with.”³¹ When discussing emergency funds for Palestine in late 1926, Brown seemed less interested in the harsh conditions of the Yishuv than in correcting perceived injustices, both personal and collective, perpetrated by Zionists: “These people here, including Mr. Marshall and surely Mr. Warburg, have not the faintest notion of how far reaching was the poison gas of our Zionist friends. They haven’t any conception of the enormous amount of resentment that had been built up in practically every city in the U.S. among that group which gives us the bulk of our money, towards the Zionist leaders for their continuous attacks upon the United Jewish Campaign, the JDC and yours truly. Any action of ours at the present time [on behalf of Palestine], which would create the impression that we have taken these people into our
arms will certainly reflect itself [badly] in our collection in practically every section of this country.”32

Pervasive rumors about a conspiracy with the Bolsheviks and financial abuses—presumed to emanate from Zionist publicists—further exacerbated sensitivities in the JDC. Hence, petty bickering often overpowered all else between Zionists and the Joint.33 This political and personal drama obscured an important fact: no one in the JDC ever proposed substituting Russian colonization for Zionism.

INSTITUTIONAL ROOTS OF CONFLICT

The publicized success of Agro-Joint frustrated Zionist activists in the Diaspora who struggled to build a coherent infrastructure and labor ethic in the Yishuv. Realists understood that Palestine could not solve the dilemma of Russian Jewry: it was too barren and distant to absorb massive population growth in the near future; and, anyway, the British authorities severely restricted Jewish immigration. Added to this, the management of Russian colonization appeared superior to the performance of settlement organizations in the Yishuv. Hence, while many Zionists in the Diaspora recognized the utility of the Agro-Joint program, they found it difficult to overcome fears that it might replace Palestine as the long-term solution of the “Jewish question.”34 Even if the Joint indeed supported the Yishuv, it projected a moral superiority that bordered at times on arrogance; JDC officials reminded Zionists of their chronic fiscal woes and boasted in the Soviet press about the Joint’s fund-raising achievements.35

The Zionists’ anxiety increased further because the start of organized colonization in Soviet Russia coincided with an ideological crisis connected to the fourth wave of immigration to Palestine (ha-aliyah ha-reviit). These Jewish refugees from Poland differed from earlier pioneers; they sought to replicate their European bourgeois lifestyle, not bring about social upheaval or personal transformation. This troubled Yishuv leaders, who clearly preferred the ideals of productivization embodied (symbolically at least) by the previous waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe. If unchecked, there seemed to be a real possibility that the focus for Jewish moral transformation could shift from Palestine to Crimea. Consequently, in their opinion Agro-Joint not only drained potential capital, but also seemed to challenge Zionism’s position at the forefront of Jewish rebirth.36 A leading American Zionist assessed the situation: “[American Zionists] were distrustful of the communist regime and doubted
that under the circumstances such a venture would succeed in Russia. Apart [from this], we feared the possibility that this effort might come to appear to the public mind as a viable alternative to our Zionist work.”37

Institutional competition poisoned the political atmosphere. This period overlapped with attempts to include non-Zionists (who comprised the core of the JDC) in the Jewish Agency for Palestine, heretofore a Zionist stronghold. Such a move threatened not only the ideological purity of the agency, but some employees feared losing their jobs. Whereas the leaders of the Joint were wealthy Yahudim, most American Zionists hailed from lower-income East European households and most Yishuv leaders came from modest backgrounds. Furthermore, because non-Zionists did not fit the agency’s traditional ideological mold, many Zionists felt obliged to resist their entry into the Jewish Agency. Rabbi Wise voiced this conclusion: "[The organized Zionists of America] believe they can shift their [financial] burden at last, and that the Marshall-Warburg group [that is, the JDC leadership] is ready to take it over. I dissent from both views—we Zionists ought not to shift our burden, and the Marshall-Warburg forces are not prepared and will not be prepared to take it over, excepting upon terms which will reduce Palestine to a Near East counterpart of the Crimea provinces of the JDC.”38

While troublesome for JDC officials, Zionists neither choked off funds for the project nor dissuaded major benefactors. Their pressure explains only part of the shift in the JDC’s fund-raising tactics. In the fight against Agro-Joint, the Zionists were annoying but not necessarily fatal. Until the stock market crash in America, in fact, the JDC met its financial obligations. Thereafter, the banking skill of the Joint’s officers, along with Soviet readiness to renegotiate contracts, preserved fiscal fluidity. The JDC endured the period, by whatever means, no less solvent than the World Zionist Organization, despite its significantly wider range of activity. Over time, slightly calmer heads prevailed, and the JDC made greater efforts to present itself in the most Palestine-friendly way, even if this meant withholding information.39

The antagonism with the JDC eventually proved instructive for many Zionists. The fact remained that Agro-Joint brought more Jews to the land in a brief period than had been settled in Palestine in twenty-five years.40 Donors to the JDC, great and small, had fueled the success of the Agro-Joint experiment. These truths forced all Zionists to accept the importance of building bridges with wealthy American Jews: ideological purity alone could not create a homeland in Palestine. Hence, events on the ground in Soviet Russia reinforced
Weizmann’s message among his Zionist colleagues: cooperation with all sectors of Diaspora Jewry was a moral and economic imperative.

MINORITY VOICES OF COMPROMISE

A small but significant group of Zionists did not reject Russian colonization outright. For them, an absence of doctrinal rancor and institutional jealousy permitted greater flexibility toward Agro-Joint. Because they were free of the anticommmunist atmosphere in America and geographically isolated from the personal animosities embedded in the conflict with the JDC, leaders in—or those closely involved in—the Yishuv showed considerable moderation. More attuned than their counterparts in America to the economic misfortunes in Russia and the logistical limitations of Palestine, they were more ready to accept the expedient of colonization in the Soviet Union. Hence, Chaim Weizmann urged cooperation with non-Zionists “who do not concede the priority of Palestine over those of our brethren who live in other countries.” Even if JDC leaders encouraged Weizmann’s gestures—at times, by thinly veiled coercion—he clearly sought conciliation throughout the interwar period. Only a steady stream of aggressive rhetoric from his subordinates prevented full rapprochement. Family connections probably added to Weizmann’s sympathy for (or at least awareness of) colonization in Soviet Russia—his brother Shmuel was the deputy chairman of Ozet and a longtime proponent of territorial solutions for East European Jews.

Additional voices of calm came from Palestine. Perhaps the foremost leader of the Yishuv at this time, Menahem Ussishkin, rejected Crimea as a permanent solution to the “Jewish question” but conceded the immediate need to resettle Soviet Jews close to their points of origin. Therefore, he saw no fundamental contradiction between the long-term goals of Zionism and the short-term efficacy of settlement in Crimea. Arthur Ruppin, rare among leading Yishuv personalities to visit the colonies in Russia, observed: “The Jewish settlement in Russia is not meant to save Judaism, nor Russian Jewry. For the former it lacks spiritual leverage. For the latter it lacks size. It must be seen as a philanthropic act to assist the economic welfare of tens of thousands of Jewish families in Russia. As such, this effort should be supported.”

Some American Zionists also found room for compromise. While not a proponent of colonization in Soviet Russia, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland reversed his prior dismissal of the project following a short trip to the USSR in 1927. He, like Ussishkin, concluded that the resettlement project was an emergency measure, not a solution to the “Jewish question.” Horace Kallen, in an
atypical stance among journalists identified with Zionism, presented Russian colonization as “a fundamental renovation; the setting up of a new life for the Jews of Russia. It is at the last frontier of Jewish hope.”46 Benign neglect represented another, more common, reaction among American Zionists uncomfortable with any blanket rejection of colonization. For example, Louis Lipsky attacked, and then downplayed, the importance of Agro-Joint, despite its serious drain on Zionist coffers.47

The Hasidic World and Colonization

Relations with the Hasidic community in the USSR and its friends in America complicated the Joint’s activity in the Diaspora. The Hasidim—although a small segment of Soviet Jewry and under increasing pressure from the state—imposed considerable pressure on the JDC for assistance.48 This required the Joint to remain attuned to the concerns of its American donors about the plight of Russia’s Hasidim—foremost among them, Rabbi Joseph Schneersohn of Habad.49 Wars and revolution had led to a social and economic dislocation that had fragmented Russia’s Jewish community. Thereafter, the conditions generated by the NEP imperiled traditional religious life: many fled the impoverished but insular shtetls; the rate of intermarriage increased; and Zionism captured the imagination of the youth. Competition between secular Zionists and religious groups ruptured the bonds between generations, threatening what remained of the traditional communal fabric.50 Simultaneously, religious institutions fractured from within: at one end, the Hasidic followers of the Lubavitch rabbi Joseph Schneersohn (head of the Rabbinical Committee in the Soviet Union since 1922); at the other end, the majority of Orthodox rabbis or the non-Hasidic community councils.51 The Soviets added pressure from above, including restrictions on formal religious education, harassment of the rabbis and religious teachers by the GPU, and secularization campaigns by the Evsektsiia and the League of the Militant Godless (bezbozhniki).52

Relations between the JDC and Russia’s Hasidic community were complex. The JDC’s reputation as Russia’s largest and most effective Jewish service organization alongside the well-known commitment by the Joint to provide financial help to religious institutions made Agro-Joint an alluring patron for the religious community, particularly in times of distress.53 But this prestige carried risks for an agency devoted mainly to agricultural settlement: it had to avoid bitter intracommunal conflicts. The Hasidic leadership aggressively courted Rosen’s favor because it was desperate to compensate for the disappearance of its traditional donors among the Jewish entrepreneurial and commercial class.
as a result of the revolution. Russia’s Hasidim also sought protection from the government’s antireligious measures. As head of Russia’s Hasidim, Rabbi Schneersohn hoped that the Joint would increase its support beyond what had been channeled to the Hasidic community since the days of the ARA.

Changes in the JDC’s operating program shook but did not break ties to the Hasidim in the mid-1920s. As a religious organization, Habad made a priority of Orthodox Jewish education and observance. During the JDC’s service with the ARA in the early 1920s, its palliative programs had not contradicted these goals. By contrast, from 1924 onward, Agro-Joint promoted agricultural reconstruction, and later, productivization. Among Schneersohn’s constituency, this was less acceptable. He thought that the proximity to non-Jews in settlements distant from the traditional centers of Jewish life would endanger the religious welfare of the colonists, heretofore under strict supervision in the shtetl. Pro- ductivization of Russia’s Jews came only slightly closer to the rabbi’s priorities. Most Orthodox Jews, therefore, saw colonization as no more than a stopgap against poverty.

Despite these disparities, the Joint and the Hasidim arrived at a modus vivendi in 1925. For the next few years, the JDC incrementally increased its monthly stipends in response to the rabbi’s repeated appeals. In return, Schneersohn gave tacit support to colonization, on the condition that the Joint ensure ritual practices. JDC leaders and Schneersohn ultimately agreed: large-scale colonization alone would not enhance religious life nor solve the “Jewish question.”

A sea change occurred in the Joint’s attitude toward the Lubavitch rabbi in the late 1920s. Worry had grown among many JDC officials that any association with organized religion, though not explicitly illegal, could jeopardize their legitimacy in the eyes of the Kremlin. They felt vulnerable because the Habad networks—an extraordinarily visible target for the GPU—were the recipients of, and helped to distribute, most of the money that the JDC earmarked for religious institutions in the USSR. Schneersohn had, in fact, fled Leningrad for Riga in 1927 to avoid prosecution. Joint officials also learned that, while in Riga, he laundered rubles from émigrés to finance religious work in Soviet Russia. Mistrust and impatience with Schneersohn and his followers grew significantly after his flight to Riga. Increasingly, the Joint came to see him more as a burden than an asset. Even Marshall, a man normally sensitive to religious matters, confessed: “I have no confidence in [Schneersohn’s] methods, which would in my opinion jeopardize our Russian work. I met his son-in-law last summer in London. [I] explained our interest in Jewish educa-
tion, but made it clear that we could not do what he requested. Within a few days I read in the press the most extravagant and false representations as to what I had said, which without the slightest warrant he translated into the most liberal of pecuniary pledges. When I arrived in Paris, I found that he had repeated the same statements. It was then unanimously agreed that it would be imprudent to have any relations with Schneersohn. Would that we might be able to help [religious matters in Russia], but . . . “62 JDC support for religious life in the USSR survived the break with the rabbi. Rosen’s grudging willingness to distribute funds for religious purposes in Russia allowed Cyrus Adler (chairman of the Joint’s Cultural Committee) to sever the JDC’s ties with Schneersohn in 1929.63 A final (abortive) campaign by the rabbi’s colleagues in the American Orthodox rabbinate climaxed during his visit to America in early 1930. Even then, the JDC did not abandon the Hasidic rabbis who remained in Russia, but by the end of that year it had withdrawn its support from any group suspected of blatant breaches in Soviet civil law.

The situation with Rabbi Schneersohn had two important consequences around the turn of the decade. It led the Joint to be far more discreet in dispensing funds for religious purposes. While Soviet antireligious policy mandated caution in any case, the friction with the rabbi and his “court” clearly influenced the decision to be much more secretive.64 The troubles with Schneersohn also contributed to the decision to privatize fund-raising for Russian colonization—the ASJFSR erected an administrative wall between the rabbi’s appeals for funding and the JDC’s public collections. Henceforth, it was the Society, a private corporation legally separate from the Joint, that set budgets and priorities for all relief work in Russia. Joseph Hyman (secretary of Agro-Joint) could now claim that “the JDC is no longer engaged in the promotion of the Jewish agricultural program in Russia and that work is under the direct supervision of a new organization.”65 Establishment of the ASJFSR did not end appeals from Habad, but it did substantially reduce their tone and frequency. Gone were Schneersohn’s exhortations to confront the Soviet government on behalf of religious freedom, pleas for quantum leaps in donations, and criticism of the colonies.66 In their place came limited requests, usually connected to upcoming Jewish holidays.

Withdrawal from thorny religious issues accelerated after April 1929, reflecting the Joint’s priority on colonization over politics and, probably, mounting wariness of the harsh new Soviet antireligious policy. By January 1932, the JDC had completely detached itself from formal support of religious institutions.67 At least in theory, this allowed Agro-Joint to refocus on colonization
with fewer distractions. In an unofficial capacity, however, Rosen still helped hard-pressed religious institutions outside the colonies, despite some apprehension in New York. The presence of the central Agro-Joint offices in Moscow may also have helped safeguard a degree of Jewish life in the capital after the regime had extinguished indigenous Jewish institutions in Leningrad.68

Even while it aided religious life in the cities, the JDC never thought it could, or perhaps should, seek to make the colonists more observant. Nor did it consciously seek to secularize them. From the standpoint of Rosen and other Joint officials, resettlement was a worthy goal unto itself; it necessitated concentration on farming needs, without regard to the cultural or religious desires of the colonists. If the latter wanted to perpetuate spiritual life, they would have to do so alone. In the final analysis, the Joint spent its energies to create a “new” Jew on the steppe, not perpetuate the “old.”

Because of pressure from its potential donors in America, Agro-Joint had to at least project an image of deep concern about the preservation of religious life in the colonies. Overall, Joint officials had difficulty deflecting queries from those concerned with religious affairs; most questioned the JDC’s claim that it had insignificant leverage over the Soviet antireligious policy. Behind closed doors, Joint officials calmed their own worries about the fate of Judaism in Russia by comparing Soviet Jewry with America. According to this equation, the rapid secularization of young people beset both communities.69

Interaction among Western Philanthropies

As we have seen, Jewish and other foreign philanthropists stepped into the rural administrative void left by the young Soviet state; some had worked in tsarist Russia, while others (like the JDC) arrived with the ARA. Of interest here are those organizations that supported agricultural development in the USSR. Though superficially committed to a similar goal (rural modernization), Agro-Joint differed in scale, operating style, life span, and priorities from the rest. While a detailed examination of the other philanthropies is beyond the scope of the present study, relations between these organizations affected colonization, set precedents, stimulated Agro-Joint, and reflected the political environment of Diaspora Jewry.

Within two to three years of the creation of Agro-Joint, a pattern of achievement bolstered confidence in the JDC and heightened its proprietary sense over colonization—an attitude expressed in its behavior toward newer philanthropies. From February through June 1926, Russian Reconstruction Farms (composed of twenty-five nonsectarian Americans who operated a model farm
in southeastern Russia) requested financial support from the chairman of the
JDC. Warburg categorically declined but told a colleague that “if anyone ever
attempts to insinuate that we Jews are the only ones who have helped the agri-
cultural work, here are data that may be very valuable to us.”70 The Joint also
adopted a defensive posture toward the Agro-Industrial Corporation in early
1928. This newcomer proposed the creation of industrial enterprises in Soviet-
Jewish communities. JDC leaders feared that the (alleged) charlatanism of the
corporation’s founders might hurt their own good name.71

Rosen and Agro-Joint also occupied a unique professional niche compared
with Western businesses in Soviet Russia. It was no secret that Western compa-
nies were selling machinery and seeds and operating model farms or were send-
ing experts to Russia. But no other organization (regardless of its profit motive)
offered a totality of services—encompassing professional training, agricultural
machines, and an efficient administration—to an entire region.72

THE JEWISH COLONIZATION ASSOCIATION: “A MONEYBAG WITHOUT A HEART”

Although the organizations shared much, the JDC, the JCA, and the ORT-
Farband locked horns no less frequently than they joined arms. At first, they
seemed to overcome the older hostility that had plagued relations between the
JCA and American Jews before World War I.73 The hesitant attempts at coop-
eration in Eastern Europe during 1923 yielded to more ambitious efforts in
1924, with the creation of the American Jewish Reconstruction Foundation,
managed by the Joint and JCA.74 Then in July 1924, around the time of the
$400,000 appropriation for Agro-Joint’s trial period, officials of both organiza-
tions discussed partnership schemes for colonization in Russia. But in short or-
der, the JCA home office in Paris turned down their “brash American cousin”
in favor of separate, more cautious operations. Ironically, the JCA director (and
other personnel) in Russia agreed in principle with the Joint’s plan: “From the
point of view of geographical and agricultural conditions, [Liubarskii’s] plan
for Jewish colonization in the Crimea can be considered as feasible. I do not see
in this plan any more risk than our present activity in Russia has to contend
with, unless we allow ourselves to be involved in grandiose plans, and so long as
we conduct the affair cautiously, following [our] usual methods.”75

For reasons that are still unclear, the JCA refused to commit itself fully to this
innovative colonization project in Soviet Russia, even though the JDC’s pro-
gram appeared to spring forth from Baron de Hirsch’s earlier work in Ar-
gentina. In its prewar support of the Russian colonies, the JCA had never en-
gaged in colonization itself. After the war, its directors in Paris neither shared
the constructive vision of JDC leaders nor could overcome suspicion of the Soviets. They set far narrower parameters for their involvement, stupefying counterparts in the Joint: “The people of the JCA have not grasped the idea of what is taking place in Russia today. They still continue to do the more or less satisfactory pre-war work in a pre-war way. They are resettling Jews in colonies abandoned during and since the war and are perhaps adding a settlement here and there. Dr. Rosen, on the other hand, has achieved his results by seizing the unique opportunity that presents itself today.”  

Hesitant to engage in aggressive action, the JCA signed an unadventurous contract with Komzet in February 1926, taking responsibility for the Mariupol and Zaporozhie settlement districts in Ukraine. This obligated the JCA to a $150,000 annual investment for the absorption of three hundred families. This commitment aside, the growing optimism among Joint leaders in the 1920s had no parallel in the JCA. The older philanthropy had adopted the JDC philosophy only in part; it imported tractors but did not apply them in an integrated agricultural enterprise. Low on funds and slow to create a settlement infrastructure, the JCA ceased the absorption of recruits to its districts in 1925 and never employed enough trained agronomists. It lost its little remaining enthusiasm for colonization at the time of total collectivization in the winter of 1929–1930; by the end of 1930, it had ceased investment and withdrawn its foreign personnel from the USSR.

The JDC’s responses to JCA caution had far-reaching results. Frustrated with the latter’s apparent rejection of organized colonization, the Joint launched the $15 million United Jewish Campaign in 1925. Thus, the tightfisted policies of a Paris-based philanthropy precipitated a move by an unconventional, New York–based reconstructive organization. In turn, this led to the frontal conflict with American Zionists described above. Although it was obvious that the JCA’s heart was not in Russian colonization, JDC leaders did not lower their expectations; they repeatedly exhorted it to greater activism and donations. The search for a permanent financial base drove this persistence: unlike the Joint, the JCA operated from a large endowment. In addition, the JDC hoped that identification with a venerable European philanthropy would enhance its own prestige. The refusal to yield some measurable control over the colonization process, however, negatively affected its appeals to Paris. Agro-Joint president James Rosenberg assessed this complex scenario: “The price of such money [Rosenberg wanted a $1 million JCA subscription for the ASJFSR] would be prohibitively high if it resulted in any measure of authority, however slight, in JCA’s part in the management of Agro-Joint. [It] must remain an American organization controlled by us here in America. [Nonetheless], a ges-
ture of cooperation between JCA and us here would have implications and by-products of great value.”80 Interaction improved only in the mid-1930s, when d’Avidgor Goldsmid replaced Louis Oungre as president of the JCA, and in addition, a general mood of conciliation began to spread in the Jewish world after Hitler’s rise to power in Germany.81

RELATIONS WITH ORT-FARBAND: “THIS IS WHERE THE ‘HUNDT IS BEGRABT’”

Unfortunately for the colonists of both organizations, the partnership between the Joint and the Berlin-based ORT-Farband hardly fared better than that with the JCA throughout the 1920s. Conflicts resulted from differing philosophies about service. Agro-Joint agronomists deplored what they saw as inadequate supervision in the ORT colonies, a clumsy administration that suffered from over-reliance on Berlin for directives, and failure to abandon old models of “savings-and-loan” banking. ORT officials, for their part felt unduly slighted, particularly because ORT-Farband and the Sovietized ORT had survived on much smaller budgets and had actually preceded the Joint in supporting Jewish colonies (albeit mainly with JDC’s funds). ORT-Farband’s director of operations in Russia told colleagues from the Joint that “it is possible that [ORT] policy is too tough, but it does instill in the farmers real ability to pay [off their loans].”82

Peace was gradually restored toward the end of the 1920s, but periodic bouts of bickering—perhaps better defined as institutional turf wars—discouraged cooperation and typified the troubles of Diaspora Jewry. ORT-Farband officials hinted that Rosen and Boris Bogen were in fact captives of the Evsektsiiia’s dictates.83 Bogen, in a letter of 1924, had no doubts about the motivations for these accusations:

It is absolutely maddening when the people are still harping on the point of working under their auspices with the Communists in Russia, just as though it would be a novelty to them to know that Russia is still a communist country. The talk about our settling with the [Evsektsiiia] is laughable because this question was thoroughly discussed before [and] there was no alternative to the proposition. Now when Rosen goes to Russia with a [colonization] plan the supposition is made that he will work with Jewish communists and every effort is made to discredit this venture. The ORT fully realizes they cannot ever expect to work there unless they are under Communist supervision, and absolutely it is up to them to make clear the point that all this talk of the Jewish distribution in Russia following a policy that other organizations could avoid is tommyrot. The ORT is very anxious as well as the Communists in Russia to assume the entire responsibility in this new plan of Rosen’s. I believe this is where the “hundt is begrabt!”84
With the benefit of hindsight, it seems unlikely that ORT hoped to displace the Joint’s role in colonization. What is apparent, however, is a belief among JDC officials that other philanthropies coveted Agro-Joint’s prestige and financial sources. The atmosphere of conflict was surely not removed by the Joint’s tendency to treat other Western philanthropies as junior partners. Relations also exhibited signs of generational competition as well as a struggle for leadership in the Diaspora between European and American Jewries.

ORT’s colonization work in many respects resembled a modest version of Agro-Joint. Assisted by small sums transferred from its American branch, the ORT-Farband expanded activities into industrial training through an agreement with Komzet in May 1928. For its part, the Sovietized branch of ORT operated a local network that delivered a degree of administrative and agro-technical expertise to its settlements around Odessa and in Belorussia, much like Agro-Joint. ORT worked in the Odessa colonies until the late 1930s, disseminating intensive crops, winter employment, and electrification. Even Soviet observers realized, however, that its accomplishments—while impressive compared with those of the JCA and Ozet—paled when measured against those of Agro-Joint. Indeed, the JDC supported colonization with sums that dwarfed the combined investments from ORT and the JCA and, for a time, the Soviets themselves.

**AMERICAN-JEWISH COMMUNISTS: COLONIZATION AS A “BEST SELLER”**

The American branch of Ozet (Idishe kolonizatsie organizatsie or Ikor) was another foreign participant in Jewish colonization. Formed in December 1924, Ikor at first tried to obscure its connections with communism. In the late 1920s, however, it surrendered to the inevitable—its membership card henceforth read: “I am a friend of the Soviet Union and of Jewish colonization in the USSR.” These direct links to the communist cause temporarily isolated Ikor from mainstream Jewry.

As a settlement organization, Ikor left much to be desired. It had no administrative expertise and merely shipped tools and tractors to its client colony (also called Ikor) in Crimea. In some ways, it appears that American-Jewish communists derived greater benefits from the colony than did the colonists. Evidently, it was an ideological prop that buoyed these American Jews through otherwise difficult days; colonization became their “best seller.” Ikor was also an asset for the Soviets; they publicized it as exemplary of world communist support for Jewish-Soviet settlement in the USSR.
Events in Soviet Russia modified the distribution of power between Ikor and the JDC. Until the late 1920s, Ikor could not breach the JDC’s monopoly on colonization among American Jews, nor did it merit particular attention. Suddenly in the late 1920s, as an activist of the time recalled: “Ikor was rescued by [the Soviet program for the colonization of] Birobidzhan. It proved a veritable boon to Jewish communism, opening a new and fertile field for propaganda and fundraising. The Ikor developed an intense campaign around Birobidzhan, solemnly calling upon the American Jews to fulfill their duty toward realizing the future ‘Jewish state.’”

Given the political infighting of the times, Agro-Joint often cooperated more fruitfully with the Soviet government than with other Jewish philanthropies during the first years of organized colonization. Indeed, colonization was both an object and a catalyst for the political conflicts of the day. But the colonists could not wait for harmony to develop among their European and American brethren; money had to be collected in the Diaspora, equipment purchased and shipped, and fallow fields plowed before the lishentsy could be revitalized.

SELLING COLONIZATION IN AMERICA

To solicit millions of dollars for colonization in Soviet Russia from donors in a communism-wary country, the JDC had to revolutionize its public relations tools. In the 1920s, no precedent existed in the Jewish community (or elsewhere) for mass, institutionalized charity on behalf of such a project, certainly not for implementation outside of the Yishuv. Unlike the campaign to resettle Jews in Palestine, Agro-Joint appealed to utilitarian rather than national sentiments; it propelled contributors into an unexplored world of communal reconstruction. As a result, the fund-raising campaign had to combine traditional with new and even local themes. Officials in New York grasped the hesitant public mood and their task: “[American Jewry] does not realize that it must take years and years to reconstruct uprooted Jewish communities and institutions; if only the physical suffering softens the heart and opens the purse of the giver, then this method of appeal is adopted. For even though part is spent for relief, if only to keep faith with the giver, the bulk of the money is spent to give the communities a footing along permanent constructive lines.” Attempts to breach this barrier originated at the top. Major figures in the JDC—all with national recognition or a strong regional presence—traveled through-
out the United States and abroad, spoke to local gatherings, and energized grassroots collections. From the start, JDC officials measured the public in clear terms and adjusted themselves accordingly: “[Most people] imagine that the funds are to be devoted exclusively to colonization work. From now on [refugee and child care in Europe and Palestine] must be stressed much more effectively than in the past. The great majority of people respond more readily to appeals of a primitive nature than anything that is educational, cultural or economically constructive. To put our campaign across, we will have to dramatize the needs of the cardinals, the neurasthenics, the nervous borderline cases, the tuberculous, etc. Similarly, you must ‘play up’ those activities in your program which are likely to make a more compelling appeal to the primitive emotions of our people.”

Criticism in the Diaspora complicated the “sale” of colonization to the Jewish public still more and forced the Joint to sharpen its rhetoric. To deflect demands that it tie future aid to the reversal of Soviet antireligious or anti-Zionist policies, the JDC first reiterated its commitment to basic Jewish values and its belief that relocating Jews to the geographic periphery enhanced their freedom. Rosen then reminded Jewish correspondents that even in the weakest days of the Bolshevik regime, Herbert Hoover’s ARA (wielding a mandate from the U.S. government) could not extract religious concessions from Moscow. Fundraiser Jacob Billikopf also asked the Chief Rabbi of England how Agro-Joint could be expected to influence Soviet domestic policy when no other government, nor sister states in the United States, had been able to deter Massachusetts from the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The combined pressure from critics in the Diaspora never forced the JDC either to confront the Soviets openly or to abandon fund-raising. At the same time, because it was somewhat encouraged that piety in the colonies remained mostly immune to outside pressure (as will be seen below), the Joint did discreetly lobby high Soviet officials in the effort to moderate antireligious measures.

Creation of the ASJFSR in 1928 fundamentally changed the character of the fund-raising campaign. Heretofore the JDC had gathered much of the funding for colonization (and other programs) by laborious appeals to Jewish communities throughout America. The Society, however, was a private stock corporation, owned entirely by its bond-holding subscribers. Therefore, the “marketing” of colonization to a small number of wealthy investors could now emphasize economic logic: despite rising costs, resettlement in Crimea and southern Ukraine remained the least expensive and quickest answer to the Russian-Jewish plight. The appeals to investors by top JDC officials also adopted
Rosen’s exhortations that opportunities in Russia would be lost if not seized quickly.

Use of the Press and Other Media

The American-Jewish press became the main stage in the contest for public opinion. Most of the newspapers and magazines, in English and Yiddish, had strong ties to a specific side in the colonization debate and projected consistent, predictable messages to a targeted group. Support from one segment of the American-Jewish press did not shield the JDC from savage attacks in other publications. Typically, these surfaced among recent Russian-Jewish émigrés embittered toward the Soviet regime or authors closely affiliated with Zionism. Rosen and others in the Joint were keenly aware of the dangers of negative publicity. He replied to a report that Jews, not their non-Jewish neighbors, had stolen cattle from a colony: “Thank God, because otherwise the American press would have been filled with stories of pogroms, and of excesses, and of attacks on Jewish settlers.” Journalistic jousting climaxed in 1928–1929 with the announcement of the unprecedented monetary scope of the ASJFSR ($8 million over eight years). The specter of the Society being able to obtain such substantial funding sparked a journalistic offensive from Zionists who had barely recovered from the shock of the JDC-led $15 million United Jewish Campaign.

The Joint’s publicity campaign relied on personal ties. In particular, Agro-Joint’s president, James Rosenberg, regularly sought counsel and assistance from friends, business associates, and former clients connected to major newspapers. This proved invaluable at critical junctures in the crusade for public opinion. He wrote Arthur Brisbane of the New York Evening News in March 1928, at the height of the subscription campaign for the ASJFSR: “I know you are in sympathy with [our work], your pen would be a mighty one indeed to help us forward [in] this great task of human engineering.” The personnel of the Joint also harvested Julius Rosenwald’s personal network to apply pressure on the Chicago Tribune at pivotal moments.

Colonization marked a watershed in the development of public relations techniques as second-tier JDC officials polished their media acumen and mustered resources hitherto unknown to older leaders. They devoted attention to the minutiae of press campaigns, even taking note of the best day of the week on which to release information. Likewise, the Joint’s publicity director felt that presidential candidate Herbert Hoover’s 1928 letter endorsing Russian colonization “should not be released until after Labor Day, even if signed by Mr.
Hoover before that time. It is too good a story to be released in the dead month of August.”

The younger generation of JDC officials systematized and made the most of relations with the press. They scoured the New York and Chicago dailies for positive news and then redistributed offprints to potential donors and other parties, issued rebuttals to negative articles, and orchestrated JDC officials and supporters to exert local pressure on editors. In addition, Rosenberg corresponded directly with editors of Jewish and national newspapers about impending articles and unabashedly recommended alterations to elicit greater public sympathy. All the major figures in the Joint met with the Jewish and national press to circulate scripted information, thereby minimizing difficult issues, particularly during the period of collectivization. Surmising that “authentic” responses lent greater legitimacy to JDC claims than anything issued from New York, Rosenberg often dispatched Drs. Kahn and Rosen to meet with journalists. He also wrote carefully worded reports to publicize major events of the United Jewish Campaign as well as Rosen’s visits to America. Moreover, the selective withholding of information led to concentrated, nationwide publication of important items, most crucial among them, highly complimentary articles about the formation of the ASJFSR.

JDC publicists ambitiously courted mainstream American newspapers, thereby illustrating a growing determination among Jewish organizations to gain and expand acceptance in non-Jewish audiences. Others believed that news items in the secular press most impressed Jewish readers. To maximize this approach, the JDC highlighted similarities between Jewish colonists in Russia and the American homesteading tradition. Warburg and others equated hardships endured and overcome on the steppe with the American experience on the plains. They presented Agro-Joint colonists as self-respecting, loan-paying, “new Jews,” not recipients of charity. They also used geographic references to make Jewish colonization more tangible to the general American audience. Billikopf informed correspondents: “I was told by people who know that [Crimea] corresponds to the land known as western Kansas and western Nebraska, which is the finest soil in America for the cultivation of wheat. If you say that the land on which the Jews are settled is a land which corresponds to Western Kansas and western Nebraska, that is all that is necessary to tell the people of America.”

The seeming success of the JDC publicity campaign in the national media provoked unforeseen animosity in the Jewish press. Rigid control over information stirred anger among Jewish journalists who felt slighted by the JDC’s
preference for national coverage. Pressures apparently became so acute that some supporters of Agro-Joint considered the formation of a quasi-independent press agency. Consequently, the venom directed toward the JDC from some quarters in the Jewish press—those upset by its tactics and the Zionist competitors of the Joint—partially offset the cumulative effect of its publicity efforts.

MOBILIZATION OF NEW PUBLICITY TOOLS

Challenged in parts of the conventional Jewish-American press, JDC publicists expanded the campaign beyond newspapers. First, they invested heavily in mass-distribution brochures. Most often, these were truncated travelogues of JDC officials or invited guests to the Russian colonies. For maximum effect among potential donors, the brochures avoided details of daily life and problematic aspects of colonization; instead, they emphasized Agro-Joint’s work and made general references to social transformation on the steppe or cooperation with the indigenous population. This pattern was also an outcome of the authors’ limited familiarity with actual conditions on the ground. Their visits were always brief, and they were escorted through selected colonies by Agro-Joint personnel. To attract those potential donors predisposed to reconstruction over philanthropy, the pamphlet literature also consistently noted the weaning process undergone by settlers: whereas newcomers depended completely on the agronomists, fourth-year settlers no longer required Agro-Joint guidance. Furthermore, the pamphlets clearly stated the organization’s temporary operational mandate. JDC officials received the first feedback from these unorthodox efforts following the publication of David Brown’s travel diary in 1925 (New Exodus). Excited responses from newspapers, companies, Jewish institutions, and individuals flowed to Warburg’s desk. Thus, publicity material distributed in the United States produced a self-perpetuating, hopeful image.

The publication of Rosenberg’s travelogue, On the Steppes, demonstrated the importance attached to publicity, the generational divide in the JDC, and the pressures under which the campaign operated. For a start, Rosenberg acquiesced to Louis Marshall’s editorial recommendations and removed all references to Zionism. Cyrus Adler, another member of the JDC old guard, admired the book but cautioned against its release, for fear that the diary would cause excessive friction with anticommunists in the JDC and the general Jewish community. Younger men, with more aggressive vision, eventually prevailed: On the Steppes appeared in 1927, although not as an official JDC publication.
To reach donors and friends throughout America, the Joint used the Reform—and to a lesser extent, the Conservative—congregations in America as publicity networks. These synagogues, even some associated with Rabbi Wise’s splinter Jewish Institute of Religion, helped disseminate information on colonization. JDC officials corresponded with leading rabbis, consulted with them on future campaign tactics, and exploited existing administrative networks to expand the scope of publicity campaigns. Consequently, rabbis spoke warmly of the project from their pulpits during Saturday or holiday sermons, and fund-raisers often operated from synagogue membership lists. The fate of On the Steppes illustrated the success of this network. A supportive rabbi from Chicago suggested to Warburg that the book be distributed to pulpits throughout the country; he was “sure that with 300 or more rabbis drawing the public’s attention through it, a great deal of constructive propaganda would result for the drive to collect the remaining pledges [for the United Jewish Campaign].” Furthermore, he named specific rabbis who could distribute large quantities of books through the offices of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the United Synagogue (the national bodies of Reform and Conservative rabbis, respectively).

The JDC ventured into previously untapped publicity strategies made available by modern tools of mass communication and conscripted professionals in the arts. Joint fund-raisers introduced silent films, shot on location in the colonies, as a powerful vehicle of appeal to potential donors. The Joint’s first cinematic effort—Back to the Soil: A Story of Jewish Hope, Struggle and Achievement—recorded Felix Warburg’s visit to the colonies in 1927. It focused on the transition from early hardships to advanced farming under Agro-Joint tutelage. Moreover, the film’s director attempted to forge a psychological link between the American donors and their beneficiaries in Soviet Russia. Rosenberg later seized on the power of radio to reach the general audience. Finally, the JDC dispatched artists to the colonies and later displayed their work in America. Rosenberg expected them to contrast the misery of the shtetl with “the Jews on the soil, bronze, young boys and girls, fine types of men and women, who have been made strong and healthy through their life in the open air.”

CONCLUSION

Political acrimony in the Diaspora surely predated Agro-Joint, but controversy over the new settlement project magnified all the wounds of the day up to the time that European fascism came to be viewed as a greater evil. As a result, the
JDC usually found work with its Soviet partners more hospitable than with other Jewish philanthropies.

Louis Marshall, Felix Warburg, Julius Rosenwald, and others had good reason for surprise in the middle of 1925 when they found themselves at the head of a very ambitious undertaking based on older, more modest experiments in the West as well as untested formulas. Colonization had not been on the Joint’s agenda at the start of 1924, and there was no real partner for the project among the European philanthropies. Encouraged by developments on the ground, even more by meetings with Soviet leaders, they suppressed their own doubts and moved forward.

Because the JDC could not wholly extricate itself from controversy, it had to rearrange the blueprint for colonization. Stubborn attacks from Zionists in the Diaspora and pressures from the Hasidic community necessitated innovative responses. The creation of the ASJFSR in 1928 was a characteristic move by business leaders eager to simplify an increasingly cumbersome fund-raising process. In turn, this allowed a refocus on their primary goal—the productivization of Russia’s Jews.
The unprecedented financial demands of simultaneous colonization in Russia and Palestine forced the JDC into untested spheres of public life. The campaign coalesced gradually, eventually exploiting new media while referring back to familiar humanistic images. In most senses, Agro-Joint could mobilize the requisite political and financial resources because elite Diaspora society was still small and the leaders of the JDC uniquely placed to pursue these tasks. Zionist fund-raising later benefited by the adoption of the same mechanisms, and in some cases, the same personnel. So, despite the bitterness along the way, competition between the Zionist Organization of America and the JDC probably strengthened both.

The political battles revealed central, but otherwise veiled, features of the colonization episode. Publicity materials made it clear that the settlement project was meant to be permanent, but that Agro-Joint was not. The recipients of such materials would almost certainly be impressed by the sincere, perhaps naïve, optimism and commitment flowing from the Joint. Driven toward bolder activity by younger men, the JDC now had to deal with an inflated image manufactured by its own campaign. Perceived as a principal force in Russian-Jewish life, it became a target for unrealistic expectations (at home and abroad) and had responsibilities thrust upon it for which Rosen and his colleagues were often unsuited and unprepared.

Drawn to the steppe by the largesse of Western patrons and the utilitarianism of Soviet rulers, masses of peddlers and shopkeepers from the shtetl headed to a new world oblivious to the political enmity in the Diaspora. The philanthropists in New York could only guess whether their support could, in and of itself, compensate for the complete lack of farming experience among the tens of thousands of recruits who began to flow southward in 1925. Judging from one account, results were mixed:

A Russian agricultural inspector asked a Jew plowing in a new colony, “What are you doing?”

“Why, can’t you see? . . . I’m plowing.”

The Russian slapped him on the back, seemingly in a most amicable fashion.

But whenever a husky Russian slaps you, it is disconcerting.

The Jew gasped for breath; he literally crumpled up. “What are you slapping me for?”

“Why, you fool, is this the way to plow? You’re scarcely scraping the ground.”

He then showed the Jew how to turn up the clods. The Jew patiently watched; he was learning something.

The Russian slapped him again. Again the Jew almost collapsed.
“What now?”
“You ignoramus,” the Russian exclaimed, “is this the way to hitch a horse?”
And he showed the pioneer how to hitch the horse. The Jew was again learning something.
“Thank you brother,” the Jew said after catching his breath, “but next time, please be more gentle in giving lessons.”121
Chapter 4 Soviet Power

and Life in the Colonies, 1925–1929

Thousands of Jews set off southward from the shtetls to the new colonies every winter throughout the second half of the 1920s thanks to the combined, if uneven, labors of the foreign philanthropies and the Soviet authorities. The bulk of settlers had uprooted themselves from impoverished, albeit familiar, homes but knew next to nothing about the adventure they had undertaken. Only the most politically acute among them understood that they were en route to regions at the edge of state control, where the local leaders were at loggerheads with the center. The colonists arrived in Crimea and southern Ukraine armed with little more than guarded enthusiasm and vague promises of a brighter future from the Ozet recruiters in the shtetls and Joseph Rosen’s employees who greeted them at the railroad stations and assembly points.

No matter their fervor, fundamental difficulties faced the colonists’ transition from urban to rural life. True, Agro-Joint, Komzet, and other service providers constructed homes, provided tractors, sent agronomists, and eased the first shock of agricultural life. Nevertheless, no one knew whether the efforts of Soviet and American benefac-
tors could transform merchants into farmers. Indeed, the new colonists were utterly alien to the Crimean steppe, somewhat less so to southern Ukraine. More often than not they spoke Yiddish—an unknown language for the indigenous population—and, as former town dwellers, looked and acted foreign to their new neighbors. Ashkenazic Judaism was a rare, urban phenomenon in Crimea before 1923. Hitherto, such Jews had intermingled with the indigenous population only in the marketplace, if at all. Contemporary JDC publicity disseminated a picture of idyllic life on the steppe, with “new Jews” living in harmony with their neighbors, warmly received by veteran colonists, and grateful for the guidance of Agro-Joint instructors. Did this picture correspond to reality?

What of the chaotic political environment into which the settlers arrived? Weak central control over the periphery was an old story. The tsarist state had sought to control and cow subject peoples as it expanded to the west, south, and east from the eighteenth century until February 1917, but with limited success. The Romanovs had neither the institutions, nor the personnel, nor the resources to monitor and closely govern their colonial appendages. On the contrary, most of the popular revolts against the tsars erupted from the periphery. Even if revolution and civil war had left the Bolsheviks with a smaller land area to control, Lenin and his immediate successors lacked the means to assert effective control over the borderlands. Indeed, they had limited powers to coerce and convince, even in areas closer to the center.

The multiethnic fabric of the Eurasian landmass further impeded the establishment of full control. Slavs constituted a minority in the borderlands; over the course of the nineteenth century, the share of the non-Russian, non-Orthodox population had actually risen outside Ukraine, Belorussia, and Russia. As a result, Russian Orthodox administrators throughout the empire ruled over a multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups, most of whom were neither Russian nor Orthodox. These conditions forced tsars and commissars to temper an instinct for imperial control and Russification with policies that avoided revolt and accommodated local needs. From below, resourceful indigenous authorities in the distant republics learned how to deflect the more distasteful elements of Soviet social policy without igniting forceful responses, at least until the late 1920s.

Conscious of this inherited vulnerability, the Soviets tolerated partial korenizatsia from 1923 until the mid-1930s and then abandoned it altogether in 1936–1937. At first, they hoped that such a policy would transform the ethnic minorities—who carried disproportionate demographic weight in the border-
lands—into a unified body politic under Russian tutelage. In practice, kor-
enizatsiia in the national territories usually continued undisturbed into the
1930s provided that it remained predominantly cultural and did not stir politi-
cal unrest. As for the Jews, the party settled on no clear nationality policy:
Stalin (like Lenin before him) favored assimilation of the Jews into general So-
viet culture while President Mikhail Kalinin led anti-assimilationists in the
party hierarchy.

COLONIZATION AND SOVIET LEGITIMACY

Moscow’s alienation from the periphery in the early years of korenizatsiia ex-
plains, in great part, its enthusiasm for colonization. In all of its non-Russian
republics, the regime tried to offset the power of the titular nationalities with
more trustworthy ethnic minorities. In this vein, colonization looked like a
fine opportunity to balance hostile populations in the borderlands with more
loyal and “modern” Jews. Moscow had a solid statistical basis for this approach.
In 1922, Jewish membership in the communist party was two-and-a-half times
greater than the overall proportion of Jews in the population of the Soviet
Union; the same held true in Belorussia and Ukraine—the primary recruiting
pools for colonization. Seen through the prism of political control, it behooved
the Soviets to redistribute Jews to areas with a weaker party presence. Although
the ratio of Jews in the communist party declined in subsequent years, it still
compared favorably with other ethnic groups on the periphery, particularly in
contrast to their non-Jewish neighbors near the settlement tracts.

As events would demonstrate, colonization created opportunities for the So-
viet regime to pursue political goals in Crimea beyond the financial and public
relations benefits of the project. Jewish colonization was in fact the final factor
in igniting a clash between the Soviet state and the Tatar communists. For local
leaders, already uncomfortable with unilateral decrees from the “Russian” cen-
ter, these colonies were an outright provocation from Moscow. In their view,
the colonists—even if unwittingly—served as agents for the expansion of cen-
tralized, hence Russianized, rule over Crimea. Bad timing only made matters
worse: Simferopol’s attempt to flex its political muscles against colonization co-
incided with the center’s campaign against local nationalists (embodied by the
removal of Sultan-Galiev). As a result, Agro-Joint and its colonists inadver-
tently gave the state a pretext to assert its authority over local, “chauvinist” lead-
ers in Crimea.

Lacking adequate political resources, the nationalist Tatar leadership in Sim-
feropol did not survive the ensuing crisis with the state. The Tatar communists resisted colonization because the decrees on concentrated land allotments for the Jewish settlers seemed to impinge on the national integrity and political legitimacy of the Crimean Tatar Oblast. Moreover, unlike the German, Tatar, and other national entities, the Jewish compact settlement blocs came under external administrative and service umbrellas (Agro-Joint and Komzet). Because they jealously guarded their local nationalist autonomy and bridled against this seeming violation of their political space, the Crimean Obkom campaigned to eliminate, or at least substantially reduce, the land allotment quotas. By blatant obstruction of All-Union Sovnarkom directives on this issue in late 1924, Veli Ibrahimov (chairman of the Crimean Sovnarkom and Central Executive Committee) and other Tatar communists triggered a forceful response from the center. Contrary to the image presented in Soviet pamphlets, Tatar resistance to Jewish colonization derived neither from the personal caprice of Ibrahimov nor from a narrow cabal of extremists. Rather, Moscow’s unilateral orders had kindled antagonism throughout the Crimean government.

As elsewhere around their empire, the Soviets sought ways to outmaneuver local political resistance in Crimea. Although unaware of the wider ramifications of their actions or the ultimate consequences for Ibrahimov and his colleagues, the managers of colonization proved a decisive weapon as the Kremlin, with help from loyalists in Simferopol, broke the Crimean-Tatar leadership. Caught in a conflict larger than the colonization enterprise, and desperate to fulfill its mission for Russia’s Jews, Agro-Joint allied itself informally with the Kremlin against the Tatar communists.

Enthusiasm, a sense of urgency, and fortuitous timing propelled Samuil Liubarskii (at the time, the head of the Kharkov office) into a quasi-governmental function. Dispatched by Komzet as its plenipotentiary in 1925, he went to Crimea after an earlier emissary from Moscow (Iuli Gol’de) had been shunned upon arrival in Simferopol. Liubarskii’s subsequent report on the resistance of the Tatar communists to Soviet instructions on land allotments proved disastrous for Ibrahimov. He told Komzet of the “lack of concern for state interests in the position of the Crimean Narkomzem,” not simply their resistance to colonization. Rosen followed Liubarskii’s report with an impassioned appeal to Komzet for action. Despite firm, continual demands, Tatar communist leaders still refused to fulfill Komzet’s quotas on land allotments for Jewish colonization. An ominous sign of what lay ahead came in a scathing report from a pivotal Moscow loyalist in the obkom against his Tatar communist
comrades. Letters to the Komzet from individual colonies that emphasized the wider implications of Tatar communist resistance on this issue further fueled the growing anger in the center. The resultant anti-Tatar sentiment in the party primed the Kremlin for stern action against such wanton defiance.

The measures taken against Tatar communists illustrated the shifting power calculus in the center-periphery conflict and hinted at what other republics would later undergo. Moscow—wary, and still in the midst of the succession struggle—used legalistic and administrative finesse, rather than brute force, to break local resistance to Jewish colonization. First, Komzet foiled Simferopol’s attempt to invoke the Soviet Land Codex in 1925. Even in 1927, the regime sought less to coerce than to cajole, calling on socialist duty and going no further than an implied threat. Concurrently, Iurii Larin launched a vilification campaign against the Tatar communist leadership. In a caustic condemnation of Ibrahimov to the Soviet Central Committee, Larin crafted his argument around the center-periphery issue, not just colonization. Whatever the effect of Larin and other proponents of colonization, removal of the Tatar communists began shortly thereafter, culminating in the execution of Ibrahimov in May 1928. With the political situation apparently under control, Moscow postponed the cultural Russification of the peninsula until the mid-1930s.

Colonization had a lesser, yet significant, bearing on the republican government in Ukraine. Much like the Tatar communists, the core of Ukrainian resistance lay in center-periphery and nationalistic tensions, not antisemitism. Equipped with greater leverage than Simferopol (and absent ethnic or religious friction with the leaders of the Kremlin), political maneuvers by the Ukrainian Narkomzem and Central Committee were able to slow, but not halt, colonization; their effectiveness should therefore not be overestimated. In part, the Ukrainians’ relative success was due to better concealment of their opposition from the outside world. In the end, Komzet enlisted higher authorities to overcome repeated attempts to deflect colonization from southern Ukraine to Crimea or “the East.” The outcome of Ukrainian defiance differed fundamentally from the Crimean version in one respect: its actors (men such as Vlas Chubar’) survived the episode, only to fall victim to purges during the 1930s.

**Eliminating Alternate Sources of Identity on the Steppe**

Owing to the availability of primary and oral sources in the West, previous studies have attributed great importance to the liquidation of the Zionist Hehalutz communes (Mishmar, Maayan, and Tel Chai) and the Vojo Nova
commune founded by immigrants from Mandatory Palestine.28 These communes were anomalies that numbered only four of the eighty-six colonies in Crimea—representing at most, a few hundred of the twenty thousand permanent colonists. Members of these communes shared few characteristics with the bulk of settlers. The average Hehalutz communard was young, unmarried, and imbued with socialist Zionism. The Vojo Nova settlers, while mostly from a Russian background, had been ideologically and professionally transformed during their years living in the Yishuv. By contrast, the far greater part of recruits to Agro-Joint colonies migrated as households focused on material survival and could not be characterized by a single ideology.

Notwithstanding the historiographic imbalance, these communes were not without their significance, particularly for the ever-vigilant Evsektsiia. Because neither the large disproportion of Jews in the early Soviet governments nor the promises of future rectification of current hardships compensated for the prolonged suffering in the shtetls, Zionism offered, at least in theory, an alternate allegiance for Soviet Jews still alienated from the regime. The success of the Zionist communes amplified this threat. As tightly knit, ideologically driven groups, the communes presented challenges to the centralizing authority. Since Hehalutz also radiated agricultural expertise and cultural activity in northern Crimea, it was a natural magnet for the surrounding settlements, “stronger than Komsomol cells.”29 Soviet sensitivities could not long tolerate the mixed symbolism of Zionist pioneers spearheading the mechanization of Crimea, especially among new colonists to the region. From the Evsektsiia’s point of view, removal of any alternative domestic source of authority in the Jewish community could not come too soon.30

Whatever the mood or rhetoric in the Kremlin surrounding Hehalutz, the active suppression originated in the Crimean Evsektsiia, followed later by that of the superior authorities. Yet, until 1926 the local Evsektsiia thought indoctrination through Komsomol activity the best solution for overcoming Hehalutz. When the dénouement failed to materialize, the Evsektsiia helped unleash the OGPU (secret police) against the Hehalutz communes on charges ranging from tax evasion to counterrevolution, preceded by virulent attacks in the local press.31 This was, in fact, the only practical “success” of the Evsektsiia in the colonization project. In this they left no stone unturned: the chairman of Evsektsiia in Moscow battled Larin over the fate of Hehalutz; in Dzhankoi, it showed no tolerance for these communes, regardless of their value as model farms for new settlers.32 In this respect, the destruction of Hehalutz foreshadowed the everyday use of force generally ascribed to collectivization.
A more banal political factor also contributed to the fate of the Hehalutz communes. As the Evsektsiia began to sense its own end in the latter half of the 1920s, it sought a raison d’être by attacking a vulnerable enemy inside the Soviet Union. Although many Komzet officials did not want a fight with foreign donors (or with Soviet Jews) over Hehalutz, the Evsektsiia refused to yield. Its campaign also sharply contrasted with tacit acceptance of the communes by the agricultural and economic bureaucracies in Crimea, as well as by the majority of the communes’ indigenous neighbors, all of whom recognized the professional value and stabilizing effect of the Hehalutz.

As Zvi Gitelman has observed, the Soviet regime tried to use agricultural colonization in Crimea and southern Ukraine to divert the attention of young, urban Jews from Zionism—a movement that had gained considerable strength in the early 1920s. The state’s anti-Zionist rhetoric first contrasted domestic colonization with the relatively high cost of Palestinian settlement. As one Soviet author predicted, “[The Jews] would no longer weep over Israel, rather, would sing the song of internationalism [in the colonies].” Other authors argued that religious conservatism enslaved Palestine’s Jewish inhabitants, whereas life on the Crimean steppe liberated colonists. Because Russian-Jewish returnees from Palestine appeared to be living proof of Zionism’s bankruptcy, their creation of the Vojo Nova commune in Crimea proved a bonanza for the Soviet’s anti-Zionist publicity. The state now merged anti-Zionism with attacks on British and other international conspiracies against Soviet Russia. Combined with the venom and actions of the Evsektsiia, such propaganda from the state generated a lethal atmosphere that enveloped the Hehalutz communes.

In parallel to the political interests of the Evsektsiia, repression of the Hehalutz must also be understood in the context of Soviet steps against national movements during the second half of the 1920s. Merezhin (the secretary of Komzet and a former leader of the Evsektsiia) signaled this approach in mid-1925, more than a year before the Evsektsiia began aggressive action. In his view, the nationalist aura of the Zionist communes meant that the Soviets had to fight Hehalutz just as it fought pan-Islamic movements. In the final analysis, however, even if the Kremlin issued the order to liquidate the communes in 1928, the Evsektsiia—an otherwise ineffectual party organ—had already destabilized the communes from below.

The liquidation of the Hehalutz communes clearly indicated that the party made antinationalism a priority. It reflected (together with the destruction of the Tatar communists) how cultural korenizatsiia could coexist with the systematic repression of any signs of grassroots nationalism. Limited autonomy in
the periphery was, therefore, a temporarily acceptable compromise for the Soviets; an alternate national focus was not. The later dispersal of the Palestinian émigrés from the Vojo Nova commune further eliminated vagaries in nationality policy. With no other competitive ideologies left among the colonists around the turn of the decade, the project assumed wholly practical parameters for the Soviets.

**Agro-Joint: A Surrogate Authority**

Pragmatic local and central officials, eager to restore local order amid the chaotic aftermath of the civil war, at first welcomed the stabilizing role of Agro-Joint. As a visitor from the Ukrainian Narkomzem admitted: "If the situation of Jewish settlers is not so great, at least this situation is no worse than in the rest of Ukraine where there is neither Soviet authority nor Agro-Joint." As central power consolidated later in the decade and Moscow sought to assert greater control over the fringes of Soviet territory, Agro-Joint received less thanks. In the meantime, it dominated rural life and channeled information upward. Institutional jealousies aside, even when Komzet first attempted to gather reliable information about the colonies in late 1929, it could actually do little without Agro-Joint. Komzet (hence, the government) knew little beyond what Rosen and his employees told it.

Like other local groups throughout the country that faced an increasingly active state apparatus in the latter 1920s, Agro-Joint had to locate safe avenues in which to guard its unique position. To do so, Rosen adjusted to policy changes in Moscow. The relationship with Hehalutz was typical of such political contortions. While they were still tolerated by the regime, the Zionist communes enjoyed symbiotic relations with Agro-Joint: Rosen funneled material aid in return for training and services rendered to the new colonies. At the same time, he vigilantly shielded the JDC in New York from any possible legal responsibility for the communes or their members. Once the regime clamped down on the Hehalutz communes in 1927, Rosen quietly intervened (legally and politically) on their behalf. The fate of other colonies outside Agro-Joint’s protection best illustrated its local weight. In the absence of Rosen’s administrative umbrella, envious local authorities stripped the property of nonaffiliated Jewish settlements.

**Colonization in the Soviet Press and Art**

Moscow’s propaganda campaign was an important barometer of its commitment to specific ideas and illustrated how a weak state maximized assets. The
Soviets saw propaganda as a crucial tool in the popularization of new, Soviet themes, embodied by an overarching message: hard work could overcome the nation’s backwardness. From its infancy, the regime placed great faith in the compensatory power of visual messages and used them as a principal instrument of mass mobilization for specific tasks. An ambitious propaganda apparatus—meant to “enlighten” and mobilize the masses with patriotic and heroic images—grew in earnest during the civil war and then expanded its publishing capacity, if not its effect, during the NEP. Whereas Moscow’s behavior on nationality issues was reflexive, its enlistment of popular support was conscious, measured, and overwhelming on issues closer to the party consensus.46

The popularization of Jewish colonization in Russian-language materials began cautiously, peaked during the First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932), and then merged into the fairly regimented Soviet publications of the 1930s. Initially, the Komzet feared a wide propaganda campaign; Petr Smidovich (its chairman) worried that the peasantry would misconstrue any publicity and would invariably protest against preferential treatment for the Jews. Early letters to the Central Committee from the general population seemed to validate his concern.47 The campaign intensified only after the center began to gain confidence in its control over rural Russia.

From the outset, propaganda was meant to shape and define public opinion toward Jewish colonization. The regime used for this purpose tsarist transgressions as a moral and ideological justification for the project. From President Kalinin to the lowliest pamphleteer, authors argued that Jews deserved land and rights as compensation for centuries of injustice under the Romanovs.48 Among other attributes, the pamphlets presented colonization as a unique outcome of the revolution, unthinkable in capitalist countries.49 In an era of relative openness, the booklets expressed semiofficial approval for the benefits bestowed on the Soviet Union from cooperation with a bourgeois organization. Finally, pamphlets were also meant to counteract anti-Soviet rumors bubbling up from the periphery.50

Like other propaganda campaigns of the era, this one radiated from the center outward. Whether the colonization project was to be taken at face value or explained as an attempt to reap foreign goodwill and wealth, the Soviet state expended great effort and expense to popularize it among non-Jews from the mid-1920s. In the wake of the Politburo and Sovnarkom decisions on colonization, top-ranking officials in the Central Committee and Politburo authored Russian-language pamphlets and articles in national newspapers to promote the general policy and rationale.51 At the same time, the production of Yid-
lish-language materials of all sorts began in earnest. Only a fraction of Soviet publications targeted foreign audiences, although these apparently found their way to readers outside the country. Western commentators on the colonies frequently interspersed travelogues of visitors with reviews of Soviet materials.52

This propaganda campaign replicated and sharpened many tactics used in other NEP-era mobilization efforts. Pamphlets were the most accessible medium, followed by literary works from Soviet-Jewish authors. Although these publications were available for purchase by anyone, the bulk of the written propaganda targeted urban non-Jews. Despite the printing of massive quantities in some years, Ozet’s journal (Tribuna) probably had less influence than the pamphlets because it circulated among only the committee’s members and affiliated intellectuals, rather than the general public.53

Ozet’s most important contribution to the propaganda campaign were its urban cells. At its height, the committee boasted hundreds of thousands of members, all exposed in some measure to the story of colonization. Ozet sent dozens of workers’ delegations to the colonies, who then reported back to factories and wrote glowing articles in national newspapers.54 Ozet also sold posters (in Russian and Yiddish) as a cheap, effective medium of popularization, in keeping with a nationwide surge during the First Five-Year Plan.55 Finally, Ozet produced a promotional silent film, Evrei na zemle (Jews on the Earth), in 1927.56 An otherwise formulaic motion picture gained historic weight thanks to its caption writer, Vladimir Maiakovskii, the hugely popular Soviet laureate. His contribution symbolized the disproportionate attention directed toward Jewish colonization.57

Of lesser importance, but illustrative nonetheless, colonization aided the propaganda campaign against rural class enemies. Both before and after total (sploshnoi) collectivization in the winter of 1929–1930, Jewish cooperative farms were an ideal canvas against which to contrast the evil of kulaks, greedy Jewish colonists, and assorted antisemites.58 Identification of these foes fitted the national imperative; opposition to the regime’s policy, by definition, had to be from class enemies. Propaganda against kulak antisemites (real or fabricated) simultaneously conformed to the class-warfare paradigms prevalent in the late 1920s and served the Evsektsiia’s interests—an organization at that time in decline, desperately seeking a bogey to legitimize its existence.59 The Soviets may also have hoped that the overstated demonization of antisemites might encourage more foreign support.60

Agricultural exhibitions were a last, unfailing type of popularization, a sure sign of continuity in policy. Unlike the case with most other publicity tools, the
Bolsheviks inherited an appreciation of such events from their tsarist predeces-
sors. Moreover, despite changes in the methods and messages of propaganda,
the official encouragement of Jewish participation in agricultural exhibitions
never wavered. Strong showings by Hehalutz communes at regional events in
the mid-1920s further reinforced the value of exhibitions and the wider reso-
nance of colonization. Soviet and Agro-Joint leaders concurred that Jewish par-
ticipation in exhibitions served two functions: the efficient dissemination of
agricultural expertise to the surrounding villages and the warming of relations
between the communities. Agro-Joint financed the participation of its
colonies at agricultural exhibitions from the mid-1920s, making their inclusion
even more attractive for the Soviets.

Mass propaganda was not free of hazards for the regime. Because most of the
potential Jewish colonists were not ideally suited to become steppe farmers and
because the legacy of Jewish agrarianization in Russia was mixed, the propa-
ganda effort carried significant dangers for the Soviets. It could engender, at
best, a positive atmosphere among the reading public. In the countryside, how-
ever, Moscow’s pamphlets mattered very little. The arrival of colonists could
easily destabilize the ethnic balance in Crimea or the sensitive relations with the Ukrainian republic. If colonization failed, the Kremlin could expect embarrassment, condemnation from abroad, perhaps local uprisings. Investments by the Joint were appreciated, but hardly sufficient compensation for such a risk.

Why, despite these considerations, did the regime publicize the project so energetically in the Russian language?

Part of the answer lies in the issue of central control over an unruly periphery. The early propaganda literature tried to manufacture specific images of enthusiastic Jewish colonists and of a new, more Soviet-friendly, Crimea. Party work among the colonists, in fact, suffered from labor and other shortages endemic throughout the USSR. Nevertheless, first reports claimed suspiciously high levels of enthusiasm for the regime and readiness to participate in the newly formed selsoviet, particularly in comparison with neighboring Germans and Tatars.63 By the late 1920s, however, officials admitted far more modest levels of Soviet penetration into Jewish colonies. Herein lies a striking example of Soviet propaganda at work: the regime consistently projected its version of reality in the Crimean countryside undaunted by the fact that communism remained a small, urban phenomenon.64

During the 1920s, a weak but ambitious state labored to enhance its control

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An exhibit of Agro-Joint colonies in the Kolai district at an agricultural exhibition. (Courtesy of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. File: YIVO, RO Dzank 1.)
over the geographic periphery with all available assets yet without sparking a rebellion. Colonization was among the new, and unforeseen, sources of tension between the center and periphery unleashed by the inherent imbalance between the state’s prerogatives and local interests. Although these conflicts were mostly outside the purview of the settlers, the outcomes affected life on the steppe. Jewish colonists therefore faced political stresses from above in addition to the challenge of adjusting to new lives. Change was inevitable.

**FROM SHTETL TO COOPERATIVE FARM**

As an organization that embodied modernity and an undeniable “otherness” in the periphery, Agro-Joint compounded the local political peculiarities of the NEP. While at times what happened in these colonies was typical for the era, events in Crimea more often contradicted the prevailing norms or, no less frequently, foreshadowed future developments on the regional and national stages. Affairs in Crimea would show that the greatest pressures on Moscow most often emanated from below. In particular, multiple, antagonistic interests, heavily influenced by rural and urban forces (often stronger than the regime), deeply divided society. What did the experience of the individual colonists reveal about NEP-era society in the countryside?

**Jewish Rural Cooperatives**

Among the many ironies of the Jewish colonization episode, the Joint—created and funded by arch-capitalists in New York—found itself at the forefront of cooperativism. Over the first few years of operations, Rosen and his agronomists came to two fundamentally important conclusions. First, in the short term, adequate agricultural services simply could not be delivered to every household. Second, it was easier to find one talented man among dozens of households to lead a cooperative enterprise than to train the head of every family as a farm manager. Therefore, the leaders of Agro-Joint in Russia (together with Komzet, and to a lesser extent, other foreign organizations) seldom wavered from a conviction that cooperativism maximized the workforce, leadership, cost-effectiveness, and use of equipment, pasturelands, and water resources. Even the leaders in the JDC headquarters, most of them already successful businessmen, never expected the farms to fully privatize.

At first glance, the colonies seemed headed toward the traditional, household-centered form of village life. Throughout Russia, the peasants remained ambivalent toward cooperativism: the quantity of consumer cooperatives sky-
rocketed during the period of the NEP, whereas the members’ satisfaction apparently varied. Furthermore, this quantum growth occurred solely in consumer and credit cooperatives, not in production associations (artels). Formed arbitrarily while the Jewish recruits were still in the shtetls in order to satisfy the requirements of Ozet, most of the original artels in the Agro-Joint colonies broke up in 1925 or 1926 over an array of internal disputes.68

In contrast to the typical rural patterns of departure from collective bodies during the NEP era, the colonists reconstituted the defunct associations as land settlement, production, and consumer artels sometime during the 1926–1928 growing seasons, with the help and sanction of Agro-Joint and Komzet.69 Both in theory and in practice, these voluntarily renewed artels made the best use of labor, equipment, and purchasing power. Such periodic departure and return to cooperatives characterized the settlements during the 1920s (barring the brief interlude in 1925–1926), making cooperativist practices everyday notions.70 Though the number is difficult to measure with accuracy, approximately two-thirds of all Jewish colonists participated in cooperative organizations from 1926 until the eve of total collectivization, with even higher proportions in Agro-Joint colonies.71

The cooperative activities in a typical colony of Agro-Joint during the 1920s were closer than in neighboring non-Jewish villages to the collectivist edicts unleashed by the Stalinist regime against the whole Soviet countryside at the end of the decade. The Agro-Joint colonies plowed, sowed, and harvested cooperatively on privately owned land.72 The frequency of this kind of work in the Kherson region was somewhat lower owing to the presence of the nineteenth-century colonies. After three or four generations on the land, these colonists in southern Ukraine were more resistant to Agro-Joint practices and enjoyed labor surpluses, contrasted to deficits in Crimea.73 Even so, at the moment of total collectivization during the winter of 1929–1930, some figures show that 80 percent of Jewish farmers in Ukraine belonged to consumer, credit, or production cooperatives, as against 35 percent of non-Jewish peasants.74 In both the Crimean and Ukrainian scenarios, Jewish colonists thereby became accustomed to cooperative work and understood its mechanics and the means to circumvent problems before the state imposed nationwide collectivization.

Although it exceeded rural norms, the extent of Agro-Joint’s cooperative practices did not satisfy some local Eversektsia officials. Specifically, such cooperativism fell short of the pronouncements about the full collectivization of agriculture that came into vogue among faithful communist officials at the time of the XV Party Congress in 1927. Eversektsia activists complained that
Komzet had failed to promote the establishment of full-scale collectives by mid-1928; the smaller consumer and production cooperatives counted for little in the eyes of the Evsektsiia. Despite these criticisms, Agro-Joint sustained a real cooperative model while the party debated theoretical versions up until the winter of 1929–1930.\(^7^5\)

Soviet authorities with fewer axes to grind against Agro-Joint found common ground with the American philanthropy on the acceptable contours of cooperativism. Their separate political interests coincided with practicality in a mutual marginalization of communes. Unlike most of the Jewish colonies, the handful of Jewish communes governed themselves autonomously, with little or no Agro-Joint supervision. Among these was Yungvald, founded and led by Jewish Komsomol members in mid-1926 but settled mainly by people who fit the apolitical profile of most Agro-Joint colonists. The bedlam and amateur management in this commune near Dzhurchinsk was equally disturbing to both Soviet and nonpolitical visitors, regardless of the ideological fervor of its leaders. From the Soviet perspective, administrative disorder had caused economic failure and public disappointment in Yungvald, for which no idyllic enthusiasm could compensate. Autonomous communes were anathema to a regime obsessed (at both the local and national levels) with order. It should be remembered that the government spent much of the NEP period trying to replace everywhere in the country the traditional power of the “backward” Russian land commune with the selsoviet.\(^7^6\) The seemingly inherent chaos of Yungvald was also at odds with the rationale and practices of Agro-Joint, an organization committed to systematic colonization.

While the circumstances differed significantly, the Soviets and Agro-Joint also found fault with the lifestyle in the Hehalutz communes. It is interesting to note that even their exemplary orderliness did not shield the Tel Chai, Mishmar, and Maayan communes from the party officials who were most concerned by the political ramifications of Hehalutz. Agro-Joint respected the technical expertise in the Zionist communes but, for obvious reasons, did not consider them a viable model for emulation for the dozens of new colonies to be populated by settlers in search of socioeconomic relief. Thus, Agro-Joint and the Soviet authorities honed in, albeit from different directions, on the artel form (a cooperative association with small-scale private animal husbandry and farming plots) during the 1920s as the optimum form of collective organization.

Agro-Joint colonies departed from the general rural tendencies in important ways. Most beneficial for the state, Agro-Joint at least tried to attach colonists to the land year-round—a very attractive feature for the regime at a time of un-
controlled peasant migration. Yet despite the best efforts of all the settlement organizations, many colonists wintered in the shtetls, or retained business interests there, until at least 1930. In their attempts to keep the colonists in place during the winter, the Agro-Joint agronomists were not trying to please the state. Rather, this was a response to the proven danger of non-Jewish peasants who became squatters on the tracts abandoned during the winter months; these trespassers were then difficult to remove. Some agronomists advocated the benign encouragement of new colonists to bear the grueling winters in communal barracks; others promoted the coercive application of credit policy. All found it hard to distinguish between those families who abused the privilege of colonization and those who migrated back and forth as a result of genuine personal needs. The service organizations eventually solved this problem by a massive program of housing construction and the creation of winter workshops. In another contrast to rural trends, Agro-Joint discouraged the parcelization of land within the colonies. Instead, its farms contained relatively large, centralized units of production at a time when landholdings in the Soviet village splintered, thus reducing their profitability.

**Rural Life without State Authority**

Legal vagueness, owing to the absence of the state, weighed heavily on colonization during the early years of the NEP. Settlers and Agro-Joint both explored their roles and maneuvering room while Moscow (and to a great extent, Simferopol) dealt in high politics. The reinstatement of voting rights, exemptions from tax and military service, and large credits encouraged recruitment, but stubborn legal issues impeded progress in the colonies. For instance, confusion over land ownership during the first years of organized settlement slowed the introduction of vineyards. The legal category “organization of land use” (zemleustroistvo) was new; its parameters were unclear to both colonists and administrators. Unsure of their future rights over vineyards, settlers delayed planting. Colonists hedged against uncertainty by staking de facto claims to land; they intentionally plowed surplus parcels to expand occupancy rights. A lesser crisis concerned the extension of suffrage. Around the time of a renewed national crackdown against lishentsy in 1928, Komzet began to disenfranchise colonists who received supplementary income from the shtetls—usually generated by businesses or property left in the hands of relatives and friends. Even after Agro-Joint helped resolve these issues, new legal problems invariably arose.

To a degree, the uncertainties of relations with the state replicated them-
selves in contacts between the colonists and Agro-Joint. The picture presented in JDC and Soviet publicity materials was simple—an idolized, frugal, dedicated, authoritative Agro-Joint agronomist obeyed by thankful colonists: “Menashe believes in the agronomist just as, once upon a time, he believed in his old God-Adonai.”

Reality was more complex, however. At first, many colonists vacillated between the advice offered by agronomists and counsel from their German neighbors. Other settlers, particularly those with some prior farm experience, thought Agro-Joint agronomists more a nuisance than an asset. Distorted perceptions of the American sponsors took hold in the shtetl where rumors spread that the Crimean tracts were “American land” granted to the U.S. government by the Soviets for Jewish colonization in order to repay outstanding tsarist-era debt.

Doubt over roles, authority, and function permeated the Agro-Joint staff as well. Only the JDC leaders in New York showed steadfast confidence, bordering on patronization of their Russian brethren: “American Jews are making Jewish history in Russia, which if peace continues, will be felt for generations.” The realization of American-Jewish visions of social engineering seemed to be at hand in the late 1920s. Consequently, Joint leaders confidently predicted that the end of Agro-Joint’s intensive role in resettlement was within sight. In the Soviet Union, however, the JDC was often as foreign to its own Russian personnel as it was to the colonists and to the state. Its staff struggled to define parameters with new partners. The very nature of the parent organization baffled its Russian-Jewish officials, accustomed to work, at most, in the tightly controlled, autarkic structure of the JCA: “We cannot master the character of the JDC. It is partially a business, partly a joint-stock company, partly a fiscal institution or all these mixed together. Think what you like, I know neither the fathers, nor the mothers, but the child has turned out rather strange.”

In another outgrowth of the NEP era, the abysmal state of Russian agricultural training forced Agro-Joint to cobble together a makeshift staff. Because Soviet schools were capable of producing only small numbers of poorly trained agronomists in the early 1920s, Joseph Rosen plucked his professional staff from vocational institutes or from the old Kherson settlements. Overall, these agronomists were young and energetic, armed with a mixed bag of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Nothing in their collective history (except for a handful of regional agronomists and department heads in the Moscow office) prepared them for the immensity of their tasks on the steppe. At first, the local agronomists did not know whether their authority over the
settlers involved command or advisory powers, nor were they sure to whom they were accountable.\textsuperscript{92} On the ground, the agronomists’ work transcended simply lecturing to farmers (the preferred method of Russian-trained agronomists). Instead, they were forced into the realm of concrete action, “going from words to deeds.”\textsuperscript{93}

By default, Agro-Joint agronomists managed small administrative fiefdoms. Herein, they were the primary authority figure and service provider to new colonists for up to three years. Without functional government agencies, agronomists dealt with issues of housing, loans, supply, transportation, and culture—as well as agriculture, of course—for six to eight new settlements, and then they cleared fields for future colonies.\textsuperscript{94} This resulted in a complex and unequal relationship in which colonists met at least weekly with sector agronomists and instructors but rarely saw the office staff from Moscow. These heavy responsibilities, the limited experience of the agronomists, and jittery colonists added up to a formula for conflict.\textsuperscript{95} In an operation of this magnitude, with Agro-Joint personnel spread thin over hundreds of miles of steppe, some agronomists faltered in their duties. Therefore, just as Soviet authorities barely controlled the geographic periphery, Joseph Rosen in the Agro-Joint’s
Moscow office had only partial charge over events in the settlement tracts. Even with these deficiencies, the Agro-Joint network bestowed the colonies with a far higher degree of guidance than any other farming sector in the USSR—a factor essential to success.96

In the murky administrative waters of the second half of the 1920s in the Soviet countryside, ad hoc alliances formed in various permutations within the triangle of Agro-Joint, Komzet, and the settlers. Initially, colonists allied with Komzet against Agro-Joint (then perceived as the preeminent local authority) to achieve particular goals.97 At the same time, agronomists brokered no-win conflicts between association boards and obstinate settlers. Though this undermined their own local credibility, it did shelter colonists from the wrath of Komzet, and hence, the government. Even when Komzet became more intrusive, Agro-Joint agronomists continued to conceal settlers’ improprieties. For example, Iakov Surdutovich knew of multiple, illegal land rentals but withheld the information until confronted by the Crimean Komzet chairman. This, however, did not prevent cooperation between Agro-Joint and Komzet to discipline or evict particularly troublesome or “demoralizing” colonists. The transfer of the Evpatoria region from Ozet was a final, indirect illustration of an informal alliance between colonists and Agro-Joint. Pushed by appeals from settlers, Agro-Joint petitioned the government (via Komzet) for the transfer. Initially disinclined, the government eventually yielded.98

As the surrogate authority in the colonies, Agro-Joint, not the state, bore the brunt of the settlers’ complaints. Frustration with living conditions during the first year of colonization brought censure of Agro-Joint agronomists who “come running with your cars, but tell us nothing about our short term problems.” On occasion (so it was reported), they brusquely responded to settlers’ complaints by saying that “if [the colonists] don’t like it, they can go to Eretz Yisroel [Palestine].”99 Such outbursts aside, the agronomists’ response to such complaints in the first years usually emphasized patience, diligence, and the need to have faith in the agronomists’ counsel:

If you, comrades, make an assessment, you ought to be patient and hold out until the end. Do not lay it on thick, we do not want to accept undeserved reproaches at our own expense. It is wrong to enter upon a new life, solely on the basis of the mood of today. We advised you not to sell your horses when you returned in winter to your homes because you would later be forced to pay “three times the price.” We said and yelled not to sell the hay but you did not listen to us. You now know that this was a mistake. Those of you who believed us now receive 35–40 kopecks, instead of 15–20
kopecks per pud. Is it not so, comrade Finkel'shtein, that 80 percent of all the building plans for this year have been completed? We have made many mistakes, we recognize them, but you should recognize your own.\textsuperscript{100}

Agro-Joint surrogacy paralleled the state in two additional ways. Just as Russian peasants assumed that “if Moscow only knew,” it would correct local suffering, Jewish colonists likewise idolized the heads of Agro-Joint. The colonists therefore focused their rage on local agronomists but seemingly venerated Samuil Liubarskii (the assistant director) and Joseph Rosen as benevolent, if distant, figures.\textsuperscript{101} More important to the majority of colonists, heavy rural debt reinforced wariness about Agro-Joint, the largest single creditor to the colonists. The rapid modernization of Jewish colonies had not obviated debt. Moreover, the relatively high cost of Agro-Joint homes increased the comparative burdens for their colonists compared with those of JCA, ORT, or Ozet colonists. Although financial issues were particularly irksome for Agro-Joint’s clients, even the relatively low debts owed by colonists to those other service organizations soured relations.\textsuperscript{102}

Amid the governmental inactivity in the NEP-era countryside, the visible effects of Agro-Joint’s work not only raised expectations in the old and spontaneous colonies, but also sparked anger among their non-Jewish neighbors who were starved of initiatives and material comforts.\textsuperscript{103} Ozet colonists grumbled over the supposed privileges enjoyed by Agro-Joint settlers and the humiliation suffered by “their” agronomists who had to travel in cars donated by the Joint. As colonists in ORT-supervised areas around Odessa moaned: “Agro-Joint has forgotten us.” A JCA colonist complained at an early settlers’ conference: “How are we inferior to the other settlers? They have completely forgotten about us. JCA aid is negligible.”\textsuperscript{104} Even within Agro-Joint areas of operation, jealousy or anger consumed those convinced that it favored other settlements.\textsuperscript{105}

**SURVIVING IN THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY OF NEP**

The weakness of Soviet administration had important ramifications for the colonies. To be sure, they could not look to the state for substantial financial assistance, practical guidance, or even basic social services. On the positive side, however, the absence of government regulatory capacity allowed for greater maneuverability and improvisation; it also put a premium on unconventional solutions.

The colonies’ economic survival hinged on diversification and commercial-
ization. Outside the Jewish colonies, grain was the principal commodity on private markets, supplemented by small quantities of dairy and meat products. Agro-Joint introduced significant changes in this formula, but initial returns were low: before and after the disintegration of the original artels, most new households failed to turn a profit. Inevitably, “farmers in internship” had more mistakes than successes. These conditions necessitated frugality, winter work outside the colonies or in shtetls, loans from service organizations, and cash from foreign relatives. Fortunately for the colonists, Joseph Rosen’s application of modern farming techniques, the focus on productivity, and aggressive marketing of farm produce changed the daily routines of the settlers and gradually brought higher standards of living to whole settlements and individual households.

A comparison with the indigenous population illustrates the importance of Jewish economic adaptation. Unlike the surrounding villagers, most Jewish colonists were new to farming. Free of hereditary rural conservatism, they used whatever best fitted their immediate needs. According to contemporary Soviet sources, the colonists eclipsed the agricultural achievements of the surrounding villages sometime during the 1920s because of their readiness to adhere to the instructions from the agronomists and to adopt mechanization. Simultaneously, stubborn resistance to agronomists sent by the state retarded the progress of their non-Jewish neighbors and (to a lesser extent) of the old Kherson colonists. As an example, six-field crop rotation was standard practice in Jewish settlements, whereas most Soviet peasants still employed an antiquated two- or three-field rotation. Notwithstanding such gaps, the physical conditions in the colonies appalled some foreign visitors unfamiliar with conditions in the rest of the USSR. They (and much of the subsequent Western historiography) missed the critical point: the colonies were relatively better off than their neighbors. Soviet sources did recognize this difference.

Two further factors dictated the pace of socioeconomic progress in the colonies. First, by fusing traditional, commercial instincts with agricultural experimentation, the colonists calculated farming decisions as merchants, not peasants. According to Soviet observers, profits were the chief catalyst for mechanization and the introduction of new branches of farming in the colonies. Thus, Jewish farmers concentrated on high-profit crops and complex market arrangements while their neighbors vacillated between hoarding and the small-scale exchanges characteristic of the NEP era. The second governing factor was the presence of veteran Jewish colonists, who provided an important shortcut to socioeconomic integration. Most of the widely recognized
“model” colonies had one or more such members whose agricultural expertise preceded, supplemented, or supplanted the guidance of outside agronomists. More important, the veteran farmers mediated relationships between recently arrived shtetl Jews and their local non-Jewish neighbors, thanks to greater familiarity with peasant mentality.

Social Pressures: “Fleas, Snakes, and Lack of Water”

Economic stabilization and growth tended to aggravate, not ease, social stratification in the colonies. Tensions emerged almost immediately, with greater intensity in the old Kherson colonies than elsewhere. Some social conflicts appeared along traditional shtetl fault lines. Ozet’s journal, Tribuna, reported that wealthy Jews joined settlers’ artels with the express intent of exploiting poorer partners. Others hoped to incur fewer debts by joining artels composed mainly of bednota (the poor). When successful, these wealthy “cheaters” bore disproportionately light burdens. Once the settlers were on the land, such arrangements exploded into controversy. In other instances, settlers’ artels appointed domineering shtetl figures as chairs or underwent putsches by small, brutish, cliques. Most of these disputes ended with an amicable dissolution of the artel, but some wound up in regional courts.

Subsequent waves of colonists fueled material jealousy and internal power struggles despite a rise in the overall standards of living. Protective of their hard-won achievements and privileges and angry that service organizations “hand-fed” new members, older colonists spurned the greenhorns. On the reverse side, new settlers generally saw little to emulate in the older but “completely backward” colonies of Kherson. Starting from the bleakest early years, the factors making for dissent impressed foreign visitors. Select households had acquired wood floors, fine furniture, and other amenities that contrasted sharply with the living standards of others in the colonies. Furthermore, settlers measured themselves against adjacent colonies. As Joseph Hyman noticed during his visit to Russia: “The colony that has a bath house is not satisfied until it has a school building as well. And the colony that has both a school building and a bath house looks enviously at the settlement that has a clinic.”

Agro-Joint observers interpreted such conflicts in social terms; they applauded the energy of the spontaneous and early settlers (“the best shtetl elements”) but bemoaned a lower level of industriousness among subsequent settlers.

Real, albeit less tangible, cultural disparities among colonists added a final source of communal tension. Part of the conflict derived from bureaucratic de-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Collective</th>
<th>Number of Families</th>
<th>Place of Origin (by city/village/shtetl and province)</th>
<th>Settlement Tract No.</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Tul’chin, Podol’sk province</td>
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<td>Druzhba</td>
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<td>Krasnyi Pakhar’</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Chernigov city</td>
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(continued)
Differences. Initial colony rosters show that the early settlements mixed associations from multiple provinces of the former Pale, and from both Belorussian and Ukrainian areas. According to most accounts, the more “cultured” Belorussians fled the colonies more readily than Ukrainians, inciting scorn from the latter. Another source of friction was language. Ukrainian Jews spoke and tended to defend Yiddish, whereas Belorussians pressed for the use of Russian in schools. Tensions were palpable between the two groups: “The former were called ‘shmilakes’ and the latter ‘shmulikes.’ There was always friction and conflict between the shmilakes and the shmulikes, for instance in electing a committee chairman or chairman of the kolkhoz and the like.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Collective</th>
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<th>Place of Origin (by city/village/shtetl and province)</th>
<th>Settlement Tract No.</th>
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<td>Iaruchi village, Mogilev province</td>
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<td>Khleb i Kul’tura</td>
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<td>Novaia Zhizn’</td>
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<td>Nezhin, Chernigov province</td>
<td>Lenin mass 8</td>
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Note: Data were taken from “Spisok evreiskikh pereselencheskikh ob’edinenii v SSSR, 1925.” Evreiskii Krest’ianin 2 (1926): 223–27. Though only partial, this list is a representative sample of the complex composition in the early settlement tracts.
ter from 1925 also shows that the settlement organizations put both former urban and shtetl dwellers together in the new colonies—another potential irritant in an already sensitive social mix.

Education and cultural activities, or the lack thereof, were also nagging sources of complaint. Given the belated entry of the state into the daily rural life, religious interests temporarily gained ground over secular institutions. Colonies, mostly without Agro-Joint aid, set up small, religious primary schools (heder). By early 1928, when the construction of secular schools by Agro-Joint began to approach demand, the heder closed. Thereafter, a four-year primary school opened in almost every colony, while settlement blocs founded seven-year secondary schools, both of which taught in Yiddish. Simultaneously, Agro-Joint worked with the government during the late 1920s to establish a series of regional high schools as well as pedagogical and vocational institutions. To keep the colonists happy, Agro-Joint next initiated a program for stopgap, adult education. By most accounts, these efforts achieved only episodic successes during the 1920s. The few intellectuals among the new colonists were especially disgruntled by the physical isolation, mental stagnation, and lack of culture. In 1927, traveling libraries toured the Dzhankoi district but likewise met with little interest: “Unfortunately, the population is not particularly eager to read these books; they prefer fiction. Some of the books are in Yiddish, which are more readily read, particularly in Tract 21, where the majority of the population reads Russian poorly or not at all.”

Fortunately for the settlers, the most critical social problems proved temporary. The lack of housing initially caused great hardship—and hence dissatisfaction—among newcomers, but by the 1925–1926 settlement season Agro-Joint and other service organizations had built communal barracks. These structures served subsequent waves of settlers until the service organizations constructed proper homes. Thereafter, two families often lived together until one could afford to build an additional home. While some settlers did race to occupy new homes, the norm was a staged movement from dugouts, to barracks, and then (usually within two years of arrival) to new homes with red-tiled roofs.

While the pressures on female colonists may have exceeded those undergone by other Soviet women during the NEP, severe gender-oriented distress passed as women gradually adjusted to the transition from the shtetls to new conditions. At first, some women refused to adopt a “peasant” lifestyle. For wives of formerly affluent merchants accustomed to relative comfort in the Pale, the first years in Crimea were replete with “fleas, snakes, and lack of water.” There-
fore, Agro-Joint personnel had little doubt why many early settlers failed. A. Iu. Pikman (an agronomist in the Kherson region) concluded that “one of the decisive reasons for the flight of all these settlers is their wives.” Another Agro-Joint official wrote: “The only person who has not yet accustomed herself to the conditions of agricultural life is the Jewish wife. The well-being of the entire peasant economy depends upon her happiness. In those farms where the women have realized their role, the results of her activity have been remarkable. Incidents of flight of settlers from the tracts are mostly provoked by the dissatisfaction of wives who were unable to cope with the new working conditions.”133

This assessment propelled Agro-Joint to quick action. The agronomists feared that women would ignite general discord in the settlements if material inequities were not rectified. Consequently, “if the new settlement project was to be a success, something had to be done to ease the women’s life.” Surmising that “the way to a woman’s heart [was] through her children,” Agro-Joint opened kindergartens and provided meals for schoolchildren as quickly as possible. Acting to placate the female colonists before it was “too late,” Agro-Joint worked hard to ease these pressures by the late 1920s.

Colonization partially mitigated the destructive effect of the NEP era on the patriarchal family unit. Of first importance, relocation to isolated steppe communities deterred or delayed migration to the cities that characterized the shtetls during this period. Furthermore, the labor demands of the farms kept the entire household close to home in the first years. But with a measure of stabilization came educational, professional (and hence, physical) mobility for a large proportion of the young colonists—opportunities denied to the lishentsy and unthinkable in previous generations. Moreover, access to tractors became a chief catalyst for intergenerational leveling as young men formed the bulk of operators. This new profession, as in other Soviet rural communities, carried great responsibility, prestige, and independence. On a darker side, its high wages and perquisites inevitably ignited troubles in both Jewish and non-Jewish kolkhozes toward the end of the decade.

Professional opportunities on the national scale, and not Agro-Joint’s input, were the single greatest determinant of flight patterns for most settlers. Overall, departure was most likely among unmarried colonists, especially those with marketable urban professions. Early analysis by Agro-Joint concluded that neither social pressures nor any sort of antisemitism determined the length of stay in the colonies. Rather, one’s former profession and its relative value in the NEP economy guided decision-making. Thus, as the private markets came un-
der increasing pressure from above during the latter 1920s, former merchants and traders found greater benefits in the colonies. But when the Soviet economy geared up for the First Five-Year Plan, trained workers, artisans, and white-collar administrators gravitated outward.\footnote{139}

**DEFENSE MECHANISMS**

Political maneuvering room on the steppe existed not just for Agro-Joint, but for the settlers themselves. At first glance, familiarity with the colonists, enhanced by control over credit, gave Agro-Joint personnel unmatched local strength, even after the settlements stabilized. Invested with the authority of the government and the American sponsors, together with his other attributes, an agronomist could seem indomitable. In practice, however, just as Joseph Rosen leveraged Soviet authorities, colonists manipulated Agro-Joint. Colonists first applied pressure on sincere, but inexperienced, sector agronomists. Unsure of their power and burdened with a daunting task, isolated Agro-Joint officials succumbed to consciously exaggerated pleas or threats.\footnote{140} D. K. Dashkovskii described a hostile reception by a credit association:

Apart from the personal insults, which caused a ruckus, the association was not permitted to conduct its work calmly. [The colonist] Azernikov caused a riot threatening the prosecutor, and the RKI [Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate] with the torments of hell. During all of this, Azernikov waved his Red Army card and all his other medals, promising tomorrow to dispatch the GPU for my arrest.

Work just cannot get done in these conditions. Today a komsomol member, tomorrow a Red Army soldier, the day after tomorrow a komsomolka [female Komsomol member], soon ten generations of all the “meritorious” relatives will come to threaten us, so that work becomes inconceivable. Neither these know-nothings, nor arch-know-nothings have the right to heap insults with such aggression.

The proposal to make bricks is answered with taunts; they say that [I] should make the bricks. It’s not that Aronchikov, on the proposal to cart stones, states that he needed a bottle of vodka every day. I came to the conclusion that these people do not come here to work to establish their livelihood, but to happily exploit us, to use credits exclusively for consumption.

Dashkovskii concluded that only one option remained open to complete his mission successfully: “To execute work in the tracts, every [Agro-Joint] employee must establish authority. I cannot call on [settlement] Tract 28 because of the group of criminal hooligans. Last year on Tract 22 there was a situation like this, and when two people were removed, it quieted down. I think that the
same must be done on Tract 28 to make the community healthy. In any case, until some steps are taken I cannot continue. Therefore I request your approval [to evict them].”  

Resistance to authority embraced many devices. In the old Kherson colonies, the more conservative and skeptical veteran settlers simply ignored JCA, ORT, and Agro-Joint agronomists. Elsewhere, if colonists did not feel obliged by Agro-Joint’s energetic program, they worked less, employed hired labor, or rented out land. When agronomists confronted neglectful colonists, the latter counterattacked with accusations of hard-heartedness. Agronomists also reported the fabrication of associations, created solely to embezzle loans. In the mid-1920s, the colonists had little to fear: obstinate colonists risked (at most) condemnation by sector agronomists as “undisciplined.” Later in the decade, Komzet and Agro-Joint adjusted to these maneuvers by revoking land-use rights from settlers who did not sow or who openly resisted Agro-Joint instructions.  

Settlers also enlisted help from above. If the opportunity arose, they showered visiting dignitaries with direct appeals or catcalls against local agronomists. Occasional letters of complaint appeared in Soviet periodicals, but their efficacy was unclear. More daring colonists with scores to settle filed class-based accusations against Agro-Joint and Komzet officials. Vigilant OGPU representatives unfailingly investigated these charges. Such inquiries probably discouraged Agro-Joint and Komzet personnel from further confrontations with colonists. If all else failed, Jewish settlers (like their non-Jewish counterparts) wrote to President Mikhail Kalinin, the All-Union peasant elder. Colonists also tried to capitalize on rifts they sensed between Komzet and Agro-Joint: “We have broken completely with our old homes. The homes were sold, the land transferred, machines sold, [everything else] has been eaten or burned for wood. I have dwelled on all this because Komzet representatives are here. Therefore, this will be known in Moscow. Agro-Joint workers are also present here, so that this will be known in America.”  

Grassroots defense often manipulated more distant targets. Aware that Americans were watching their progress, settlers appealed over the heads of agronomists to the ears of unseen benefactors in New York. Abe Cahan (the preeminent American-Yiddish journalist and editor of the Forverts) concluded after a visit to the settlements that the colonists’ complaints often were designed to evoke the sympathy of American Jews. JDC dignitaries invariably encountered adoring crowds of colonists. Privately, however, settlers voiced other sentiments: “Everyone in America is a millionaire. Why can’t they help us a little

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more?” Other settlers purposely manufactured images to suit the visitors: conscious of the effect that their words had in New York, colonists deliberately expressed greater emotional attachment to the land when speaking to American visitors than to local observers.149

Alert to the permissible maneuvering room in early Soviet society, colonists exercised greater caution when dealing directly with government authorities, even before the state established thorough rural control. Whether out of gratitude or of grassroots Realpolitik, colonists did not overtly resist Komzet or local government authority (for example, selsoviets, raikoms, or the obkom).150 In much the same way, non-Jewish villagers in more central parts of the Soviet Union learned that passive resistance to Soviet rule and antireligious policies was safer, and likely to be more effective than frontal confrontation.151

Religious and Secular Life: “My Grandson Prefers the Club with the Communist Girls”

Contrary to the warnings of Orthodox rabbis, colonization did not so much accelerate as mediate the rapid changes in religious practice that engulfed Soviet Jewry during the NEP period. As the population of the former Pale dispersed to the cities of the adjacent republics and beyond, rates of observance fell precipitously, particularly among young people. Though the state’s hostility toward organized religion increased during the late 1920s, the breakup of shtetl society still remained the greatest force for assimilation before April 1929.152 Migration to the colonies, however, had a different effect. True, the daily rhythms and priorities differed fundamentally from those in the shtetl, but nothing inherent in the agricultural lifestyle meant an automatic decline in religious life. The high level of observance in the old Kherson colonies aptly demonstrated this fact before the revolution. Nonetheless, the Hasidic rabbis in Soviet cities still feared the worst: “[Colonists] want to eat kosher food but are unable to pay a shohet [ritual slaughterer]; many would send their children to a Hebrew teacher but again lack the funds. It is indescribable the great agony and tragedy of these Jews. Such colonies are apt to lose their Jewish identity. There is still time to save them from assimilation and extinction.”153 This lament matched events only among younger colonists, as intergenerational friction flared when religious needs confronted the reality of farming life. Who emerged victorious in the debate between older colonists who sought a prayer sanctuary and young men who wanted to store excess grain in the same building? Did the youth obey the colony’s elders and pray at home or travel during Passover? By 1926, farming necessities and greater social freedoms acquired on
the steppe combined to overpower tradition. As an elder colonist observed: “I am still wearing my prayer shawl and my skull cap, but my grandson prefers the club with the communist girls.” More important in the long term, once detached from the home, religious observance usually declined as career trajectories took students to other parts of the Soviet Union. This phenomenon intensified as a larger proportion of young people came of age and departed for academia during the late 1920s.

Competing interests and priorities kept religious observance alive in the Soviet periphery despite periodic antireligious campaigns in the center. This was equally true in the Jewish colonies, where no single factor sustained religious life. The availability of buildings was certainly not the determining dynamic. Whereas no synagogues existed in the Crimean settlements, two remained open in the old Kherson colony of Lvova, one in Yaffe Nahar, and one in Sde Menucha. Yet Saturday remained the day of rest in almost all colonies until 1941. Lacking formal synagogue buildings, religious men prayed communally in private homes or public rooms. The evidence of continued personal and small group religious practice in the colonies seemed a reasonable state of affairs to JDC leaders, who were disturbed by the general decline in observance and synagogue attendance throughout the Diaspora. Convinced by reports from Rosen and their own visits to Russia that the Soviet regime was not actively repressing observance, the JDC let the development of religious life in the colonies take its own course. The coming chapters will reveal to what degree Judaism survived under such conditions.

Acculturation in the colonies originated with the young people, much as it did in the neighboring villages. A secular youth culture blossomed on the steppe, apparently driven more by homegrown interests than by Soviet organs and propaganda. Yet the hopes of the state remained mostly unfulfilled: commitment to Soviet youth organizations ran deeply only among relatively narrow segments of the youth. General enrollment was high (many nominally belonged to the organizations), but few pursued advancement up the hierarchical ladder. No less important than membership in the Komsomol or Pioneers, young people from different nationalities intermingled during holiday celebrations and spearheaded new social openness on the steppe. Assimilation had its limits, however: intermarriage was rare.

Several factors encouraged a growing fascination with America in rural Crimea, hitherto considered by conventional scholarship mostly outside the range of American cultural influence. In the colonies, repatriated students, former emigrants, foreign visitors, journalists, and the occasional American set-
tlers served to disseminate news of the West and its culture: Y. Y. Zinger (a well-known Polish-Jewish author) encountered a former worker from the Ford Motor Company; Viktor Fink met a colonist who had studied biology in America; an American woman taught in the Pervomaisk kolkhoz; Louis Fischer’s wife worked in the colonies in the late 1920s; Horace Kallen met a religious American Jew who had returned to Russia hoping to preserve his children’s piety; and a key Agro-Joint agronomist traveled widely in the United States during 1930. Even the names given to farm animals carried the stamp of Westernization, though such practices were not always respectful toward the figures involved. For example, hogs on Jewish colonies from Crimea to Siberia were given names like “Curzon” and “Chamberlain.” Not only Jews absorbed new stimuli; young rural people of all backgrounds looked on Douglas Fairbanks as a demigod.160 The cumulative force of such interchange and the exposure to American literature and film contributed to the grassroots fascination with the United States that conforms to a well-documented urban phenomenon but has not heretofore been noted in rural Russia.

**Encountering the Indigenous Population:**

“Why Did These Alien People Come?”

Beyond the inescapable political conflicts with the indigenous populations ignited by Jewish colonization, little has been written to date on interethnic relations in the region.161 On his part, Joseph Rosen had hoped that Jews would fit harmoniously as equals into the Crimean ethnic mosaic because of the absence of a predominant majority group. Rosen’s vision sprang from a misreading of the peninsula’s rural demography,162 and this erroneous analysis led to his oversimplified presentation of land tenure questions to the Joint in New York. Significantly, Komzet employed the same rationale when arguing in the Kremlin for the enlargement of the settlement tracts.163 Events proved more complex. Contrary to Rosen’s projections, Crimean land did not lack claimants from among former and present renters or ambitious national groups.164 In many ways, the absence of state control and the uncertainties of the NEP only intensified the competition between minority groups in the countryside. Immigration (by Jews and, to a lesser extent, other ethnic groups) soaked up much of the free land, most often from Germans, that had been the staple of previous rental arrangements. Therefore, colonization sparked quick, grassroots reactions against the perceived injustice of governmental affirmative action on behalf of Jews.165 Germans often lashed out against their new neighbors, sure that they were conspiring with a Jewish-controlled regime in Moscow to evict
Germans from marginal and leased parcels. At the very least, embittered German colonists wondered why the government did not provide them with equipment equal to that given to the Jewish newcomers by Agro-Joint.  

Interethnic relations around the Black Sea involved far more than the question of Jewish colonization. Quarrels also erupted among other peoples: non-Jewish settlers arrived from afar; cattle were stolen; land was rented and contested. Moreover, the rate of non-Jewish attrition often surpassed that of Jewish flight. For most ethnic minorities, Jewish colonists were only a minor annoyance compared with their greater struggle against the state. When national minority leaders pondered their Jewish neighbors, it was usually in a broader context of ethnic relations and of a power calculus vis-à-vis the government.

Wherever local animosity surfaced, the reaction of the local populations to Jewish colonists conformed more to patterns of conventional violence than of antisemitism. Rural hooliganism was hardly unique to this period or to this area. While threats to “slaughter all the ‘zhidy’” accompanied some attacks, hostility to interlopers—regardless of ethnicity—was the dominant dynamic. Assaults represented a counterattack against the center in defense of existing land tenure arrangements. The indigenous population subjected the unwanted newcomers to abuse that was further aggravated by widening gaps between the general rural squalor and the emerging prosperity in the Jewish settlements. Non-Jewish neighbors stole and destroyed the colonists’ equipment, livestock, and seeds; unlawfully used their wells and pastures; encroached on the arable land; resorted to physical violence; and forced some Jewish settlers to flee. Sporadic hostility from indigenous villagers continued into 1926; thereafter, it was perpetrated mainly by migrant Ukrainian workers.

Conventional skepticism, more than antisemitism, characterized attitudes toward the colonists. Whenever local opinions were recorded, they usually voiced disbelief with regard to the Jews’ ability to farm or suspicion about their intentions: “Why did these alien people come, why did ‘some kind of American’ appear?” Quite soon, however, hostility gave way to shock that the Jews were capable of manual labor. For their part, some Jewish colonists regarded their neighbors with condescension and contempt. Indeed, most bore a traditional disdain for Russian peasants and refused to learn from their experience. Patronization of rural Tatars was perhaps even stronger. Y. Y. Zinger met Jews who thought of Tatars as kind people, who were “satisfied with what they have and do not look further. They just needed strong coffee, shish kebab, and a song.”

Jewish colonization was subject to and generated its share of hearsay in the
rumor-laden Soviet countryside. Consequently, non-Jewish peasants whispered that the Jews would soon expel them from their land or that “Russians got all the hard work, while Jews received the best land in Crimea.” Religious grievances also generated rumors that the regime allowed rabbis and Tatar mullahs to preach freely but mercilessly persecuted Russian Orthodox clergy. Villagers asked why Jews could celebrate their holidays while Russians could not.177 Such rumors were inaccurate but created a charged atmosphere nonetheless. Hence, even though the removal of Ibrahimov had ended top-down resistance to Jewish settlement during the late 1920s, a measure of popular resentment persisted.

To a degree, the combined, if uncoordinated, actions of individual settlements, Agro-Joint, and state authorities reduced indigenous resistance by 1927. While some colonies took small-scale, proactive measures as a first line of defense, most appealed to local police and selsoviet chairs for protection.178 If dissatisfied, settlers then petitioned the Crimean central government or courts. When all else failed, they wrote to central authorities in Moscow, who “intervened where local authorities closed their eyes to antisemitism.”179 Sector agronomists learned of such incidents, reported them to Agro-Joint offices, and often approached local authorities on behalf of the colonists. At least in part, stiff and swift administrative and legal action (assisted by the GPU) deterred future violent confrontations. Local authorities believed these measures necessary to protect Jewish colonists and rural order.180

All in all, it would be erroneous to assign excessive weight to the interethnic problems. While the specter of punishment by the state probably deterred some aggressive neighbors, mutual benefit pushed the majority of the surrounding villagers closer to the Jewish colonists. As the two comparatively advanced farming communities, Germans and Jews stood to gain most from each other. Good relations began with humanitarian gestures.181 Jewish newcomers needed help beyond that which Agro-Joint agronomists could provide once or twice a week. Barring the arrival of experienced new members, they needed the advice of wiser German, Tatar, or Russian peasants. Individual neighbors pragmatically gauged the situation; more often than not they accepted the Jewish colonists, despite their grievances. For all the tensions, relations between Jews and local Tatars were generally the most positive. Before 1924, Tatars from the northern plains (the area of Jewish colonization) had rarely encountered urban, ethnic European Jews.182 Such unfamiliarity meant that there was little prejudice to impede fraternity; cordiality and commercial ties quickly developed, with violence remaining relatively rare.183
The efforts of Agro-Joint had multiple, positive effects on interethnic relations. At the most basic level, the organization warmed the local environment by the distribution of modern equipment unavailable elsewhere.\textsuperscript{184} It multiplied the goodwill through conscious moves to ease tensions between colonists and neighbors. The international dimension of Agro-Joint mattered little to local peasants. As with any people hovering around subsistence, their sentiments hinged on what was to be won or lost at home.\textsuperscript{185} Though they touched relatively few indigenous villagers on a personal level, Agro-Joint projects deeply affected specific cases.\textsuperscript{186} Direct assistance commenced before the formal activity of Agro-Joint began in 1924, including famine relief, the import of tractors, and the admission of non-Jewish children to schools built by the Joint.\textsuperscript{187} The organization and individual colonists employed some non-Jewish laborers, mostly to compensate for labor deficits or gaps in knowledge.\textsuperscript{188} This proved a mixed blessing, however; by the late 1920s, machines started to displace these workers, thereby putting new stress on interethnic relations. Indirect aid fostered other forms of interaction.\textsuperscript{189} Thus, foreign economic support—augmented by the deterrent effect of Soviet legal muscle—generally encouraged local harmony.

**CONCLUSION**

When the Soviet regime pondered the long-term meaning of this project, it thought that agrarianization might solve part of the “Jewish question” and also score important public relations points for the Bolsheviks in America. More immediately, however, the state exploited Jewish colonization as a tool in its ongoing tug-of-war with local leaders in Crimea and Ukraine during the 1920s. Specifically, Moscow used Jewish resettlement to help atomize the territory of these worrisome republics and to decapitate the authentic local leadership in Crimea, thereby reducing the political risks of korenizatsiia for the state. But why did Agro-Joint survive after the liquidation of Hehalutz and the Tatar communists? Its economic and administrative value was surely significant. But more important for the state, Agro-Joint would eventually leave, whereas Tatar communists and domestic Zionism represented long-term threats to the state’s legitimacy. Given the political trade-offs it made throughout the decade in order to control the periphery, this partnership with Rosen’s organization surely looked attractive to the regime.

For the moment, the lack of central power in the periphery allowed both Agro-Joint and its settlers to exercise considerable freedom. The incapacity of
the state also gave the colonization project as a whole an importance beyond its real proportions. In the coming years, however, the status of Agro-Joint and the quality of life for the settlers would not follow the same trajectory.

Thanks in great part to the efforts of Rosen’s staff, remarkable things had been achieved in the Jewish colonies during the 1920s. Contrary to contemporary norms, the colonists had availed themselves of cooperative organizations at far greater rates than their neighbors. Considerable evidence points to a similar trend in other episodes of Jewish colonization, but this question requires further investigation. No less surprising, grassroots relations with the indigenous populations had flowered in a way that would have pleased Soviet propagandists. Finally, a hybrid Soviet-Jewish farmer had emerged shortly after arrival on the tracts, distinct in belief and practice from the hereditary peasantry. The following chapters will track this “new” Soviet Jew.

The colonies grew within Crimea and Ukraine yet were separate from their surroundings. Unlike the mass of Soviet peasantry, they had foreign patrons and thereby achieved a higher standard of living. This fact insulated the Jewish settlements from the destructive vacillations of the NEP and also kept the colonists at a level of equity that contrasted the trends of stratification in Soviet society during these years. We will now see whether this shell protected the colonies from the coming storm.
Chapter 5 Collectivization
and Its Limits, 1929–1934

Throughout the countryside, the shadow of the Soviet steamroller grew larger during the winter of 1929–1930. According to conventional scholarship, the Jewish colonies, together with the rest of rural Russia, bent under the oppressive collectivist policies now issuing forth from Moscow. Common sense dictates that Joseph Rosen’s organization—composed of agronomists, accountants, and other communal activists—could do little to deflect the intrusion of the state into the Jewish colonies. Looking at the effect on everyday life between 1929 and 1934 as the social and economic revolution was imposed from above, we can assess how the increasingly aggressive state dealt with Agro-Joint, and how its beneficiaries accommodated collectivization, even as the “good American uncle” became less of a factor in daily life.

Unlike much of rural Russia, the Agro-Joint colonies were under constant observation by officials and visitors from Russia and abroad. Their records therefore reveal the continuity and change that were present in the process of total collectivization, as well as the rural developments made possible by having the protective
shield of a foreign organization during a period of expanding central power. Archival documents concerning Agro-Joint testify to major fissures between the plan and the reality as the state tried to conquer the village. These gaps reveal the clearest picture of rural life at the time, inside and—arguably—outside of the Jewish colonies.

THE LITTLE “GREAT TURN” IN CRIMEA

Toward the close of the 1920s, the Soviets knew that the NEP had failed; just as the state found itself unable to manage the village, workplace, or family, it could not feed the cities or finance industrialization. In the cities, peasant migration had increased unemployment and created new antagonisms. Moreover, religious interests still seemed to control the Soviet village. To correct these ills, Stalin and his supporters concluded that profound change was necessary. But to achieve the desired results, they had to act in ways unthinkable under the NEP. Everyone in or near the Kremlin concurred that industrialization was the key to modernization: they disagreed only over the pace.

The new formula for modernization departed from anything Russia had experienced. If the tsars had financed rapid modernization by massive grain exports and foreign investment, Stalin’s ideological predisposition and diplomatic isolation precluded these options. Once the Bolsheviks enacted an extraordinary modernization program (the First Five-Year Plan, in 1927), conflict with the peasants—whom the Bolsheviks had always seen as backward farmers reluctant to market their produce—was imminent. The first hard-line policies instituted in 1927–1928 antagonized the peasantry and did not result in consistently greater flows of grain. Into this volatile mix came a war scare with England. Whether manufactured by the Kremlin or the consequence of a real crisis, it deepened a preexisting siege mentality in Moscow and reinforced Stalin’s argument that the country must rapidly reach self-sufficiency.

Encouraged by the grain supplies produced in a trial collectivization program in the Lower Volga during the summer of 1929, Stalin announced the “Great Turn” (velikii perelom). Peasants throughout the Soviet Union felt the Great Turn by way of total collectivization—the paramount event of the era—which began in January 1930, propelled by twenty-five thousand urban factory workers and Red Army soldiers (the 25,000ers) sent by the regime to the countryside to force peasants into collective farms (kolkhozes). Cleansing the villages of wealthy peasants—broadly termed “dekulakization”—was deemed in-
Integral to the creation of a productivized, compliant agricultural sector. Regional authorities and the OGPU joined dekulakization efforts, resulting in the exile, arrest, or punishment of 337,563 kulak households in 1930 alone. The pace of collectivization bore little resemblance to the goals set by the party. The collectivizers sent by the Kremlin, mostly ignorant of the countryside and the party’s original intent, resorted to violence more often than not in the face of peasant defiance. In the process, these men and women surpassed the planned rates of collectivization severalfold, Crimea included.

Total collectivization changed the countryside forever. It removed the most successful peasants, shattered the fabric of the traditional Russian village, decimated the rural economy, and by most accounts, triggered a horrific famine and typhus epidemic during 1932–1933. Fear of starvation sparked an unprecedented flight of peasants toward the cities and the nation’s new industrial centers. In Crimea, one quarter of the farming population left their villages during the 1930s. Collectivization also brought the village and state into open conflict. Faced with imminent peasant revolt and the failure to sow in the spring, in March 1930 Stalin temporarily rescinded forcible collectivization, after which more than half of the peasants left the kolkhozes. How did the regime survive this catastrophe? In part, policies enacted during the Great Turn often accommodated national sensitivities and thereby avoided some unnecessary conflicts. In addition, an outstanding nationwide harvest in 1931 guaranteed higher spirits among the entire peasantry, the Jewish colonists included. This windfall gave Moscow a critical interval for recovery and consolidation before the ruinous harvests of 1932–1934.

Collectivization seemingly delivered the village to Soviet control by dismantling the traditional source of rural political power—the mir (the village government or commune). Henceforth, peasant resistance became an individual act designed to avoid, not confront, the state. These new Soviet peasants kept their families fed through the provision of cash (called workday payments or trudodnia) and farm produce for their labor on the kolkhoz, petty theft, and whatever could be sold from the small household plot. Using a mix of aggressive policy and conciliation, the state arrived at a modicum of understanding with the peasantry by the mid-1930s.

Defining wider circles of potential “class enemies” was a central theme of the Great Turn. Eventually, the regime identified adversaries among foreign capitalists, bourgeois specialists working for the government, the established intelligentsia, and even Stalin’s closest comrades. Most important for Jewish colo-
nization, Aleksei Rykov’s defense of the noncommunist specialists in 1929 made him a prime target for Stalin’s suspicion. His downfall in 1930 weakened Joseph Rosen’s political support network that had buoyed Agro-Joint during the 1920s. In place of professional specialists, the Great Turn stocked a new Soviet bureaucracy with political, not economic, men, who were far less prone to appreciate the value of Agro-Joint. ¹⁴

Some signs of continuity persisted despite these momentous events. Undoubtedly, political conditions had clearly changed following the removal of Veli Ibrahimov from the Crimean government. His arrest, while he was still in office, and subsequent death sentence surely signaled to other leaders of the national republics that the permissible range of action had shrunk. But cultural korenizatsiia remained stable until the late 1930s even if the term was no longer used after 1933. In effect, once Moscow neutralized troublesome authentic nationalists in Crimea, it had little time or interest in discussing the finer points of cultural korenizatsiia and mostly ignored it until 1937. In the Ukraine, Russification of part of the republic’s leadership followed total collectivization in the early 1930s; in the process, Moscow ousted or otherwise precipitated the end of bona fide, old Bolshevik leaders of Ukraine such as Mykola Skrypnik. Yet, as in Crimea, the Russification of the republican government in Kiev evidently did not immediately duplicate itself in the countryside. Even after the Soviet regime replaced local leaders, neither the Kremlin nor these new plenipotentiaries could fully control the hinterland in the early 1930s. As they discovered, many rural administrations were unreliable and disinclined to combat massive peasant evasion of orders from the center. Even in Soviet industries closer to Moscow, systematic central control was by no means assured. ¹⁵

In Crimea, the removal of the Tatar communist leadership in 1927–1928 had remedied the center-periphery confrontation between Simferopol and Moscow but had also inadvertently created a replica at the lower levels of local politics. Thus, the new Russified leadership of the Crimean Oblast conformed entirely to directives from Moscow, and the peninsula was among the nation’s leaders in the proportional rates of dekulakization and collectivization. Concerning colonization, it questioned only the pace and organizational responsibilities of resettlement. The raikom authorities, however, began to bridle against orders from above that affected their constituencies. The Crimean Obkom tried to restore discipline at the district level, including the liberal use of the OGPU, but the results of these moves were not always clear. ¹⁶ This localized version of the center-periphery conflict helped to preserve Agro-Joint’s
political position as it switched alliances between national, oblast, and raikom authorities to match specific needs.

**The Political Effect on the Colonies**

Previous attempts by the regime to establish rural order had achieved mixed results. As David Shearer has found, the regular police force was understaffed and underfunded until at least the mid-1930s. Soviet penetration was no greater in the colonies. As for the selsoviets—the primary instrument of central control over the countryside—they may have given settlers another, more pliant power structure to manipulate. Because the regime imposed production obligations on collectives (and not individuals) after 1929, selsoviets prioritized the retention of members. Individuals could now pressure the selsoviet simply by the threat of flight. Furthermore, because lone colonies tended to neglect the establishment or maintenance of cultural institutions, for lack of resources or interest, the selsoviets provided a safe outlet for the settlers’ previously unmet demands on these issues.

The infiltration of Soviet authority into Jewish settlements did not follow the usual paths. A critical difference was that Komzet, and not the 25,000ers, acted as the collectivizing agent in the winter of 1929–1930. Unlike the latter, Komzet members were a permanent, if often ineffectual, feature of the rural landscape; they did not descend seasonally upon the colonies during sowing and harvesting, nor did they advance to chairmanship of the kolkhozes—the name now applied to the colonies. In another clear distinction from the 25,000ers, Komzet representatives used almost no brute force to convert these cooperative colonies to collectivized kolkhozes. Instead, they applied monetary penalties to push colonists into the new framework. Even where the 25,000ers appeared in the Jewish kolkhozes, they did not meet party expectations; in other cases, knowledgeable colonists eclipsed their authority. Only five of the eighty-seven 25,000ers sent to the Evpatoria district were Jews, further restricting their potential influence in the colonies. Nor did total collectivization improve levels of active party participation in most Jewish colonies.

If the data suggest that most lay colonists remained impervious to Soviet indoctrination, a contradictory trend emerged among a narrower group of settlers: Jews were filling many local party and government posts. This was, in effect, a prime ingredient of the Jewish compact settlement blocs. Jewish colonists willingly undertook the full range of rural positions and came to dominate the ethnic, government, and party landscape as kolkhoz and selsoviet
chairs, raikom officials, Komzet administrators, Komsomol leaders, and local heads of the Peoples’ Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD).  

There appears to be a correlation between liquidation of the Evsektsiia in 1930 and the Judaization of local positions. Before then, popular alienation from Evsektsiia had probably estranged Jews from the regime. Thus, once the Evsektsiia had disappeared, local Jews felt less deterred from entering government or party service. The liquidation of the Evsektsiia also freed a cadre of relatively qualified and ambitious Jewish activists for service in the settlement blocs. Assimilationists in Moscow may have thought that liquidation of the Evsektsiia would atomize Soviet Jewry; in Crimea, the opposite occurred. A corps of qualified Jews helped forge and lead a public conscious of its identity in these de facto compact settlement blocs.

If during the NEP, the Jewish compact settlement blocs coexisted with similar German or Tatar entities, dekulakization and purges decimated the latter while the Jewish blocs survived intact. This was not a random development, nor can it be attributed to the existence of titular autonomous districts. The strength of the settlement blocs grew from the fact that they had been established by newcomers, that so many openings had become available in the local party and state organs, and that Agro-Joint had already trained a Jewish professional/administrative cadre. Perhaps most important, although colonists may not have identified with the Soviet regime, they—unlike many of their neighbors—made no overt attempts to resist collectivization. This relatively quiescent environment allowed the compact Jewish blocs to grow outward, gain internal stability, and thereby nurture cultural autonomy despite the government’s desire to reintegrate national groups during the 1930s. With the aid of the Crimean land reform in 1929, which consolidated Jewish settlement regions even further, one could travel dozens of miles inside blocs of Jewish colonies that did not necessarily conform to the borders of the national districts.

SURROGACY IN DECLINE

The state and Agro-Joint appeared to be headed on a collision course at the end of the 1920s: the former planned the reconquest of the countryside whereas the latter’s local influence was at its peak. At least for the moment, Joseph Rosen still had a range of quasi-governmental measures that he could employ in relations with regional and national authorities. Confronted with hostile behavior from the state, Agro-Joint replied by withholding funds and resources. The organization’s power was such as to allow it to participate as a legitimate (if not
full) partner in the local government debate over the preferred form of official
collectivization and to haggle over the distribution of agronomists. It could
even openly criticize the state’s inadequacies.26

As before 1929, Agro-Joint’s status still hinged on its ability to ensure order
and provide reliable rural data. Because the government had banned any
method for an objective measurement of the popular mood, the information
Agro-Joint provided on conditions in Crimea and southern Ukraine was par-
ticularly valuable during the 1930s. As for Komzet, it satisfied itself with spo-
radic supervisory functions and reports to Simferopol and Moscow that were,
in fact, generated mostly from data accumulated by Agro-Joint. Indeed, the
obkom complained that police and party reports from northern Crimea added
nothing significant beyond what it had already learned from Agro-Joint cum
Komzet. Even after total collectivization, the party and state consulted openly
with Agro-Joint on work practices in the colonies and the professional contours
of a fundamental component of the kolkhoz system, the Machine Tractor Sta-
tions (MTS).27

Because the Great Turn did not immediately stabilize the Crimean coun-
side, Moscow and Simferopol treated Agro-Joint and other Western donors cir-
cumspectly. Whatever the antibourgeois rhetoric raging across the country, the
state needed rural calm. It therefore shut down attacks from below against
Agro-Joint and colonization.28 This did not prevent, however, the secretary of
the Crimean Obkom from complaining to Moscow that “Komzet workers are
under the powerful influence of Agro-Joint. It is controlled and used by Agro-
Joint, not the opposite.”29 Others found fault in the excessive closeness be-
tween the personnel in the two organizations, or in the fact that Agro-Joint
continued to control the tractors and credit policy.30 Perhaps most alarming
for regional officials, some colonists regarded Agro-Joint as a real part of the lo-
cal authority and gravitated closer to the “good American uncle” during collec-
tivization.31

Agro-Joint’s local power raised questions not just in Moscow, but also among
the Sovietized regional authorities. Concern in the obkom with regard to the
local standing of Agro-Joint and to its clout in Moscow translated into class-
based accusations against the organization, a half-hearted witch hunt for class
enemies within Komzet and Ozet, and a stillborn purge among the colonists.32
As acidic as they were, however, these criticisms did not overpower the general
concern for the well-being of the colonies as model production units.33 If the
Soviet regime tempered its growing suspicion of Agro-Joint with a recognition
of its political and economic value, the Crimean Obkom—followed by the
raikoms—increasingly balanced condemnation of the philanthropy with a willingness to adopt colonization as a mission, not just an obligation.

Although it accepted Rosen’s organization as a necessary evil, the Soviet government did attempt to undercut Rosen’s political leverage starting in the winter of 1929–1930. The Kremlin apparently mobilized covert forces against the main offices of Agro-Joint (predictably via the OGPU). At the local level, the Crimean Obkom and raikoms attempted to replace rural officials who had been “tainted” by Agro-Joint influence. Concurrently, they also appealed to the Central Executive Committee of the party for greater activism from Komzet. These measures (which probably led to shakeups of Komzet personnel), together with the transfer of equipment to MTS, did not remedy the situation. Obkoms still could not obtain reliable information on the colonies, and MTS service failed to have the desired effect. Even at mid-decade, Agro-Joint still overshadowed Komzet and regional officials, who often seemed incapable of any productive work. The latter intervened aggressively only in the wake of settlers’ appeals or in response to spasmodic pressure from above. Thus, while collectivization yielded gradual political penetration, it certainly did not establish control over daily routines in the colonies, perhaps not in rural Crimea as a whole.

PRESSURE FROM MOSCOW AND NEW YORK

The political status of Agro-Joint and its staff underwent subtle changes for the worse in the early 1930s. At the top, Rosen’s direct access to high offices in government was closed off by the removal of his contacts among the noncommunist specialists and among those party members associated with the Right Opposition—most notably, Aleksei Rykov. This proved detrimental but not catastrophic in the short term because Rosen still had access to the regional authorities, who now played a larger role in colonization. In the longer term, however, the disappearance of its patrons in the highest echelons of Soviet power surely abbreviated the official welcome extended to Rosen’s organization.

Collectivization necessitated only minor compromises on the part of the Joint. Like much of the rest of the world, JDC leaders at first could not grasp the totality of the change. Although concerned over what they learned, the JDC directors felt both contractually and morally obligated to continue. They also took heart from the difference in the behavior of the state toward the Jewish colonists compared with that shown the indigenous peasants. Nevertheless, if the greatest pressures on Agro-Joint personnel during the NEP period
had come from the colonists, lower authorities at the national and local levels began to pressure the agronomists after 1929–1930.41 Agro-Joint and its personnel were also easy targets for antibourgeois propaganda; although the level of rhetoric could certainly have been more intense, it did not help to bolster the standing of the organization or its staff. As a result of these developments, the Great Turn complicated public relations efforts in the United States: leaders of the JDC were hard-pressed to explain continued support for colonization in the face of the negative reports in the Western press about collectivization.42 The seeming magnanimity on the part of the Soviet government further deepened their moral dilemma.

Whatever the overall tenor of the Great Turn issuing forth from Moscow, the state never wavered from its financial obligations to the Joint. On the contrary, the purchasing power of JDC funds remained extraordinarily high in the USSR. Not only that, the regime offered an additional 750,000 acres of prime farmland in Crimea for Jewish colonization in the midst of the collectivization campaign. Most promising of all, Soviet industry heartily absorbed trainees from Agro-Joint vocational schools into the national workforce.43 The JDC therefore concluded that it would be doing the greatest service to Soviet Jewry by remaining engaged in the project. On a less encouraging note, when the regime canceled most of the peasants’ private debts to the state in 1931, Agro-Joint found itself in an ethical and financial quagmire. Then in 1934, when the government wrote off all debts incurred by all kolkhozes, it also suspended the Jewish kolkhozes’ loan payments to the ASJFSR.44 As a result, subscribers of the Society suddenly found themselves with little hope of recovering their investments. Within a short time, this factor pushed the Joint toward a renegotiation of its contract (of 1929) with the Soviet government.

Debate over collectivization never entirely abated in New York, but by mid-1930 the American financial crisis eclipsed all other concerns. Within months of the stock market crash of October 1929, serious concern arose over the liquidity of the principal investors in the ASJFSR. Agro-Joint’s dilemma was twofold: some members of this exclusive group warned of impending default, while the worsening economic conditions in America cast doubt on the effectiveness of returning to mass fund-raising tactics. The primary casualties of the crisis were projects that required a high level of cash flow: industrial training, tractor teams, and new construction.45

Hence it was New York, not the Kremlin, that was more inclined to extract Agro-Joint from Soviet Russia. The Paris-based JCA also struggled for several months with the issue. In quite remarkable fashion for a conservative philan-
The JCA lauded the positive effects of collectivization on the colonists (for example, tightened work discipline, improved care for equipment and livestock, and less uncontrolled flight). Nonetheless, collectivization proved too great a political burden. The JCA ceased active colonization work in early 1930. Despondence in the JDC grew during 1930–1932 as several subscribers to the ASJFSR requested release from their obligations. Throughout 1931, some of the central figures in the Joint explored rapid exit strategies from work in the Soviet Union while others preferred only to scale down Agro-Joint activity. Sometime during that year, they agreed to forego additional obligations after 1934 (the expiration date of the 1929 agreement) and to cease cash transfers. The death of the primary subscriber (Julius Rosenwald) to the Society in early 1932 extinguished the last glimmer of optimism in New York.

Both the Agro-Joint directors in America and Joseph Rosen had always envisioned their work as temporary; in late 1926 the JDC had thought that its direct settlement role would end within two years. The only question was timing. Rosen, who believed that the organization should fulfill all its obligations to the state and settlers from the original 1929 ASJFSR agreement, called for active engagement until 1936. According to his vision, the functions of Agro-Joint thereafter would shift to state agencies. Given the American financial collapse, however, New York sought an earlier exit. Seen in this light, even if the atmosphere later in the decade surrounding Agro-Joint’s departure was unpleasant, the result matched the JDC’s plan.

This change in the JDC’s calculations also altered its relations with the Soviets. Joseph Rosen spent almost two years persuading Komzet to renegotiate the terms of the 1929 agreement (specifically, the cessation of all future cash payments), but Komzet refused until late 1932. At both national and local levels, the Soviets watched the situation intently. The Joint’s requests led to a reassessment of Agro-Joint’s utility. Local Komzet leaders sensed the growing vulnerability of Rosen’s organization and believed the moment ripe to push it out of farm operations, particularly tractor work and cotton plantations. The first concrete change came only in May 1934, following a Central Committee discussion about Komzet. Henceforth, the Crimean Komzet adopted a more aggressive posture toward Agro-Joint but did not (or could not) displace Rosen and his staff.

**Joseph Rosen and Soviet Agricultural Policy**

The national effect of Jewish colonization transcended the investment of the JDC and the effect on the lives of the settlers. Moshe Lewin has argued that the
regime almost completely ignored the cumulative experience of cooperative rural associations when it planned the mass collectivization. While this may be true on the national scale, the case of Jewish colonization suggests that a modification of this viewpoint might be necessary. Soviet authorities had good reason to study Agro-Joint. It was an anomaly in a country still wrestling with medieval farming practices almost untouched by the budding agro-technological revolution in the West. Could Moscow ignore or dismiss the organization that imported nearly one hundred of the one thousand tractors operating in Russia in 1924, along with the second pair of wheat combines, and marshaled more tractors in Crimea than were operating in the whole Riazan region in 1928? Rosen had adapted a complete farm system to local conditions, while other American enterprises in Russia stumbled with ill-suited equipment and techniques.

Agro-Joint was an unequaled model because machinery alone could not rescue Soviet agriculture in lieu of operators or instructors. As late as 1930, the Soviet government scrambled to coax American agriculturalists to the USSR to fulfill these functions. The Soviets could assemble the agro-technical puzzle piecemeal from different sources: tractor training from the Russian Reconstruction Farms, Inc., Ikor, the JCA, and ORT; technical training from Western experts; individual model farms created by well-intentioned American communists; or equipment from American and German manufacturers—but this was not enough. Russia needed a complete model and expertise for agricultural practices, including tractor work, irrigation, fertilizers, and the introduction of cultured seeds. Before and after total collectivization, this was available simply by looking over Agro-Joint’s shoulder, with an important fringe benefit: it cost the Soviets nothing. Expectations were high, particularly among Komzet officials who envisioned Jewish settlers as “‘missionaries of progress’ in the [Crimean] republic, demonstrating intensive cultivation, cooperative construction, and the organization of the processing and marketing of products.” The state’s failure to remedy poor nationwide agricultural performance during the 1920s and the persistent alienation between the peasants and the state agronomists made Agro-Joint even more attractive.

To understand the appeal of Agro-Joint’s “model” for the state’s collectivization campaign, one must appreciate the revolutionary character of Rosen’s tractor program. This began with a simple formula: because he and the directors of Agro-Joint reasoned that the individual colonies or households could not efficiently use machinery, they trained professional, centralized tractor teams in each compact settlement bloc. Except in a limited number of cases, Rosen con-
centrated all of the mechanized farm implements in the hands of capable crews composed of American instructors who turned operations over to teams of young colonists. These teams prepared tracts before the arrival of the new colonists and plowed, planted, cultivated, and often harvested for all of the colonies in the settlement blocs. In some cases, the colonists supplemented the mechanized work with their own horses and oxen. The tractor teams coordinated their work in advance to avoid unnecessary pressure between colonies and also sold or donated services to neighboring, non-Jewish villages. Colonists usually paid the teams with a predetermined, reasonable percentage of the harvested crops. Cash transactions occurred, but were rare.

From the outset, Soviet authorities took special interest in Agro-Joint tractor teams, even in the midst of post–civil war chaos: “All the Russian agricultural organizations [were] extremely interested. This was the first time such work was done in Russia on a large scale, with properly organized SERVICE [sic], a thing almost unknown in Russia before. Several commissions delegated by the Department of Agriculture and by other organizations to observe our tractor teams have rendered reports which were flattering indeed. We had the fullest cooperation of the Department and the Ukrainian Improved Seed Society. This work has received a good deal of attention in Russia, and the Department had a special exhibit devoted to this work at the All-Russian Exposition in Moscow.”

Official interest snowballed as word spread about the Joint’s modern equipment and collective technique. Izvestiia highlighted the tractor teams in a published discussion of mechanization in mid-1923. Six months later, a government bulletin (distributed to representatives of the Soviet republics in February 1924) made special note of Agro-Joint’s exemplary methods. Many high-ranking Soviet visitors to the colonies were astonished by what they found; Ukraine’s commissar of agriculture declared them in 1925 to be “exhibition stations” of tremendous educational significance for the region’s peasants. The stark contrast in living conditions and cooperative arrangements between the colonies and their non-Jewish neighbors similarly stunned a visitor from the All-Union Narkomzem in 1926. The development and distribution by Agro-Joint of purebred seeds also did not escape government notice. Soviet officials (particularly from the national and republican agriculture ministries) continued to make information-gathering trips to the colonies at least until the eve of total collectivization.

These visits and reports may have inspired the curious similarity between the colonies and parts of the organizational structure of the Soviet kolkhoz. Indeed, key features of the future collectivization policy existed, in embryo, in the co-
operative Jewish colonies from 1923. Only the most obvious among these was the work of tractor teams on large farming units. Throughout the 1920s, Agro-Joint agronomists and team managers consulted with Komzet officials on issues confronted later by MTS directors: contractual obligations, schedules, logistics, and even local skepticism. Judging from the archives, most Agro-Joint personnel did not regret gradual displacement of the tractor teams by MTS. For them, it was a natural transition and a convenient means to rid the colonies of their last single, inefficient tractors. As professional agronomists, they generally overlooked the wider implications of the virtual monopolization of tractor service by the state; in their opinion, large, collective service providers simply made better financial sense. In their eyes, the drive among regional authorities to supplant Agro-Joint by the MTS probably implied only a change of command, not a change of character or structure. Rosen’s tractor teams had, in essence, established a space into which the state moved. The coercive strength of the MTS in the Soviet countryside became obvious to them only later.

Colonization foreshadowed collectivization in other important ways. For example, the policy governing the size of a Soviet kolkhoz recalled the physical parameters used for colonies in the compact settlement areas. Agro-Joint and Komzet (in the precollectivization era) had computed an optimal colony at one hundred families, surrounded by several similar settlements. Thus, a typical settlement bloc contained approximately six hundred families. Such an arrangement made possible the consolidation of farm units, as well as a rational supply of credit, communal institutions, electricity, social work, and agricultural instruction. Barring the brief, abortive adventure in kolkhoz gigantomania in 1929–1930, the standard Soviet kolkhoz (chiseled from several adjoining villages) thereby mirrored the logistic framework of the Jewish settlement blocs. Furthermore, Soviet publications highlighted specific features of the Jewish colonies before 1929 as models for emulation: cooperativism, technology-driven agriculture and an openness to new ideas. Authors left little doubt about their ramifications for the surrounding peasants: “In these respects, Jewish farms resemble experimental-instructional fields.”

Collectivization narrowed the operational distances between the agricultural practices of the Soviet regime and those of Agro-Joint but widened the psychological gap between them. In an atmosphere of class warfare, no self-respecting Soviet official could express affinity for the “bourgeois” Agro-Joint, even if experience and contemporary publications spoke in its favor. For their part, employees of the JDC could never condone the force used all around them,
even if Rosen remarked to JDC leaders in New York that “technically, it is much easier for us to carry on the colonization on a collective basis.”

Thus, each side condemned the other but saw their organizational methods of farming draw closer under collectivization.

Though mostly outside the scope of this study, the pace of Agro-Joint’s industrial training programs also accelerated with Soviet priorities during the First Five-Year Plan. The new demands for industrial labor brought Agro-Joint and the Soviet regime to renew interest in the ORT-Farband—which had always made vocational training a priority—as the premier instructor of future Jewish factory workers.

In short order, the Joint and ORT buried past hostilities and together launched intensive industrial training programs for tens of thousands of Jews in the shtetls and for a smaller number in the colonies.

Although explicit references are wanting, it is legitimate to speculate about possible links between the colonies and national collectivization policy. At one level, high-ranking visitors to the colonies and Komzet officials served as upward conduits of Agro-Joint’s agricultural philosophy and practices. At another level, some of the patrons of the colonization project in Moscow frequently reported to the Politburo and the All-Union Central Committee. Even more noteworthy, they participated in key government bodies that created the kolkhoz system from 1927 to 1929.

Colonization and the Propaganda State:

“We Open Our Hearts and Thin Wallets”

Because an emboldened, hyperactivist state sought to penetrate, overpower, and mobilize society during the Great Turn, one could assume that the relatively small phenomenon of Jewish colonization would not have warranted a diversion of resources. Yet the analysis of publication rates clearly shows that the “popularization” of Jewish colonization crescendoed throughout this period. Dozens of Ozet pamphlets, published in large print runs, praised the achievements of early colonization. Tribuna’s circulation exploded at the same time. And in contrast to the pamphlets, its circulation remained quite high until it closed in 1937. Concurrently, respected Soviet-Jewish authors published a large number of short stories, travel diaries, historical fiction, and chapters devoted to the colonies in larger works on Soviet Jewry. Lastly, state agronomists or regional officials issued a limited number of local histories on colonization in the mid-1930s. Additional materials from these sources trickled out until the late 1930s.

Visual art played a lesser role in the propaganda campaign. Among the two
Soviet publications on Jewish colonization in Crimea and Southern Ukraine

This chart does not include pamphlets connected to Birobidzhan. All calculated pamphlets appeared in at least five thousand copies. Only pamphlets published by Soviet agencies were calculated. The overall totals are artificially low because the publication figures for some pamphlets could not be ascertained. Figures for pamphlets were taken from:

(1) publication data printed on the pamphlets (a normal procedure for Soviet printing houses during this period);

(2) publication data printed in the card catalogue in the Lenin Library, Moscow; and

(3) Knižnaja letopis'. Data on Tribuna were derived from the incomplete collection at Israel’s National Library, Givat Ram, Jerusalem. Complete figures would of course be somewhat higher. (Estheti Touch Animation Studio, Israel.)
hundred artists Sovnarkom dispatched in July 1930 to kolkhozes and industrial sites throughout the USSR, four went to Vojo Nova. Their paintings were displayed in Moscow in 1932 and again during February 1936 as part of the exhibit “The Jewish Autonomous Oblast [of Birobidzhan] and the Jewish National Districts [of Crimea and Southern Ukraine] in Paintings and Graphics.”

Changes in the focus of the publicity reflected important political trends in Moscow. From the late 1920s, the regime surrounded its citizens with exhortations and admonitions to mobilize public support for industrialization and collectivization. It made a parallel effort in the cause of colonization, complete with elements of socialist realism. From the early 1930s, heroic tales of Jewish colonists and machine workers appeared, with true love only for their “Caterpillars” and “John Deeres.” This newer reportage pinpointed the role of the Soviet-Jewish woman, demonized the kulak, and celebrated ethnic harmony and rural productivization. As central a figure as Vladimir Maiakovskii contributed to the exaltation of Jewish colonization in 1930: “[Where] deeds grow forth from communist words and where we open our hearts and thin wallets in the name of a life without nations—a future life without poverty and wars!”

While the reception of political propaganda is notoriously difficult to gauge, the overall tenor of the state’s message remained consistent during and after the Great Turn. The extent of the Soviet effort should not be underestimated. The regime published millions of pamphlets during an era of severe paper shortages, in a language unsuitable for easy foreign consumption (Russian), with a message of interethnic harmony not always welcomed by local populations. When moved to criticize some aspect of Jewish colonization publicly, Moscow typically used the Yiddish-language, not the Russian-language, newspapers.

Did the Great Turn decrease the center’s need for foreign organizations? If so, this should presumably have reduced the readiness of the regime to propagandize the Jewish colonization effort. The data, however, indicate otherwise and tend to reinforce an image of governmental instability into the early 1930s. Most markedly, the social and economic stresses from collectivization and the First Five-Year Plan increased rural volatility in the short term. If there was ever a time the Soviet Union needed help from abroad, it was in the immediate aftermath of the Great Turn. Therefore, official propaganda avoided needless antagonism of public opinion in the Jewish Diaspora and continued to applaud contributions to the country’s development made by the foreigners. As the Kremlin solidified rural power in the mid-1930s, however, acclaim for Agro-Joint declined sharply: “Socialism in One Country” no longer had room for foreign bourgeois philanthropies.
centered on the Jewish colonies plummeted quantitatively but acquired a new target: it juxtaposed interethnic cooperation in the settlement regions with threats from abroad.88

The intensity of the propaganda campaign for Jewish colonization in Crimea and southern Ukraine can be measured in three ways. First, it apparently compared favorably with the state’s actions on behalf of analogous (non-Jewish) episodes during the same period; unlike the drive for Jewish colonization, no significant publicity campaign seems to have accompanied colonization opportunities that were open to the general Soviet population in Siberia or elsewhere in the USSR.89 Second, even after promotional literature on Birobidzhan quantitatively eclipsed Crimea in the mid-1930s, the latter received honorable mention in most of the new pamphlets and remained central to materials designed for foreign consumption.90 Finally, in the context of socialist competition popularized during the early 1930s, the colonies became yardsticks against which non-Jewish kolkhozes could measure themselves: “For us [Jews], it is an honor to compete with the Soviet Cossacks. For you [Cossacks], the big job is not to fall behind the former Jewish shtetl dwellers, who yesterday did not even know how to hitch a horse and today are strong socialist cereal producers.”91 Propaganda about colonization had important results. The regime quickly became hostage to a campaign that positioned it firmly behind colonization as a humanitarian, iconoclastic, and expedient enterprise. Mass literature committed the Kremlin to the program’s success, while agricultural exhibitions continued to expose Jewish colonization to regional and national audiences.92 Thus, the government had to take into account its previous decisions on colonization, even if they now contradicted actions elsewhere; a reversal of the policy on colonization was possible—indeed, Stalin often did so in other fields—but it could cause loss of face at home and abroad. The scale of publicity meant that too many people knew of the original plans, to say nothing of the public relations effect abroad if the regime suddenly changed its orientation toward colonization. Once massive Agro-Joint investment became common knowledge, Komzet used this as an additional lever in Moscow, making it more difficult for the Kremlin to renege on the project.93

THE COLLECTIVIZED JEWISH COLONY

Despite Stalin’s aggressive policy and the cruelty of his local plenipotentiaries, significant latitude remained for grassroots empowerment and maneuver. Joseph Rosen’s labors had erected an additional layer of shelter for the Jewish
colonies, but it remains to be seen whether this protected them from the harshest aspects of total collectivization.

**Cooperatives to Collectives**

The process of collectivization looked different in the Jewish colonies than among the indigenous villages and necessitated fewer adjustments. For the most part, the legal framework changed in Agro-Joint settlements, but not the essential features of daily life. Whatever the mandate of the collectivizers (be they Komzet officials or 25,000ers), the coherent Jewish cooperative colony remained largely intact. The Crimean Narkomzem set a fairly simple plan for collectivization in December 1929. In accordance with national policy, the new Jewish kolkhozes of the oblast erased the boundaries between individual farms (and, at times, the boundaries between adjacent colonies), adopted a uniform administrative structure, and invested only in communal projects.

Because of manpower and other factors, the implementation stuttered from the outset. As elsewhere in the country, the initial phase of collectivization also mandated the inclusion of some Jewish colonies in multiethnic *kolkhoz-giganty* (giant kolkhozes, composed of many villages). Even during the short life span of these giganty, the kolkhoz structure had only limited effect on the administrative coherence of individual Jewish colonies. With kolkhozes administratively assembled from settlements situated up to seven kilometers apart, there was very little interaction among the components. In reality, the original colonies remained the center of daily life and work for their members before and after the imposition of total collectivization.94

In practice, the regime imposed total collectivization in the Jewish colonies less aggressively than its rhetoric suggested. Coercion to enter the kolkhozes there resembled the situation with the grain procurements of the previous two years: the pressures applied were generally financial and tax-related. Physical violence was rare in the colonies, but the incidence of coercion rose as the presence of Agro-Joint became less prominent. For example, excessive tax obligations ignited flight from the old Kherson colonies that were temporarily outside the direct supervision of Agro-Joint during the winter of 1929–1930. In Crimea, however, the local authorities backed down once faced with significant flight and rarely took action, even when certain practices or the abhorrent social composition of colonies was “uncovered.”95 All this occurred despite the superheated class tensions of the Great Turn.

The language of collectivism was not new to the Jewish colonists. Since the start of the colonies, their cooperatives had distributed wealth more equitably
than their non-Jewish counterparts, where the more affluent villagers benefited excessively from rural artels (particularly in purchasing and marketing activities) during the NEP. Before 1929, each Jewish household owned its own farm and yields, but most of the land was cultivated collectively. The Agro-Joint colonies had thus grown accustomed to communal cultivation, crop rotation, machinery use, dairy herds, and other enterprises. When total collectivization erased the boundaries between family farms, integration into the new system was much less stressful for the Jewish farmers compared with their non-Jewish neighbors. So when they confronted the MTS after 1929, the Jewish colonists would protest its prices and poor service but not the operative rationale of centralized machinery service.96

In hindsight, it appears that the family economy of the NEP survived under total collectivization. The kolkhoz did take over the field crops, but households remained responsible for the livestock and equipment needs of their private plots. Also, because consumer cooperatives existed in many pre-1929 colonies, the transition to kolkhoz consumption was not traumatic. But loan payments were still due to Agro-Joint, even though sector agronomists had ceased active debt collection in the late 1920s. Collectivization at first intensified tensions surrounding this issue; no one knew whether the kolkhoz would be legally responsible for the members’ personal loans or the debts left behind by those who fled. Still worse for the Jewish kolkhozes, new recruits arrived yearly; their contribution to debt relief would be negligible for two or three years.97 Ultimately, the state “solved” the dilemma in December 1934 by canceling all kolkhoz debts.

Unique organizational conditions and legal manipulation further softened the shock of collectivization for the colonies. Most Crimean colonies contained multiple cooperative associations that simply merged into new and totally “collectivized” kolkhozes sometime after the winter of 1929–1930. Thus, colonies collectivized in a legal sense just by assuming the form of a cooperative land association (TOZ or SOZ) or artel; many were, in fact, already listed as a TOZ or SOZ and required only a change in charter.98 Encouraged by Agro-Joint counsel, the overwhelming majority of Crimean colonies chose the TOZ or SOZ form, the more liberal of the available options. Only five of sixty-three kolkhozes established agricultural artels. The remainder created at least one land or machine association, based on preexisting farm branches. Several others added consumer and credit cooperatives.99 In some cases, small colonies ostensibly merged into a single kolkhoz. Elsewhere the legal sanction of total collectivization was employed to split kolkhozes into multiple “dwarfs.” In sum,
both preexisting cooperative forms and the manipulation of the new regulations greatly diminished the distress for the colonies.100

Just as social stratification passed from the Russian mir into the kolkhoz, it existed in the Jewish colonies before and after collectivization. Traditional shtetl tensions fueled many of the internal conflicts inside the Jewish kolkhoz just as they had in the NEP-era colony. Certain aspects of collectivization actually intensified dissatisfaction and flight by newcomers.101 Inside established colonies, new arrivals complained of exclusion from elected posts, discrimination in promotions, inequitable living costs, poor housing, and neglect or abuse by veterans.102 Whereas a semiprivate economy during the NEP allowed a partial household autonomy, in the kolkhoz, leaders wielded great control through work assignments and wages. Collectivization also influenced how households and individual members managed power relations within the kolkhozes. Newcomers were apparently attuned to the class-warfare overtones in the rhetoric of the Great Turn; their complaints against abusive veterans typically referred to the real or fictitious upper-class background of the latter.103 Finally, collectivization aggravated the internal contradictions within the communities: in accordance with the premium on advancing the bednota through collectivization, Komzet raised the proportion of poor Jewish recruits who paid little or nothing for entrance shares.104 This policy enraged veteran colonists who had financed their resettlement out of pocket.

The key to economic survival and tolerable relations in the Jewish kolkhozes was precisely that which was usually absent in the non-Jewish kolkhozes: steady access to cash, distributed with reasonable equity.105 The first guarantor of cash flow was a reenergized ORT that had established several dozen cottage industries from the early 1930s; by 1936, nearly half of the Crimean settlements operated ORT winter workshops, where members earned 400 to 1,000 rubles per season making hats, toys, and knitted and glass items.106 Other such light industries operated year-round; these marketed directly to neighbors or to wider Agro-Joint and ORT networks. From the perspective of the JDC, all the workshops carried an added benefit: they attached colonists to the soil throughout the year.107 Agro-Joint secured a second source of ready cash through the dissemination of intensive crops that the kolkhoz or individual members marketed outside the framework of the government’s procurement plan. Varied, high-profit agricultural produce (livestock, commercial vegetables, corn, grapes, sorghum, and eventually cotton) constituted the financial and nutritional backbone of the Jewish kolkhozes, without which they would have shared the fate of their neighbors. The increased revenue in most Jewish house-
holds forestalled the development of severe rural jealousies and partially eased stratification—key ingredients in the culture of denunciation and leveling associated with total collectivization and dekulakization.\(^{108}\)

Total collectivization did not immobilize the Jewish kolkhozes, even amid the state’s aggressive rhetoric. In practice, collectivization—like the NEP before it—was mostly an untried policy, adjusted over time. Moscow had few concrete plans for the collectivized kolkhoz beyond grain procurement. In this scenario, the colonists (together with Agro-Joint) had significant freedom of financial and operative action, as long as the state received the required grain on schedule. A “collectivized” Jewish colony was therefore able to make only minor adjustments to the established Agro-Joint framework. All the while, the colony could market the products from its relatively large and unique holdings in noncereal crops, fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, and light manufactured goods. Collectivization at first caused a sharp drop in income and productivity throughout the Soviet countryside. Fortunately for food producers and consumers in the Soviet Union, the private markets revived everywhere—in legal and less legal forms—in response to the acute scarcity of food in the cities and the peasant farmer’s eye for profits to be made.\(^{109}\)

Given the commercial orientation of the Jewish colonies and the marketing instincts of the colonists, the trajectory of Agro-Joint’s colonies soon separated from most non-Jewish kolkhozes. Whereas Soviet peasants returned to 1929 standards of living only on the eve of World War II, Jewish productivity rebounded during the early 1930s. Among other reasons, this was caused by the fact that the private parcel played a much smaller role in the household economy of the Jewish kolkhoz than among the non-Jewish kolkhozes. This issue will be examined further in the next chapter.

FROM BURDEN TO ASSET: CHANGING GENDER ROLES

Important social shifts resulted from the adjustments of the colonies to the Soviet system. Yet for most women, the hardships of the fluid Soviet environment left little time for debates about gender equality. Rather, Soviet women and men alike were usually preoccupied with the more existential questions of access to education and their vulnerability to arrest, confiscations, and disenfranchisement in the class-based atmosphere of early Bolshevik society.\(^{110}\) In the periphery, the party and state at first pursued radical social policy designed to weaken patriarchal society. As its campaign to liberate the women of Central Asia showed, this work often stumbled in the non-Slavic borderlands.\(^{111}\) Among Jewish colonists, the state and party shifted their sights to the mobi-
lization of female colonists during total collectivization to help correct the paltry party presence in the colonies. Henceforth, women became the targets of specific campaigns, much as was the case nationwide. The state tried to mobilize women colonists in order to advance ad hoc missions otherwise neglected by kolkhoz boards and selsoviets. During these years, the state and Agro-Joint began to consider women a potential asset, not a burden.

The effect of these efforts, however, was gradual. If in Soviet towns and cities the Women’s Sections of the communist party (Zhenotdel) promoted equal rights, education, party membership, and integration into the workforce, little of this agenda trickled down to the Jewish colonies. As the secretary of the Crimean Evsektsiia noted in the late 1920s, there was little party work among the female colonists, and the attraction to agriculture was weak. It seems that the Zhenotdel arrived late to rural Crimea for the same reasons that the Evsektsiia had made so little headway: rural party organs suffered from severe labor deficits. Women also showed fewer outward signs than men of loyalty to the Soviet regime in the early years of colonization. Indeed, like their counterparts in the non-Jewish villages, female colonists openly resisted collectivization and resented the food shortages more than men. But their accommodation with the regime slowly supplanted opposition, growing stronger as the effects of education and the potential for professional advancement penetrated the colonies.

Official policy and farm needs during the early 1930s accelerated adaptation and a degree of leveling among those women unable or unwilling to move their families back north. The regime’s pressure for full female employment coincided with the genuine need to offset labor shortages in the colonies. No less important, both the Soviet policy of collectivization and the practices of Agro-Joint made higher rural productivity a priority. Within this atmosphere, the widespread creation of daycare facilities by Agro-Joint added another element to the leveling process for women. Combined, these factors mobilized and integrated most female colonists into the kolkhoz economy by the mid-1930s.

Once propelled into the labor force, women monopolized specific productive branches in almost all of the colonies. If in non-Jewish kolkhozes women predominated in service-oriented tasks, Jewish women gravitated toward productive farm branches. Sources do not, however, clarify whether this trend was voluntary or imposed by patriarchal social structures. In other words, did women consciously construct safe harbors in certain farm domains, or did men thrust upon them undesirable jobs? Whether voluntary or not, women tended to occupy three farm subdivisions: vineyards, dairy herds, and market
gardens. The tasks involved were neither simple nor effortless. Even if considered inferior by males, these farm branches had great financial impact and had at least a partial equalizing effect for women, no matter the gender of the branch manager. The preponderance of women vineyard workers in delegations to agricultural exhibitions verified the phenomenon. In Pervomaisk (near Simferopol), female “turf” was also established in a hat factory. Agro-Joint, by the introduction of cottage industries and multifarious farm branches, thereby created—consciously or not—gender-specific territory and the tools for upward mobility.

Ambitious women took advantage of opportunities for quick advancement in the colonies, albeit to a lesser degree than men. By the early 1930s, women comprised 40 percent of the enrollment in Agro-Joint’s forty-three trade schools and professional courses. Though not a widespread phenomenon, women also filled chairmanships of kolkhozes and served as Agro-Joint agronomists and instructors, selsoviet members, and farm brigade leaders. Soviet literature marked the integration of women into productive life and leadership roles, reinforcing the picture of their monopolization of specific farm branches. Although this imagery should not be swallowed whole, the contemporary accounts do illustrate, together with other evidence, a sharp break in the colonies from the patriarchal traditions of the former Pale and a higher rate of female upward mobility than in other rural areas. Ultimately, access to higher education proved the fastest vehicle of gender equalization and general upward mobility—both for Jews and for the indigenous population—especially after total collectivization.

The liberating effect of colonization for Jewish women was substantial but not universal. True, resettlement offered ample opportunity for personal advancement for mobile, younger women or social protection within insulated farm branches for those who remained behind. Rural life did not, however, totally reverse patriarchal models; the existence of daycare facilities and communal dining rooms could not summarily erase tendencies nurtured for centuries in the shtetl. In the home, male dominance remained more the rule than the exception. A kolkhoz evicted a family whose matriarch acted unacceptably toward her husband: “Every morning [she] woke up with new gossip and flings mud on innocent people. She is a bit of a lunatic. Or very crafty. Generally, she is a blemish on the body of the kolkhoz.” Nonetheless, even if they were saddled with the double duty of household chores and fieldwork, women colonists still enjoyed outlets and support networks unavailable to their sisters and mothers in the shtetl.
Grape harvest in a Jewish kolkhoz of Crimea in the 1930s. (YIVO Institute of Jewish Research; photo courtesy of Beth Hatefutsoth, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv. File: Comp. no. 3280.)

Vineyard workers in the Peter Smidovich kolkhoz in Crimea, 1941. (Courtesy of Beth Hatefutsoth, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv. File: Comp. no. 17183.)
These things having been said, it is equally true that collective obligations, particularly workday payments, made the kolkhozes less charitable toward their weakest members after 1929–1930. This was the reckoning of rural Re- alpolitik; as long as such obligations remained, kolkhozes tried to jettison the “dead weight,” a category that included vulnerable women, “loiterers, and hangers-on.” Komzet, as a state agency, defended women’s interests, but idle males or entire households evoked much less sympathy.

Migration to the countryside did not just reshape gender relations, it also changed the cultural profile of the colonists at a rate that was probably higher than among most Jews who remained in the shtetls. Religious life in the colonies declined in an uneven and uneventful fashion before and after total collectivization, no more top-down than ground-up. Young colonists turned away from religion while still near home. Their departure to higher education in the cities only accelerated the process. Youth culture in the settlements conformed closest to the dire predictions of the rabbis, but adults still observed...
freely, albeit in the absence of formal synagogues. It is true that the Soviet law of April 1929 put heavy restrictions on religious study and observance. But conversely, young colonists rarely sought greater piety, and state agencies in the countryside did not have the personnel, training, or (so it seems) the desire to undertake the systematic repression of religion. Communists could do little more than lament, “It is not for nothing that in the kolkhoz on Saturday, many housewives still bless candles, and old men collect ten people to go sob in prayer.” The national Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Emes* angrily reported persistent observance in the Crimean kolkhozes in 1933 and 1934. If observance declined, then it probably had little connection to synagogue closures or direct repression. The evidence is inconclusive, however, concerning the role of Agro-Joint in the preservation of piety.

Although JDC leaders were aware of the repression of religious institutions in other parts of the USSR, the situation in Crimea seemed to them no worse than conditions in the West. When speaking about the kolkhozes to potential donors, JDC officials purveyed a fairly accurate picture of private observance: a religious world where *minians* (a minimum quorum of ten Jewish men necessary for congregational prayer) in the home replaced synagogues, private teachers replaced heders, rabbis congregated with older settlers but did not preach, where anyone who wished could quietly pray as well as practice the ritual customs of slaughter and circumcision. Finally, unlike elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the pious exhibited no widespread, outward fear before 1941. Judging from Brian Williams’s observations, Judaism fared better than Islam in Crimea during the 1930s.

A hybrid form of rural Judaism coalesced on the steppe to accommodate physical conditions and the official antireligious policy. Former settlers agreed that kolkhozes adjusted rituals to oblige Soviet law but remembered no direct effect from the atmosphere of secularization that accompanied collectivization elsewhere in the country. For instance, colonists removed the highly visible *chuppa* (canopy) from wedding ceremonies, but the balance of celebrations remained unchanged. Even when the regime tried to displace religious traditions with secular Soviet celebrations, Jews showed little interest. Just as many settlers declined Viktor Fink’s proposal to replace Sabbath observance with tractor work, few believed in a colonist’s proclamation that “miracles are made by science, not by some spirit.” Nevertheless, the exigencies of farm life and government pressures intruded upon the fulfillment of religious rites. Consequently, adult colonists modified observance as “the minutiae of the ritual blurred” and bent dietary laws to keep families fed. Jewish colonists were not the only Soviet
citizens making such adjustments; recent studies have found an analogous hedging of traditional practices elsewhere in the country in view of the necessities of Soviet life.135

Much like the conditions for religious observance, education and cultural institutions in the colonies were imperfect but above the rural norm. Primary literature and oral histories have usually lauded the schools, whereas state inspectors voiced serious criticism. The secretary of the Fraidorf Raikom found almost all the teachers in the Jewish schools too young, barely literate, and minimally trained. In his opinion, they were guilty of “fortune telling with hens, and converting classrooms into dance class.” As bad as these might be, however, Tatar and German schools usually looked worse.136 By the early 1930s, almost all the Jewish settlements had reading and recreation rooms, though these varied in form and content. Many kolkhozes had drama clubs, and most received visits from Yiddish theater companies—most frequently from the Jewish State Kolkhoz Theatre of Crimea—as well as periodic films.137

As another barometer of cultural life in the colonies, pressures there from above and below forged a delicate balance between the use of Yiddish and Rus-
sian during the first half of the 1930s. Yiddish was the language of instruction in primary schools, and to a lesser extent, of the administration within the colonies. Some sources suggested that it even underwent a small cultural renaissance among adult colonists. At the same time, Russian was the language for business conducted outside the colonies and for most consultations with Agro-Joint agronomists. Signs for the doubtful future of Yiddish were visible among the youth. Many schools taught in Russian long before this became mandatory in 1937; parents (particularly those from Belorussia) often demanded that instruction be conducted in the Russian language. They felt it was more serviceable for educational and professional advancement. This preference, in essence, pitted parents against the educational goals of korenizatsiia and reflected its complexities for local populations. The shortage of competent Yiddish-speaking teachers was another, more straightforward, factor in the decline of Yiddish.

By the late 1930s, an odd state of affairs existed on the steppes: most Jews wanted Russian-language instruction for their children while other nationalities desperately tried to retain their mother tongues. The state actually impeded the waning of Yiddish by requiring it as the language of instruction in primary schools until 1937. Yiddish-language newspapers sprouted in all the Jewish national districts, but oral histories suggest that few settlers in Crimea read them. If colonists read at all, they evidently preferred the more up-to-date *Krasnyi Krym* daily. Thus, the local colonists themselves, not just the Soviet regime, sealed the fate of Yiddish.

**Surviving Collectivization**

Jewish colonists reacted differently than their non-Jewish neighbors to total collectivization. Soviet peasants usually responded with passive fatalism, petty theft from the kolkhozes, and the avoidance of obligations. Whenever serious resistance arose, the state reacted with overwhelming brute force. For their part, Jewish colonists never reached an impasse that ended in violence or long-lasting economic injury. As will be shown below, the presence of a foreign philanthropy profoundly improved the position and treatment of the colonies. Also, unlike conventional peasants, the Jewish colonists were free of the traditions and emotions that tied the Russian peasants to the mir; hence, the crisis sparked by the state’s campaign against this institution was absent from the Jewish colonies. In addition, the farm structure of the Jewish colony reduced the spread of hunger that frequently resulted from forced collectivization. Effectively outside the circle of famine during the early 1930s, the colonists had
no urgent cause for rebellion. Lastly, because the Jewish colonists rarely fitted the categories used for identifying kulaks, they seldom attracted the attention of dekulakizers.143

Aside from an avoidance of frontal confrontations with the state, Jewish settlers did not respond in uniform fashion. Some considered resistance dangerous and futile; new arrivals, as the JDC believed, calculated that the foreign service organizations would rescue them in the event of food shortage. For these colonists, defiance was unnecessary. While very few colonists were accused as kulaks, the probability of resistance to collectivization grew greatly in the older (spontaneous) settlements, or among the wealthier members in the newer colonies. These colonists felt far more involved in their private farms, more empowered by their experience, and less enamored of the communalization of hard-won property. Thus, the Komzet secretary correctly warned that the absence of arson, murder, and other felonies did not mean an absence of hostility in the colonies. But real despondence registered only among some settlers in the Evpatoria region. Their labor discipline plummeted, together with their initiative to sell surpluses at kolkhoz bazaars. This fact undoubtedly was another legacy of Ozet’s clumsy supervision during the mid-1920s.144

Jewish kolkhozes, like many of their neighbors, found nonviolent techniques to circumvent the state. Entire regions avoided, delayed, or obstructed grain procurements, cash payments to the MTS, and sweeping directives from local authorities on farm operations. Colonists resorted in some cases to small-scale theft and concealment. Even if Rosen disapproved of such practices, a disproportionately high number of Jewish farmers purposely delayed the fulfillment of their grain quotas in order to obtain higher procurement prices.145 The state’s infrequent, and nonviolent, action in these cases stood in clear contrast to the fate of other rural, ethnic minorities at this time.

Dekulakization for the most part bypassed the colonies, suggesting that the basic elements of collectivization did not apply evenly. To a degree, the colonists themselves deflected part of the dekulakization drive. In a pattern common to Soviet villages during the early 1930s, Jewish colonists claimed, though with less ardor than their non-Jewish neighbors, that there were no kulaks in their settlements. In other colonies, settlers modified this tactic by claiming that they had independently liquidated (samolikvidatsiia) the bourgeois elements in the kolkhozes through education.146

Wherever dekulakization did strike, the age of colonies factored into its effect. In the older Jewish settlements in southern Ukraine, dekulakization may have reached 6 to 8 percent.147 Contemporary figures on dekulakization in the
Crimean colonies are rare and conflicting but suggest that almost no members were directly affected. The most extreme data indicated some form of action against two hundred individuals. In the absence of archival sources, however, some historiography appears to have overestimated the scope of oppression. Oral histories unanimously contradict the presumption of widespread dekulakization in the colonies but expressed awareness of the process in neighboring non-Jewish villages. The low levels of dekulakization and the relatively smooth transition from cooperativism to collectivism now raise the question of external mediation.

AGRO-JOINT: ARBITRATING COLLECTIVIZATION

Most of the tens of millions of Soviet peasants exposed to collectivization could find precious little protection from above. At first, selsoviet officials could exploit bureaucratic manipulations to ward off the worst edicts of collectivization, if they were so inclined. This gave only temporary relief, however; within months of the total collectivization drive, the regime quickly reconstituted the selsoviets with loyalists. The results of the Great Turn in the countryside forced Agro-Joint to change its role from a clear-cut settlement organization into that of an intermediary between the state and colonists. From all indications, total collectivization did not surprise Agro-Joint. It knew something of the policy beforehand from Komzet, observed its local implementation, and adjusted accordingly. It could thus act as an important buffer against the shock. By comparison, nothing prepared indigenous villagers for or shielded them from the impending blow of the 25,000ers. Furthermore, it appears that the personal influence of Agro-Joint agronomists helped forestall the self-dekulakization rampant throughout the countryside from the autumn of 1929. As noted in Chapter 4, the agronomists had already grown used to shielding the colonists from the wrath of the state. This role now gained fateful importance. From 1928 onward, the intercession of Agro-Joint assumed a more systemic character, involving much more than the protection of individual colonists. Other ethnic minorities with no visible foreign patron tended to fare far less well.

While the Moscow office sensed that Felix Warburg and other leaders of the Joint in New York were seeking an exit strategy from the Soviet Union, the Agro-Joint agronomists in the field continued their work. The diversified crops that they introduced during the 1920s stood the colonies in good stead during collectivization. The thrust of Soviet procurements was grain, the staple of the traditional Russian village. Moscow set quotas for most other agricultural
produce, but the savagery that accompanied grain collections rarely replicated in other crops. As a result, the full force of procurements was deflected because any crop other than grain left a higher proportion for internal consumption or sale.

The immediate dividend from Rosen’s program came from the late 1920s into the 1930s: his colonies benefited from having vegetables, dairy, and some meat products at a time when the indigenous kolkhozes teetered toward starvation. The introduction of sheep and poultry during the NEP inserted an additional source of cash in every colony, partially untouched by government procurements. Most important, crop diversification minimized dependence on the state’s principal rural organ and source for mechanized equipment, the MTS. Workshops established by the service organizations also served a key function, particularly after collectivization. These cottage industries produced cash, not items liable for procurement. Finally, Agro-Joint adjusted to the new technical and supply problems of collectivization much faster than did the state. The combined effect of these efforts was best felt after the poor harvest in 1934. Agro-Joint farms produced cash for supplementary food purchases while the one-dimensional, non-Jewish kolkhozes waited for government relief. Diversified agriculture thereby explains survival in the early years of collectivization, despite low workday wages—the normal measure of living standards in the nation’s kolkhozes.

Tractors and credits gave Agro-Joint the opportunity to deflect the most destructive waves let loose by collectivization. Since mechanization was a central factor in Moscow’s policy, the tractors of Agro-Joint weakened the principal argument for total collectivization of the colonies. Moreover, no matter how intensely the state desired total collectivization and rural penetration, Agro-Joint agronomists remained the preeminent agricultural authorities in the settlement blocs. As such, they partially obstructed or adapted instructions from above to fit previously established work practices. Aware that the state was reluctant to antagonize Agro-Joint, its staff used the import of tractors or credits to win over Komzet and other state bodies, even after 1929. Confidently dangling the threat of withdrawal from Russia, Agro-Joint personnel could, at times, even obstruct dekulakization with no apparent consequences.

Agro-Joint’s control over data served as another key, but indirect, ingredient of intercession. Given the state’s blindness in the countryside, Rosen’s employees could inflate their reports to Komzet on the rates of Jewish collectivization—greatly in excess of their non-Jewish neighbors—some of which existed only on paper. In turn (just as during the NEP), Komzet reported further
up the state hierarchy using the material thus supplied by Agro-Joint. OGPU investigators collected far lower figures, but this alone did not foul relations between Agro-Joint and state authorities.\textsuperscript{160}

These interventions by Agro-Joint and Komzet with state authorities had no parallel and were the greatest asset for the Jewish colonists. Throughout the USSR, the collectivized peasants had no intermediary; the kolkhoz chair, at best, partially arbitrated relations with the state. In addition to reducing procurement quotas once the first wave of collectivization had passed, appeals from Agro-Joint (and to an extent, from Komzet) also jolted state supervisory, investigative, and judicial bodies into action to repair gross injustices.\textsuperscript{161} Similar requests from simple \textit{kolkhozniki} (kolkhoz members) were much less likely to receive serious consideration from the authorities.

Even after the mass spectacle of the Shakhty Trials of foreign and other “saboteurs” in mid-1928, the Soviets avoided violent coercion of Jewish colonists under the eyes of the Western philanthropies.\textsuperscript{162} The higher rates of collectivization imposed on the Jewish colonies of southern Ukraine point to Agro-Joint’s protective quality; it had withdrawn the tractor teams from Ukraine in late 1928, the bulk of its personnel following in 1930.\textsuperscript{163} This had removed the moral and political backbone for resistance in the Ukrainian colonies and exposed them to abusive collectivizers.\textsuperscript{164} It was no accident, therefore, that in the regions where Agro-Joint, JCA, and ORT remained engaged, “the activity of foreign societies, though not able to seriously shake the general policy of the Soviet, played nevertheless a moderating role . . . and was for Russian Judaism, a source of alleviation.”\textsuperscript{165} In this capacity Agro-Joint served as both a political shield and a provider of essential services.\textsuperscript{166}

At times by intent, at times by incompetence, Komzet also acted as a barrier between the colonists and the state. On one level, it magnified the colonists’ complaints on various issues when it transmitted reports to Moscow. At another level, Komzet seemed to the Crimean Obkom unwilling or unable to ensure the fulfillment of procurement quotas from the Jewish colonies. Nor did Komzet appear sufficiently rigorous in its pursuit of Jewish kulaks or the displacement of Agro-Joint. This perceived lethargy frustrated the obkom, which had few remaining options for achieving the general policy goals in the Jewish colonies. All was not benign ineptitude at Komzet, however; as it had done in earlier years together with Agro-Joint, it used selective dekulakization to rid colonies of particularly problematic settlers before the state mandated massive action.\textsuperscript{167} Somewhat more surprisingly for a state agency, though of unclear effect, local Komzet officials led the chorus that “there are no kulaks here” when
confronted by obkom authorities. Overall, local Komzet officials pursued more moderate goals of total collectivization than those promoted by the secretary of Komzet (Merezhin) in Moscow.168

The Jewish Kolkhoz in Crimea

Any measure of success in the colonies demanded a degree of demographic stability uncommon in the early Soviet Union. Yet from the start of colonization, the high rates of mechanization could never fully compensate for shortages of labor.169 Added to that, the need for skilled workers rose as the productivity of the settlements increased. Recruitment carried complications every year and, in most cases, could barely replenish the ranks.170 Stemming flight was thus of the utmost importance. Professional and educational opportunities in the city juxtaposed with the quality of life in the colonies to govern the ebb and flow of flight. This formula had far more effect on the decisions to leave than procurement levels or the act of collectivization. As a case in point, the highest yearly flight occurred in 1934—a year of a failed harvest, not extreme political repression. Under these conditions, Agro-Joint saw the absorption of non-Jews as an expedient, not a crisis.171

The rapid upward mobility of Soviet youth influenced the long-term development of the colonies in ways that corresponded to developments elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Throughout the country, a new elite was rising from Soviet villages and workers’ neighborhoods.172 The first exodus of high school graduates from the colonies in the early 1930s, perhaps up to 50 percent, sharpened the existing labor crisis almost everywhere in the colonies of Crimea and southern Ukraine. In parallel, the higher productive goals set under the collectivization regime left no choice to the kolkhozes other than the absorption of new members, of whatever stripe.173 Motivated young colonists who chose to remain advanced quickly up the chain of command. Added to that, membership in the communist party brought meteoric promotions. This resulted in a crop of ambitious, but mostly unqualified, regional leaders and kolkhoz chairs in their twenties or thirties.174

A confluence of parental ambition with Soviet economic priorities encouraged youth flight during the late 1920s. Just as the colonies reached economic stability, the First Five-Year Plan generated a demand and the facilities for higher education. Thus, the exigencies of the Great Turn immediately stimulated the appetites for education whetted by settler-parents in their children. Contemporary literature reflected these trends.175 Just like their non-Jewish counterparts, most young colonists dreamed of work in the city. Those who ex-
Most of the Jews listed for Birobidzhan actually lived in the cities, not in the kolkhozes. Similar problems confront the data on Belorussia. (Estheti Touch Animation Studio, Israel.) Sources: Compiled from TsGAK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 44 (Rabinovich and Klempert’s report, December 12, 1938); TsGAK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 22 (Klempert’s observations, April 22, 1939); AJA, Brown Papers, MS Coll 18, Box 1/8 (Birobidzhan); Bregman, “Puti evreiskim koloniiam,” 202; Gol’d, *Evrei-zemledel’tsy v Krymu*, 5, 6; Kantor, *Evreiskoie zemleustroenie na Ukrainie*, 5, 13, 25–26; L. G. Zinger, *Evreiskoe naselenie v SSSR*, 94; L. G. Zinger, *Das Baneite falk*, 89; Levavi, *Haklaim yehudim baravot Krim*, Tables 27, 30; Levavi, Birobidzhan, 107; Munitz, *Ha-napot ha-leumiot*, 48; Shmeruk, “Ha-kibutz ha-yehudi,” 81; Smitlovsky, “Jewish Farmers in Belarus,” 63, 66, 70; and Weinberg, *Stalin’s Forgotten Zion*, 43, 69.
celled at the regional ten-year high schools left in earnest pursuit of education, but also because local youth culture equated staying on the kolkhoz with failure. Others went simply because it was fashionable. Graduates rarely returned; other than as instructors in primary schools, the colonies had few, if any, Russian-language professions. Young people considered even Agro-Joint employment as a professional dead end. Those who completed only the program in the seven-year schools tended to remain on the kolkhoz.¹⁷⁶

Thus, the state’s most destructive effect on the colonies had sprouted from the best of intentions. According to conventional historiography, massive youth flight could indicate the failure of the entire colonization enterprise.¹⁷⁷ On its surface, it indeed looked debilitating. For settler-parents, however, it fulfilled an aspiration; most had risked colonization precisely to provide their children with access to higher education or the opportunity to enter state employment denied to lishentsy. Because Crimea offered little high-caliber education other than agronomy, an emphasis on university-level studies forced parents to send children afar. From all indications, there was never a demand from parents, nor from kolkhoz leadership, that matriculated students return home. Kolkhoz boards only required that students work on the farms during school vacations, but results varied.¹⁷⁸

Despite the pressures to bring skilled laborers, the colonies’ ethnic homogeneity lasted longer than assumed by existing scholarship. Lacking archival materials or oral histories, previous authors overestimated “internationalization” in the Jewish colonies by extrapolating from Chone Shmeruk’s findings in Belorussia or individual reports from Ukraine.¹⁷⁹ Internationalization was not a factor in Crimea, although there were certainly some non-Jews in Jewish kolkhozes before 1941. It is unclear whether they were full members or merely resident workers in the colonies, but in any case, the relations were quite warm. Unlike the top-down internationalization of the Belorussian kolkhozes during total collectivization documented by Shmeruk, colonists in Crimea welcomed low-intensity integration to relieve labor shortages.¹⁸⁰ Neither Komzet nor any other state agency ever mandated the absorption of non-Jewish workers. In sum, Jewish colonies in Crimea, while always a minority at the district level (including the ostensibly Jewish districts), retained their internal demographic integrity before and after collectivization. Even in the short-lived, multiethnic giganty, the colonies sustained their ethnic coherence. In those districts of Ukraine under Agro-Joint supervision, internationalization stayed below 20 percent before 1936.¹⁸¹

The ethnic “Jewishness” of the colonies did not deter their integration into
the social fabric of rural Crimea during the 1930s, despite residual land tenure conflicts with their indigenous neighbors. By this time, attacks against Agro-Joint or the colonists were clearly criminal or hooliganistic, not nationalist or antisemitic. For example, cases of theft from Agro-Joint warehouses reflected the nationwide economic crisis ignited by collectivization. Thankfully for Jewish colonists, the root causes of material jealousy on the part of their neighbors were dissipated with the spread of modernity over the peninsula from mid-decade. For example, water disputes eased greatly from the late 1920s once Agro-Joint drilled artesian wells for the colonies and the neighboring villages. Furthermore, the timely reallocation of vacant Komzet lands to indigenous kolkhozes in 1932 defused the friction caused by the supplemental trimming of German lands adjacent to Jewish colonies during the Crimean land reform in late 1929.182

Halting acceptance, not limitless affection, characterized interethnic relations in Crimea during the first half of the 1930s. In almost all of the Russian-language pamphlets and books in support of Jewish colonization, particularly those published by Ozet, a common formula described the genesis of relations with the neighboring peasants: as depicted there, the surrounding villages had invariably come to respect and depend on the Jewish colonists, particularly their tractors. Other sources spoke with more moderation but basically confirmed this message. From what can be seen in the existing literature, these relatively tranquil conditions compared quite favorably with the interethnic tensions elsewhere in the Soviet Union, where state-sponsored affirmative action programs of korenizatsiia often exacerbated tensions among indigenous national groups.183

CONCLUSION

In most ways, the kolkhoz system was a legal shell superimposed onto the original Jewish colonies. If we put aside the superficial changes, the Jewish kolkhozes remained geared toward efficiency-oriented productivity while Soviet policy impelled their non-Jewish neighbors to focus on quantity-oriented production. Because the radical political and economic agendas imposed from the top during the Great Turn had little actual effect on them, the Jewish colonies in Crimea reinforce the picture of limited state power in the countryside from 1929 until at least 1934. This erratic regime may or may not have learned about collectivism from the colonies. We can say with certainty, how-
ever, that the state remained committed to Jewish colonization, if not always to Agro-Joint.

Against most odds, the Jewish colonies survived collectivization intact. They preserved their demographic stability and evidently made it safer than elsewhere in the USSR to practice the Jewish religion for those who wished to do so. If Western eyes found conditions austere in the Jewish kolkhozes of Crimea and southern Ukraine, things were still better than in the rest of rural Russia, the shtetl, or the cities. They, in fact, fed and absorbed others during the 1932–1933 famine while indigenous villages emptied.184

At the end of the first decade of organized colonization, Joseph Rosen had much to consider. As he had predicted back in 1924, Jews had neither tamed the soil overnight, nor entirely shed urban traditions, nor transmuted into typical Russian peasants. Instead, these former shopkeepers and peddlers had emerged from five catastrophic years in the Soviet landscape as exemplars of progress, reasonably at home in the countryside, but still far from experiencing internal harmony. Unique conditions on the farms had enabled adult women to achieve a level of independence from the traditional patriarchy brought from the shtetls. Furthermore, the colonists’ sons and daughters had begun to detach themselves from the home as well as from religion. What the Agro-Joint director did not know was that the greatest test for his organization and the Jewish colonies still lay ahead.
Chapter 6  Soviet-Jewish Farmers, 1935–1941

The six years that preceded the German invasion were filled with horror for millions of Soviet citizens, both the mighty and the meek, under siege by their own government. For most, even the evils of Nazi occupation could not entirely overshadow the painful memories of the late 1930s in Stalin's Russia. How did the Jewish colonists endure these turbulent times, with and without Joseph Rosen's organization? If the existing historiography is accurate, the colonists suffered no less than the rest of the Soviet population in the half decade before the German army marched into the settlement regions in the autumn of 1941. We will now see whether this assertion matches reality.

No one among the JDC leadership harbored any illusions about Stalin; they knew that he was determined to consolidate power throughout the USSR. As he expanded personal rule, a culture of violence—refined during the civil war and dekulakization—took aim at “potential foes” on the party rolls. If in the first few years of the decade, the brute force of the regime had been unleashed against the “kulaks” in the countryside, the police widened its net after 1933. Outright and bloody repression began in 1936. Anyone considered poten-
tially dangerous became suspect, including a variety of national minorities, criminals, and other marginal groups. In many instances, the killing assumed a random character. Older scholarship found that 10 million to 40 million perished from the famines and political repression of the 1930s. More recent studies have disaggregated the tragic tally: the state executed approximately 680,000 citizens in 1937–1938, with many more incarcerated in the Gulag. Stalin’s penchant for the violent mobilization of society only partially explains the phenomenon. Soviet citizens in fact participated in the process through denunciations, aimed particularly at social or professional superiors and local officeholders who could be safely removed from the scene if accused as “enemies.”

Regional governments and party bureaucrats suffered the most. For Crimea, like other subrepublican units, the legal ramifications were even worse than for the larger republics; a new Crimean Constitution (enacted in 1937) for all practical purposes ended autonomy. Stalin’s prediction that the practitioners of korenizatsiia would resist Russification encouraged him to liquidate most nationalist leaders during the mid-1930s. While the destruction of native leadership elites in the national territories did not necessarily doom all elements of cultural autonomy forged during the zenith of korenizatsiia, ethnic Russian appointees from Moscow did replace indigenous leaders throughout the Soviet Union by late 1938. In Crimea, these purges shed less blood only because the Soviet regime had already swept away the indigenous leaders with Veli Ibrahimov in the late 1920s.

On the national economic front, the huge expenditures for industrialization achieved inconsistent results. The Second Five-Year Plan (1933–1937) began with more coherence than its predecessor, but the gradual prioritization of military matériel and the political purges upset its equilibrium. The Third Five-Year Plan (1937–1941) intensified military production and reversed some of the consumer gains of the previous years. Because the party saw trained engineers and technicians as the future, it allocated to the peasantry a dwindling share of the national income and diminished its access to education. These policies thus led at once to double-digit industrial growth but stagnation in the agricultural sector. This chapter will suggest that the state’s shift to industry over farming ultimately had a sharper effect on the Jewish kolkhozes than did the political purges.

The purges influenced the political debate on Jewish nationality by removing anti-assimilationists from the Kremlin during the late 1930s. The surviving members of the Soviet hierarchy fully supported the Russification of all national
groups, including the Jews. Because most of the antiassimilationists did not take seriously the promise of Birobidzhan for Russia’s Jews, the destruction of these men at the highest levels of Soviet government probably increased the official prioritization of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast along the Amur River over Jewish colonization in Crimea. At the other end of this political divide, Stalin’s loyalists felt that the Far East was the perfect spot to bury the idea of a Soviet-Jewish nation. The change in priorities in the Kremlin did not, however, reverse the benign treatment of Agro-Joint’s colonies. James Rosenberg erred on this point in early 1930 when he predicted that the Joint’s refusal to support the Birobidzhan project would cause the Soviets to strangle Agro-Joint gradually.

Beyond the USSR, events seemed to confirm Stalin’s worst fears of capitalist encirclement. Diplomatic recognition from the United States in November 1933 and the Soviet entrance into the League of Nations in 1934 had not calmed these worries. Therefore, in contrast to the heavy Soviet dependence on American machinery and expertise during the First Five-Year Plan, the state consciously reduced imports from the mid-1930s. The need had not truly abated, but Stalin’s “Socialism in One Country”—and the dearth of hard currency—could not tolerate conspicuous reliance on foreign equipment and personnel. Stalin’s dilemma increased as Hitler’s Germany gained strength without a forceful response from England and France. Neither did the election in 1936 of the Popular Front government in France calm Stalin in light of Western Europe’s indecisiveness during the Spanish Civil War and the successes of European fascism. By the late 1930s, the Kremlin saw no natural allies in the international arena, only potential threats, and turned increasingly toward preparation for possible war. What did all of this mean for a foreign “bourgeois” philanthropy and its colonist-beneficiaries?

**POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION**

**IN NORTHERN CRIMEA**

With sporadic aggressive gestures, the state “knocked on the doors” of the Jewish kolkhozes sometime during late 1934 or early 1935. Although the government surely made more demands now, this intrusion reflected another (not entirely benevolent) desire as well: the standardization and modernization of the whole country. In this respect, the regime did not separate Jewish kolkhozes from their neighbors. For their part, the colonies complied with relative ease to the new program.

The imposition of state authority in northern Crimea departed significantly
from the standard patterns of political consolidation. While the NKVD (the successor of the OGPU as political police), government prosecutors, and party inspectors wrought havoc in the cities, the state was still blind in much of the geographic periphery; rural administrators in Crimea readily admitted that they held only tenuous control at mid-decade. Consequently, the regime could not unilaterally set grain procurement quotas. Instead, it negotiated these levels with kolkhoz chairs. Although such negotiations were never conducted on an equal basis, higher officials had to strike a compromise with local realities and sensitivities. 

As Joseph Rosen recognized, the Soviets applied differential criteria, not blanket terror, to foreign philanthropies. ORT-Farband—perceived as a Russian, not a foreign, organization—suffered from a distinct disadvantage compared with the JDC. From the historical perspective, this was not unfounded; Russian-Jewish émigrés in Berlin had formed the Farband after the October Revolution. The regime treated the ORT brutally, arrested its director in Russia, and forcibly liquidated its property in the summer of 1938. Together with the confiscation of property the JCA had left behind in 1930, this act created a worrisome precedent for Agro-Joint. While Rosen still had some powerful friends in the Soviet hierarchy, he wanted quickly to conclude a reasonable liquidation agreement that would minimize future dealings with an erratic regime. Soviet respect for the sanctity of Agro-Joint as an organization (or perhaps respect for Rosen) did not apply to its personnel. As the senior Russian-Jewish employees of Agro-Joint soon discovered, Joseph Rosen’s previous status afforded no more protection than could ORT-Farband or Komzet for their staff members; most shared a tragic lot.

The lethality of the purges took Agro-Joint, like many inside and outside the Soviet Union, by total surprise. The JDC fully expected even in late 1937 that Ezekiel Grower and Samuil Liubarskii (the treasurer and assistant director of Agro-Joint, respectively) would be able to run a skeleton office in Moscow for the foreseeable future, or until opportunities arose for massive immigration from fascist Europe. True, Rosen may have watered down reports from Russia to protect his staff (almost all of whom were Soviet citizens), but no one in the New York or Moscow offices of the Joint foresaw the intensity of the coming storm. For them, the early stage of the purges seemed similar to past arrests and legal problems involving Agro-Joint personnel; Rosen had resolved these prior incidents without undue harm to the arrestees. He sensed a unique danger in late 1937 but thought only that caution should be exercised not to implicate local Jews by contact with foreigners.
Even now, the regime’s attitude toward Jewish colonization exhibited no fewer signs of continuity than change. When the state slowed its propaganda campaign on behalf of colonization, this did not signal an increase of anti-semitism or displeasure with the settlements. Rather, it was an upshot of changes in the nation’s priorities after 1936. At least until then, Soviet pamphlets depicted Jews as models for agricultural emulation. Around that year, the campaign fell victim to the nationwide emphasis on industrialization and militarization. Furthermore, Russification left little room for the “chauvinistic” glorification of Jews or other minorities. That did not, however, prevent attempts to propagandize Jewish colonization for foreign consumption. Fortunately for the Soviets, Western observers devoured whatever pamphlets still flowed off the presses. Therefore, even as the role of Agro-Joint declined during 1935 and 1936, the Soviets still capitalized on its publicity value abroad.

Rural Gaps in Stalin’s “Fortress”

The evidence suggests that the presence of Agro-Joint not only hindered early attempts by the party and the state to consolidate power in rural Crimea, it also kept open avenues of political criticism. Settlers sensed the issues and distress that gripped Russia’s political center; though they were far from the controversy, certain elements of the popular, antistate discourse of the mid-1930s trickled down. For example, colonists voiced the same doubts as non-Jews about the murder of Sergei Kirov, who “was not killed by us—the lishentsy—rather by you, the communists.” Such statements triggered alarmist reports from local officials to higher authorities but did not elicit much reaction. Local authorities meted out no widespread punishments during the purges; at most, they removed “class enemies” from the ranks of Jewish kolkhoz chairs.

In contrast to other national autonomous entities, a number of factors helped to perpetuate and insulate Jewish cultural life in northern Crimea from 1935 until the autumn of 1941. Although the official autonomous districts were of less daily importance than the de facto compact settlement blocs, their continued existence had its value. For one, nominal autonomy still bestowed some integrity on the idea of a unique Jewish national life. What protected the five Jewish national districts? Put bluntly, the Jewish districts outlived their Polish and German counterparts in the Ukraine because, from the Kremlin’s perspective, Jews had no conspicuous loyalty to another country. In a more subtle way, propaganda continued to handcuff the regime to Jewish colonization, just as it had done earlier in the 1930s. Because the regime’s public treatment of Agro-Joint remained hospitable at least until 1937, no one inside or outside of
Crimea sensed a sanction from the government or the party to demonize the organization or its beneficiaries—an important prerequisite for political repression. Finally, if the violence of the purges was directed against perceived social disorder, the purgers had much less to accomplish in the areas of Jewish colonization where the settlement organizations and the colonists themselves had created a stable, productive environment. Consequently, the Jewish kolkhozes and the compact settlement blocs had some shelter below the political whirlwinds.

The experience in the Jewish kolkhozes shows that tough talk in Moscow did not always translate into ground-level implementation outside of the main population centers. If existing studies argue that the party initiated an anti-Jewish campaign during the second half of the 1930s (as part of the wider attempt to extinguish “bourgeois nationalism” and to Russify the country’s ethnic minorities), events in Crimea illustrated that this policy did not apply equally nationwide. Rather, the virulent mood petered out en route from the Kremlin to the periphery. Other than the substitution of Russian for Yiddish as the official language of instruction in the schools in 1937, Russification had little discernible effect on the Crimean colonies. Even then, considerable evidence suggests that many colonist-parents may have welcomed the change.

A secondary event—the closure of Yiddish-language newspapers—has also invited historical misinterpretation about the relations between the state and its Jewish minority. To be sure, the regime seemed to adopt an antisemitic course with the gradual closure of regional Yiddish newspapers in the five Jewish national districts at the close of the decade. As discussed in the previous chapter, however, many colonists preferred the party’s more current Russian-language daily, Krasnyi Krym, to its Yiddish counterparts. Under normal market conditions, the latter might have expired before the state ended their subsidies. Seen in retrospect, the end of the Yiddish newspapers carried no more a symbolic than a practical importance. By 1939–1940, the Soviets had published these papers for years despite fiscal deficits. Closure of the newspapers, therefore, suggests a distinct break in Soviet thinking toward the “Jewish question” even though it did not bring additional hardships upon the Jewish kolkhozes.

As much as any other single factor, the electrification of the Jewish kolkhozes exposed the contradiction between the ambitious rhetoric of the center and the persistent backwardness of the Soviet countryside. By the early 1930s, Agro-Joint had mostly finished the physical construction of the settlements, and Joseph Rosen turned to efforts to raise their standards of living, with special emphasis on electrification. In the end, his foresight and bud-
getary largesse combined with government ineptitude to bring electricity to the Jewish kolkhozes. In 1932, Agro-Joint rescued a bankrupt electrification project along the Crimean coast with the provision that the state company extend high-voltage wires to the nearby settlement blocs. Rosen’s staff repeated this tactic in 1935. Thanks to these and other methods, Agro-Joint electrified sixty-five Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea and planned to complete all eighty-six in 1939. In this respect, the Jewish settlement blocs were an anomaly; electrification was low on the Soviet agenda elsewhere in the countryside, even if it held a special mystique for most citizens. Therefore, in a decade when copper wire was still only a rumor in the countryside—electricity reached most conventional kolkhozes only during the Khrushchev era—electrification buoyed Agro-Joint’s local prestige amid the steady growth of the state’s political control.

Increased political authority did not immediately embolden the state to impose economic hegemony over Agro-Joint. Even in the depths of the purge, Moscow fulfilled its contractual obligations and followed Rosen’s lead in investment: the working plan for 1937 called for larger inputs than in the previous year from Agro-Joint and the government for high-yield crops, infrastructure, irrigation, and electrification. The settlement budgets of the late 1930s showed that neither of the parties intended to reverse the gains of Jewish colonization. On the contrary, because Soviet contributions to the local infrastructure and other benefits matched the value of Agro-Joint’s annual investments, the total outlays showed a shared desire to raise living standards.

The Stalinist State and Agro-Joint

The regime’s growing political isolationism complicated work with Agro-Joint. There was much irony during Joseph Rosen’s last years in Russia. From the early to mid-1930s, the JDC sought all means to limit its involvement whereas the Soviet agencies showed great reluctance to sever the relationship. In the course of 1934 and 1935, these roles were reversed. If financial panic guided the Joint’s policy of withdrawal during the early 1930s, its officials now reasoned that the Soviet Union was the most viable site of refuge for Jews fleeing fascist Europe; no country in the West seemed willing to take in significant numbers of refugees. These international exigencies brought the JDC to reconsider colonization work precisely at the time when Stalin’s xenophobia discouraged cooperation with foreign organizations.

Furthermore, like many people in the Western world, the extraordinary feats of the First and Second Five-Year Plans informed Rosen’s rosy assumptions on
the potential of the Soviet economy. Others in the Joint might not have shared his enthusiasm, but they did appreciate the past fulfillment of obligations by the Kremlin, particularly the release of the ASJFSR from further cash payments after 1933. Not only did the Soviets agree that their country might be the only feasible destination for desperate Jews from Germany and Poland, they also concurred that only Rosen’s organization could orchestrate such a project. Implementation proved far more difficult. Like most Western business and political leaders, Rosen did not predict Stalin’s closure of Russia to the outside world during the second half of the 1930s.

Under these conditions, Agro-Joint made little progress with the Soviet regime when it proposed the immigration of German Jews to Crimea in 1935–1936. Because the Joint raised this plan shortly after the government pronounced the establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Birobidzhan (May 1934), the Soviets linked all discussions about these refugees to this new area of settlement. The JDC at first replied that immigration had to be directed toward Crimea and southern Ukraine. Though it had refused in 1934 to participate in the development of Birobidzhan, Agro-Joint made a tactical retreat once the refugee issue became acute and an early experiment went afoul: it suspended outright rejection of the Soviet position.

Conflicting factors shaped the Joint’s strategy on Jewish immigration from Germany. A sense of moral obligation to endangered brethren, and a belief that the Soviets if left to themselves could not properly manage mass immigration, dominated decision-making. The spread of fascism, together with the apparent rapprochement between Germany, Japan, and Poland in 1935, made matters urgent. At home, willingness to reconsider Birobidzhan split the JDC’s leadership; several members rejected Birobidzhan in principle as a wholly Sovietized project. In hindsight, the JDC probably never seriously intended to colonize the Soviet Far East with Jewish refugees from fascism. Rather, Rosen extorted certain concessions from Komzet in Crimea by dangling empty offers of JDC support for Birobidzhan.

The political fallout from the trial-run immigration of several dozen doctors from Germany and Poland to Crimea in 1935 far outweighed its practical gains: the Soviets accused three of them of espionage for the German and Polish governments. Although most likely fabricated, these charges conformed to the growing xenophobia in the Kremlin and cast a long shadow over this project. Sensing the evaporation of official support, Rosen enlisted the help of other European Jewish organizations to coax the Kremlin, but the Soviets suspended the immigration program in late 1936. Worse followed: the state arrested officials in
the Commissariat of Public Health (some of Rosen’s last important contacts in the government) and members of the Agro-Joint staff in late 1937 for alleged involvement with this refugee project. This episode apparently marked the end of Agro-Joint’s sacrosanct status inside the Soviet Union. Henceforth, the regime regarded Joseph Rosen and his employees with increasing suspicion and, at times, worked to undercut Agro-Joint’s local authority.31

The show trial of Leo Kamenev and Grigorii Zinoviev was probably a serious blow to relations between the Kremlin and the remaining foreign service organizations. Although the existing programs of the Joint and ORT continued apace, any proposal involving immigration had no credibility in Moscow after the conviction of these two old Bolsheviks in August 1936 on charges of plotting with foreign enemies.32 While it must be remembered that the exile of Leon Trotsky (together with the trials of Kamenev and Zinoviev) was a political, not a racial, purge, these events surely did not help Russia’s Jews. Such demonization of foreigners and their supposed Soviet coconspirators contaminated the environment around Agro-Joint as an institution, created an easy pretext for accusations against its friends in the Soviet government, and precipitated a rapid decline in the membership rolls of Ozet.33 For fear of the consequences, pragmatic Jews and non-Jews would henceforth be much less prone to identify themselves openly with the JDC. In keeping with the gap between the intensity of rhetoric and events in the Soviet population centers versus their effect in the countryside during the 1930s, this caustic atmosphere in the cities left no palpable signs nearer to the colonies.

Agro-Joint in Controlled Retreat

Even in the twilight of its settlement activity, the JDC guarded its position as the premier arbiter between the Soviet regime and American Jewry. If necessary, Joint leaders were also prepared to discredit those who seemed to threaten the future of colonization. Therefore, the Joint leaders acted swiftly, once conscious that Ikor’s fund-raising campaign for Birobidzhan in the United States might damage the JDC’s preeminence. Competition of any sort was unwelcome; it caused some in the JDC to reconsider Birobidzhan, if only to prevent a loss of prestige. Others wanted to marginalize the openly pro-Soviet Ikor in order to preempt renewed Zionist attacks against all American-Jewish involvement with Russian colonization.34 In response to the perceived challenge, Rosenberg approached the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Aleksandr Troianovskii, “to [make] him understand that the American Committee for the Settlement of Birobidzhan [the fund-raising arm of Ikor, known as Ambijan]
did not consist of a group of solid people with means or ability to carry through.”

The JDC had ceased fund-raising for colonization in the early 1930s, so now its publicity campaign sought the heart, not the pocketbook, of American Jews. In its favor, a partial rapprochement with American Zionists eased the promotional task, notwithstanding the controversy stirred by Birobidzhan. In rather ambitious and costly moves, the Joint pursued public goodwill by producing a second silent film in 1936 and planned to publish a diary of the travels to the colonies of Evelyn Morrissey (the assistant treasurer of the JDC and secretary of the ASJFSR). Her editor bypassed the tense international atmosphere by removing all references that might be construed negatively by Soviet or other readers. He also suggested that any statements of colonists’ preference for Crimea over Palestine be omitted because the “Joint can afford to be generous to their Zionist detractors at the present time.” Furthermore, the editor proposed to ignore Hoover’s endorsement of Agro-Joint because by 1936 the former president was “not a political force of first magnitude any more.”

The deterioration in diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Soviet governments in the eighteen months between Morrissey’s visit and her final manuscript forced publication delays. Although the diary was envisioned as a large-scale publicity tool, the JDC distributed only a few copies of it in January 1938. No longer in need of funds and conscious of its impending exit from Russia, the leaders of the Joint preferred to avoid undue provocation in the Soviet and American arenas.

Changes within the organization and events outside the USSR hastened the JDC’s withdrawal from Russia. Beyond all else, the crisis in Germany eclipsed other considerations in the Joint from 1933 onward. Internal bureaucratic realignments posed a further impediment; from 1931 to 1938, the national chairman of the JDC, Rabbi Jonah Wise, absorbed mainly by events in Germany and general fund-raising issues, devoted very little attention to colonization. Dissension among Agro-Joint’s patrons in New York also fouled the working environment. Fissures appeared during the mid-1930s when young leaders began to question the institutional conservatism embodied by the generation of the JDC’s founders.

Closer to the ground, Agro-Joint continued to enhance the lives of its beneficiaries. Since the Soviet command economy marginalized agricultural development, progress throughout the country occurred only on paper in most sectors. Even when the state did allocate resources, logistic bottlenecks frequently neutralized the nationwide promotion of intensive crops. Yet until the arrest of
Grower and Liubarskii in the winter of 1937–1938, Agro-Joint smoothed bureaucratic impasses with state agencies, thereby perpetuating or widening the technological and productive gaps between the Jewish and the surrounding settlements. For example, if the vineyards of non-Jewish kolkhozes withered for lack of government-supplied wire, Agro-Joint was able to circumvent such logjams.  

The last years of the foreign philanthropies imparted added economic vitality to the Jewish kolkhozes. From the early 1930s, even as all the philanthropies surrendered authority to the state, the ORT dramatically increased its emphasis on winter workshops while Agro-Joint disseminated new farm branches (in addition to irrigation and electricity).  

Perhaps most remarkable, the renewal of Agro-Joint activity in southern Ukraine yielded prompt results after an absence of approximately three years around the time of total collectivization. While these colonies never rebounded to the standards of comparable settlements in Crimea, many performed above the level of neighboring Ukrainian kolkhozes.  

Previous studies held to the view that as Stalin’s xenophobia increased, he simply evicted Agro-Joint, whereas newly accessible archival evidence suggests another interpretation of events. The arrest of the high-ranking staff of Agro-Joint in 1937–1938 surely spelled an abrupt end to its operations, but that act alone does not fully explain the overall process of withdrawal from Soviet Russia.  

As contemporary observers noted, the Soviets reasoned that the high standards of living in the colonies meant that Agro-Joint’s mission was complete by the mid-1930s. Therefore, as the Stalinist state turned inward, it had fewer reasons to tolerate the foreign organization. No less important to understanding the process of withdrawal, the JDC had initiated a substantial reduction of Agro-Joint’s work during the early 1930s. In great part, the Soviets responded to this lead, and the process took a formalistic, bureaucratic course. It in no way resembled an eviction: the Soviet Union was eager to rid itself of foreign organizations, and the JDC was eager to leave. Excepting attempts to negotiate for a skeleton staff in Moscow, Rosen sought no further contractual commitments after the expiration of the ASJFSR agreement on December 31, 1936. In January 1937, several months before the arrest of his senior employees, Rosen reduced Agro-Joint to a minimal staff that would expand only if the possibility materialized of rapid immigration from Germany and Poland.  

No one, not even the most ardent supporters of the colonization experiment, had ever seen Agro-Joint as a permanent entity. By mid-1935 at the latest, Rosen believed that no specific Jewish problem remained in Russia. In fact, he
never saw Agro-Joint (in any scenario) extending its work beyond 1936–1937. Even when the JDC negotiated long-term solutions for the immigration of German and Polish Jews in 1935, it avoided any obligations after 1937. The question of Agro-Joint’s exit was, therefore, one of timing, and not ultimate intent. While the political purges may have precluded the continued work of Agro-Joint in the USSR, the organization three or four years earlier had mapped an exit strategy and openly had discussed departure dates as early as 1926. Agro-Joint itself precipitated the misperceptions in existing scholarship about its exit, for the New York office announced an intention to wind down activity in the USSR only in early 1936. Thereafter, and with increasing candidness, Rosen (and others) spoke about transferring responsibility to the Soviet government.

The first major step toward liquidation was the transfer of Agro-Joint’s property to Ozet, particularly the tractor repair shop in Dzhankoi—the financial jewel of the colonization enterprise. Yet even in retreat, Rosen negotiated favorable terms to perpetuate Agro-Joint’s work in absentia. Experience had convinced him and other JDC leaders that the Soviet regime was committed to the continuation of the colonization enterprise. Hence, a preliminary agreement signed in May 1937 called for Ozet to fill Agro-Joint’s shoes using state employees. In theory, but apparently not in practice, many Agro-Joint agronomists were to continue working with Ozet.

The same methodical process characterized the transfer of other assets to Ozet or to MTS adjacent to the Jewish settlement blocs. Agro-Joint conducted a full inventory of unfinished tasks and left instructions to Ozet personnel for their completion. These remaining projects would have aroused the envy of any conventional kolkhoz: the installation of engines, generators, electric water pumps, mechanical sheep shears, and internal plumbing for cowsheds as well as the electrification of homes. In the wake of these preparatory negotiations, only a shell of Agro-Joint remained when Rosen signed the first of two formal liquidation agreements with Ozet on December 11, 1937 (the final agreement was signed in October 1938).

The liquidation agreements of 1938 may have been negotiated abruptly and imposed with the typical heavy-handedness of the NKVD, but this was nevertheless the unpleasant end of a process the Joint had begun in the early 1930s. By this time Liubarskii, Grower, and other former senior staff had already been murdered, so Agro-Joint’s property in Moscow was easy prey for confiscators. Added to this, the negotiator from Sovnarkom acted haughtily toward Rosen—behavior the venerable agronomist had not previously experienced.
Long-standing discomfort over Agro-Joint’s local surrogacy found expression during the organization’s last days in Soviet Russia. Given the regime’s xenophobia, it wanted to eradicate these memories. As a result, Komzet came under sharp criticism as a dupe or accomplice in Agro-Joint’s power. Next, the NKVD swept away part of Joseph Rosen’s staff. In a further act of petty retribution, the Soviets exploited a loophole in the liquidation contract and rejected Rosen’s requests for severance pay to the personnel of those Agro-Joint offices that had recently closed.51

One could ask whether inertia or bureaucratic habit would have kept the JDC engaged in Russia if Stalin had allowed. The data suggest otherwise. Agro-Joint took itself out of active settlement work more than a year before the signing of the liquidation agreements and before the full extent of the purges became known. Given Agro-Joint’s feeble bargaining position at the time, the terms of liquidation were quite equitable.52

**Soviet Management of Jewish Colonization**

The growing centralization of power in the Kremlin triggered a reevaluation of Komzet and Ozet. The regime concluded that it must dismantle these semi-independent bodies because they operated outside its direct stewardship and could be seen as manifestations of Jewish national identity. It swiftly eliminated and reapportioned the functions of Komzet in April 1938. Within months, the NKVD swept away most of its personnel who were, according to the purgers, irreparably tainted by contact with foreigners.53 In their place (and Agro-Joint’s) came the settlement departments of Narkomzem and the NKVD, two agencies controlled entirely by the Soviet regime.

The same streamlining tendencies in the party made liquidation of Ozet inevitable. Moreover, the removal of quasi-voluntary, quasi-party organs fitted Stalin’s statist bias. This preference for state over party organs trickled down to regional authorities. In the case of the Jewish kolkhozes, local government officials in Crimea in 1937 began to voice skepticism about Ozet’s capacity for the support of the settlements and sought to transfer its responsibilities to Narkomzem. By late in that year, they were willing to tolerate Ozet only as a negotiator with Agro-Joint for the full acquisition of the lucrative Dzhankoi tractor repair shop. The Crimean Narkomzem and republican leadership then expected the All-Union Sovnarkom to assign the shop to them gratis away from Ozet.54 Within weeks of Agro-Joint’s formal departure, the Kremlin took direct control over the colonies, one more move in accord with the overarching goal of the purges in the periphery—the consolidation of power.
Events mostly confirmed Agro-Joint’s confidence in the intentions, if not the functional prowess, of the state agencies. Viewed from the Kremlin, the colonies were valuable, stable agricultural assets. So even if Rosen had cause for concern after the sudden replacement of Ozet and Komzet in 1938, the NKVD and Narkomzem responded reasonably well to the needs of recruits and veterans and lobbied other state agencies on behalf of their new clients. More than anything else, they concentrated on the proper distribution of the remaining Agro-Joint funds left from the liquidation of Ozet. Though difficult to trace precisely, these residual assets were usually appropriated by the state to their prearranged targets in the Jewish kolkhozes. Judging from the archives at the highest levels of regional and national government, the regime felt obligated to keep the Jewish kolkhozes alive.55

The state administration of the Jewish kolkhozes revealed an inability to dictate policy downward. Such continued difficulties meant that it could set, but not meet, recruitment goals for 1937 and 1938 due to resistance at the points of origin in Ukraine and Belorussia. In many cases, local authorities (including the Crimean offices of Narkomzem that were supposed to dispatch recruiters to the shtetls) simply ignored the directives issued by their superiors and other government bodies in Moscow. Fortunately for these local officials, the central authorities might criticize them but had neither the inclination nor the stomach for confrontation over this issue.56 Nevertheless, why was there such defiance of the rather modest quotas for the renewed recruitment drives in 1937 and 1938? By the late 1930s, industrialization in much of Russia and the Ukraine had absorbed excess labor, thereby eliminating the socioeconomic incentive in or near the shtetls to remove unemployed people from their midst—a vital part of Ozet’s large recruitment drives during the second half of the 1920s.

In the same way that Narkomzem and the NKVD could not impose recruitment on local authorities, they could not effortlessly solve the outstanding problems of Jewish colonization nor seamlessly replace Agro-Joint. For one thing, the state agencies could not reverse the acute rural flight from the colonies that had begun earlier in the decade. Although highly edited reports from below suggested otherwise, the state proved to be an imperfect replacement for the foreign service organizations. The tractor repair shop in Dzhankoi best illustrated the government’s woes. Here in late 1937, Agro-Joint acted as the shadow management when the shop sank into debt; its customers, all underfunded by the state, refused to pay the full costs for repairs. In addition, the responsible ministries could not shoulder the timely supply of construction materials for new families in the Jewish and non-Jewish kolkhozes of northern
Crimea. State management of the Jewish settlements did suggest, however, that in the case of Jewish colonization the government agencies achieved a degree of efficiency that contrasted favorably with the norms of incompetence endemic in state organs since 1917. Indeed, Narkomzem and the NKVD at least recognized, but not always managed to resolve, the problems of the rural economy.57

To understand the actions of the state, we must disaggregate the treatment of the colonies from that given the Jewish settlement organizations. The repression of Agro-Joint administrators from late 1937 through early 1938 (under the pretext of complicity in the immigration of the German doctors) had no ripple effect in the kolkhozes.58 In the end, the arrest of colonists was rare and their standard of living remained high compared with that of most kolkhozniki, and many other citizens, in the rest of the country.

Analysis of the Crimean and southern Ukrainian colonies must also be disconnected from that related to the Jewish kolkhozes in Belorussia and Birobidzhan. Other than a shared time frame, fundamental differences separate these chapters in the history of Jewish farming in the Soviet Union. In Belorussia, no foreign organization systematically cultivated economic life or sheltered the kolkhozes from the excesses of an increasingly intrusive regime. Nor did these colonies have an effective local patron once the Belorussian Komzet, Ozet, and Evsektsiia had destroyed each other in the party purges of 1929–1930. This clash also foreclosed any chance for further growth or coherence in the Belorussian kolkhozes after total collectivization. Without a strong, attractive economic base, these farms warranted no special consideration from the Soviet perspective, leaving them at once economically insignificant and politically vulnerable.59

The experiment in Birobidzhan is analogous neither to Crimea nor to Belorussia. From its inception, the adventure of Jewish colonization in the Far East was wholly Sovietized. Ambijan never raised sizable funds, nor did major recruitment from abroad ever materialize.60 Without active and effective foreign support, these kolkhozes remained primitive, the Jewish population small, and the local leaders vulnerable to repression. As for the domestic service organizations, Ozet and Komzet (while they lasted) displayed the same ineptitude along the Amur River as they had shown around the Black Sea. The Soviets treated Birobidzhan as a Jewish entity only during the first years and ceased vigorous development after the dissolution of Komzet and Ozet. Finally, the lack of interest in the shtetls forced the regime to send multiethnic recruits from the mid-1930s.61

If conditions in the Jewish kolkhozes of Crimea and southern Ukraine were
better than in Belorussia or Birobidzhan, there was still much to fear. All around them, the colonists could feel danger: Stalin’s apparatus of political control had drawn closer to the Jewish settlement blocs and the “good American uncle” was gone. Seen from a distance of nearly seventy years, and for many at the time too, the situation looked ominous.

THE JEWISH FARMER IN THE STALINIST STATE

The purges at the top and middle of the political spectrum tore at the Soviet body politic during the second half of the 1930s. The simultaneous Soviet penetration into the countryside seemed at first glance a part of the Soviet nationality policy intended to replace Jewish national identity with a *homo sovieticus*. With the benefit of hindsight, it now appears that these ostensibly growing threats to the Jewish kolkhozes proved not to be entirely negative for them.

Joseph Rosen’s beneficiaries survived within a rural version of the purges that plagued, but did not destroy, peasant society. In fact, the Soviet village enjoyed relative stability during the years before the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 despite the great upheavals and loss of life among party members and in the governmental bureaucracy, army, and urban society. Overall, Soviet peasants were more concerned about the weather than about purges in the party or the sensational events in Moscow and Leningrad during the second half of the 1930s. They were far more interested in exacting retribution against unpopular people in the local administration or in the kolkhoz itself, all the more appealing in a period of scarcity. Therefore, when the purges assumed political form in the village, this more often than not arose from the peasants’ attempt to reconfigure the power arrangements in relation to the officials appointed from above. After a brief period of confusion in the early 1930s, the kolkhoz had become increasingly reminiscent of the mir: it brokered relations between the peasant and state and proved equally resistant to modernization.62

Central control over the countryside unfolded in erratic pulses. In order to guarantee production and procurement from peasants amid repeated crises, the regime made a tactical adjustment in the mid-1930s; it removed the political departments from the MTS, along with most of the outsider chairs imposed during total collectivization. Once the purges had subsided, some of the first generation of kolkhoz chairs even returned to their posts. In addition, the Collective Farm Charter (July 1935) gave legal force to existing practices among the peasants: kolkhozes received their land in perpetuity, household parcels were legalized, the rules of expulsion were normalized, and the farmers’ private prop-
Property and implements were declared inviolable. Despite these improvements, peasant flight at the end of the 1930s remained heavy, and the kolkhozniki still suffered from government grain procurements.63

The kolkhoz system did not simply deliver the village to the regime. From one side of the local political formula, the enhanced benefits of kolkhoz life were such that some noncollectivized farmers—the edinolichniki, banned as exploiters from entering the kolkhoz earlier—protested their exclusion and sought to join in the late 1930s.64 Yet from another side, peasant demands to realize the social welfare programs promised under the 1936 constitution further obstructed Soviet efforts to assert greater rural control. In the short term, moreover, the purges and the reactivation of the anti-Church campaign in 1937 weakened the regime’s control over the village; relations with the peasants were strained, and the regional and rural party apparatuses had been decimated.

**Jewish Colonists During the Purges**

A new appraisal of rural terror emerges from a study of the Jewish kolkhozes. Previous scholarship assumed that they “suffered a great deal under the impact of the terror.”65 In reality, the horrific purges in the administrative centers did not replicate themselves in rural Crimea. There is little doubt that the colonists (most of whom still had family or friends in Soviet cities) knew of the repressive tendencies in the center and, as a result, probably exercised extra caution in relation to the state. What else kept them relatively safe? One probable explanation lies in the nature of their relationship with the state’s administrators. If elsewhere some local officials may have been eager to launch a mass “antikulak” campaign during the late 1930s to ease social and political pressures, such motives were mostly absent in the lower levels of government administration in the Jewish regions of colonization.66 At least in part, this can be attributed to the rise of local people into positions of authority, many of whom had received their initial professional training with Agro-Joint.

Recent studies show that, to whatever degree the purges had any systematic character in the cities, at the periphery they were seemingly random. During this period of terror, people in positions of responsibility were most likely to be repressed, but given the outward spiral of the purges, the numerical bulk of the “enemies of the people” were ordinary citizens.67 This focus on the center also affected Agro-Joint: whereas the political terror swept away many of the central Agro-Joint workers and most Komzet officials in Moscow, far greater variations occurred at the regional and local levels.68 For example, the regional agronomist A. E. Zaichik perished, as did an American expatriate, but other Agro-
Joint personnel survived the purges untouched, with no apparent correlation to rank: a regional agronomist (V. K. Redkin) survived, along with several sector agronomists or regional experts (A. Levitan, Ia. Surdutovich, G. K. Yoffe, and A. I. Lapirov), whereas a lower-ranking work leader (brigadir) was exiled to Siberia for five years.69

The incidence of arrests was low in the Jewish colonies, executions even fewer. Speculation and sabotage were the most common allegations used against colonists in 1937–1938. Other colonists were suspect because they displayed photographs from American relatives. The longer-term effects of the purges appear to have been minimal; the children of the few victims continued on the normal path of education-driven flight. Outside of the Telman district, repression among Jewish kolkhozniki was apparently even more rare. Evidently, ethnic Germans suffered the brunt of repression in the areas adjoining the Jewish settlement blocs. In sum, it appears that the Jewish kolkhozes provided more protection against the purges than even the relative safety that the political and geographic periphery afforded all kolkhozniki. According to one source, Jewish colonists who returned to the cities also enjoyed an enhanced degree of protection thanks to their newly acquired pedigree as “toilers” or former workers of the land.70

Was the continued problem of settler flight a symptom of repression? Judging from the data, the answer is negative. Even if one contemporary commentator correctly estimated that 50 percent of the colonists—led mainly by the young people—left between 1933 and 1939, this figure should not obscure the main point: former colonists usually benefited from rapid upward mobility in the cities because of enhanced education and the acquisition of prized professional skills.71 The colonists’ children leaptfrogged with particular speed to the head of Soviet higher education and the new industries.72 Rural youth all over Russia similarly sought a niche in Soviet society, but on average at a slower pace. In the process, just like their Jewish counterparts, they tended to jettison religion once they left the villages.73

As for relations with the neighboring non-Jewish kolkhozes, the near complete cessation of attacks against Jews by the mid-1930s, as well as the establishment of interethnic business ventures, testified to a change. From all indications, interaction with the indigenous Tatars was overwhelmingly positive by this time. But even if suspicions had not blossomed into friendship everywhere in northern Crimea by the end of the decade, neighbors from most of the other ethnic groups did come to recognize the solid contributions of the Jewish farmer.74 As the chairman of a German kolkhoz noted in 1936: “When the Jew-
ish settlers came here [in the mid-1920s], we taught them how to work, but all the same we thought that nothing will come of this, that they would run away. Now we know that Jews know how to work splendidly, and we can learn a lot from them.” Such a comment would have been particularly satisfying for Joseph Rosen, for the first Jewish colonists had considered the German settlers as the yardstick of success, even models for emulation. At the time, many of those same veterans of the Crimean steppe had treated the Jewish newcomers roughly. Such a transformation of the rural environment should not be taken for granted, since potential points of friction between the Jewish and non-Jewish populations had endured into the mid-1930s. But now practical interests prevailed and rural disputes did not degenerate into ethnic strife. Rosen mixed realism with a hefty dose of nostalgia in 1937 when ruminating upon life on the steppe: “The only upset was one Jew against another; but the inter-racial relations have been marked by not the slightest evidence of disagreement.” In retrospect, the persistence of conflict between the Jewish settlers and their neighbors seems low in light of the important elements of “otherness” built into the program of colonization.

Life without Agro-Joint

From all indications, the Jewish kolkhozniki responded to the departure of Agro-Joint with sorrow, but not panic; they had already come to regard Rosen’s agronomists as advisors, not supervisors. Why such levelheadedness? After all, the increased power of the state did not usually improve the lot of the common Soviet peasant. First and foremost, Agro-Joint had provided its colonists with productive wherewithal and organizational resources far beyond anything given to non-Jewish peasants by the Soviet government.

Continuity in personnel also eased the transition from management by Agro-Joint to that of the state. One of the pivotal Soviet administrators in Crimea after the departure of Agro-Joint was L. I. Rabinovich, apparently a former head of the Evpatoria Komzet, and from 1937 until at least May 1939 the assistant secretary of the Crimean Narkomzem. Hence, he already had intimate familiarity with the peculiarities of Jewish kolkhozes and, to judge from the archival record, was a true friend of the project. Another example of this continuity was Z. Klempert, an agronomist in the Settlement Department of the Narkomzem (at least in 1938–1939) who evidently had also been an employee of the Crimean Komzet. If nothing else, their presence indicates that the Soviets did not repress the entire staff of Komzet.

The spillover from the purges into rural Crimea narrowed but did not elim-
inate the room for maneuver available to individuals. Now less vocal than before, Jewish and non-Jewish kolkhozniki alike preferred to elude, not challenge, state authority. The new conditions necessitated greater caution; flouting state laws during the second half of the decade carried consequences far beyond the mere reproof of Agro-Joint agronomists or ORT advisors. According to Narkomzem, an oft-used fraud was “resettlement” in order to collect multiple grants and other government benefits awarded to “new” settlers. Also, when pushed by the state during lean harvest years, the kolkhozes often responded with the underfulfillment of quotas, despite increased observation from above. In the case of the Jewish kolkhozes, the Narkomzem generally recognized these practices for what they were—evasion, not resistance—and countered with administrative penalties rather than brute force.

The situation in Jewish kolkhozes suggests the need to recalculate living standards for the prewar collectivized village. At the center of this reexamination, income from workdays should not be the sole gauge of personal wealth. The revenue of the colonists’ household included other sources, some of which exceeded workday payments. Here, Agro-Joint was a vehicle for prosperity: the several dozen Crimean colonies with mature vineyards earned between 100,000 and 150,000 rubles, meaning that each family received annually an additional 1,000 to 1,500 rubles above the compensation for workdays. This cash bought clothing, shoes, and other amenities. A significant jump in overall household revenues occurred during 1935–1936, more or less in accordance with Agro-Joint plans to raise living standards by mid-decade. In any case, steadily increased productivity helped the Jewish kolkhozes easily surpass the state procurement quotas by the second half of the 1930s. The comparative flow of resources between city and farm constitutes another measure of living standards in the late 1930s; most Jewish settlers supplied urban relatives, not the reverse. The Jewish kolkhozes were thus extreme exemplars of wider rural tendencies only recently uncovered in Western research on the prewar economy.

The points of greatest vulnerability for the conventional Soviet kolkhoz proved to be the areas of greatest strength for the Jewish kolkhoz. To appreciate the contribution of Agro-Joint in this respect, we must understand that the full dividends of its earlier investments came to fruition only after its departure. First, the vineyards and orchards planted under the guidance of Rosen and Liubarskii matured in most kolkhozes by 1937–1938, thereafter yielding a steady cash income and produce. Second, the eighty-six Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea had a disproportionate number of commercial livestock associations (129), a legacy of Agro-Joint’s legal manipulation during the initial stage of to-
tal collectivization. Once the herds came of age in the late 1930s, the kolkhozes had another significant financial lever unavailable to most non-Jewish kolkhozes. Finally, the departure of Agro-Joint and ORT-Farband had no discernible effect on the cash flows of the network of winter workshops.81

Given these facts, the Jewish kolkhozniki in Crimea sustained disproportionately high farm outputs and enjoyed rising standards of living between 1938 and 1941, in contrast to the economic slowdown elsewhere in the country. By 1939, they held more than 17 percent of the northern steppe area, cultivated nearly 11 percent of its sown acreage, and produced 12.5 percent of its grain and nearly 11 percent of all field crops. Furthermore, they possessed more than 21 percent of the irrigated acreage on the steppe, 20 percent of its sheep, and 60 percent of the steppe vineyards—all this, while Jewish farmers constituted less than 8 percent of the regional population.82 Inside the de facto compact settlement blocs, the effect was greater, particularly in intensive crops and commercial livestock.83 Crop yields remained high even after the departure of Agro-Joint and may have even peaked in 1941 for many Jewish kolkhozes.84 Because the Soviets (purges apart) made productivity an absolute priority and recognized the economic value of the Jewish kolkhozes, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the state would have protected their sanctity in the future had the Wehrmacht not changed Crimea forever.

At the top, the state in its effort to stabilize the population in the Jewish kolkhozes adapted its approach to local conditions. This fact expressed itself first in the central government’s recruitment policy, which had vacillated wildly between 1933 and 1936. Severe labor shortages persuaded Moscow to take action in 1937 and 1938. As described above, the drives stumbled when confronted by resistance in Ukraine and Belorussia, as well as by housing shortages in the kolkhozes.85 Nonetheless, these truncated campaigns were helpful to the kolkhozes and, most markedly, gathered only Jewish candidates.86 In early 1939, official recruitment by Narkomzem ceased. The state may have abandoned organized recruitment in order to avoid excessive conflict with local authorities. But at least in part, the central government sincerely believed that large-scale recruitment was no longer necessary; they heard from Narkomzem officials in Crimea that the labor shortages in the Jewish kolkhozes had been largely overcome.87

During the late 1930s, more new settlers (both Jews and non-Jews) arrived in an unorganized fashion than the number recruited through official channels. It seems that the unplanned newcomers were attracted by personal or some other contact with the kolkhozes. This informal process also indicates that the settle-
ments were strong enough to absorb new families without government assistance. Unscheduled recruitment carried a pleasant fringe benefit for the Kremlin: it buoyed the labor pool in the Jewish kolkhozes at no cost to the state.

Although it was a source of dissent among kolkhozniki everywhere, the imposition of internal passports in December 1932 did, at least in theory, stabilize (or immobilize) the rural population after a period of uncontrolled movement. Like all other rural residents, Jewish colonists did not have such documents; local authorities issued temporary permits only for travel to markets or other short trips. Because nearly everybody who wished to bypass these restrictions found ways to do so, Moscow still exercised little real control over the movement of individuals, particularly the youth. A significant reduction of the colonists’ freedom of movement came only after the transfer of authority to the NKVD and Narkomzem in 1938. Henceforth, settlers had to register with local authorities, not Komzet. If Agro-Joint had attached colonists to the land during the 1920s with winter employment and relatively benign punitive credit measures, its departure brought Jewish rural mobility in line with the more restrictive national norms.

The NKVD and Narkomzem “normalized” Jewish kolkhozes in additional ways. Since from the late 1930s, the state did not believe that they warranted special treatment, it integrated the Jewish kolkhozes into the regional agricultural system. The Narkomzem reports about the former Agro-Joint colonies were businesslike, with little or no reference to their ethnic composition. As part of the economic mainstream, Jewish settlements also figured as central participants in the kolkhoz bazaars in Crimean cities. State control “normalized” the Jewish kolkhozes in one final way: after 1938 they suffered from the same budgetary neglect as their neighbors (beyond the residual funds from the Agro-Joint liquidation contract) during the transition to military production throughout the Second and Third Five-Year Plans. So while local Narkomzem officials might plead for larger allocations, the State Bank and the All-Union Narkomzem either lacked funds or simply refused to dispense scarce resources.

Although they were not intended as such by Rosen or anyone else, the Jewish kolkhozes were an exception to the fate of organized Judaism and other religious groups during the decade before World War II. In the cities and towns of the USSR, the regime assaulted organized religion to the point where only the elderly dared to practice their faith in public. Among the Jews, rabbis were arrested, and religious life went underground. People prayed in private even if
an open synagogue was nearby, and they hid all signs of observance from neighbors and relatives. In Smolensk, “the Godly had been reduced to a tiny band.” Some sources suggest that unobtrusive observance also continued in the non-Jewish kolkhozes of Crimea and southern Ukraine, but the Jewish kolkhozniki were probably more immune to antireligious pressure than the indigenous population. According to Rosen, writing in late 1938, “all of the few remaining mullahs in the Crimea have been arrested recently, [but] there is still a small number of rabbis there who are permitted to perform religious services.”

The national antireligious policies notwithstanding, Soviet authorities monitored but did not halt private religious observance in the colonies. Even after the Decree on Religious Associations (1929), private and even much of the visible religious life continued relatively undisturbed in rural Crimea. Such was certainly the case in the Telman district, at least until 1941. In Dzhankoi, the raikom secretary reported in September 1937 on private prayer in the homes of settlers during the High Holidays, where twenty people participated, “most of them former merchants.” He lamented the fact that the celebrants read from Torah scrolls and followed traditional practices. Though class-warfare language laced his description (in keeping with the contemporary official rhetoric), the raikom took no action against the perpetrators. These observations came several years after the intense nationwide antireligious campaign associated with the First Five-Year Plan, in the midst of a renewed official onslaught against a religious revival, and in the twilight of Agro-Joint activity. A rare report of overt religious repression (the expulsion of the colonist Lazar Kabakov in 1933 or 1934 for agitating against work on the Sabbath) was an isolated event; he lived, in fact, to a ripe old age, a respected member of the Voroshilov kolkhoz.

In most cases, assimilation among Jewish colonists was not forced. Rather, it was part of a generational conflict surrounding the adaptation to new social or professional paths. In fact, when the regime outlawed the observance of religious holidays in 1939, most youth hardly noticed; they already considered the holidays barely more than entertainment. Religious freedom existed for no one under Stalin’s reign, but among the colonists who sought it, religious practice was feasible. Among the elders, it was commonplace, risk-free, and visible, at least until the evacuation of the Jewish kolkhozes from Crimea in 1941. As for the ethnic composition of the kolkhozes in that year, even the most extreme (and unsubstantiated) estimate suggests that no more than 20 percent of the members of Crimean kolkhozes were non-Jews.
In many respects, the Jewish collective farmer came closer than the indigenous population during the late 1930s to meeting the goals set by the architects of collectivization. Throughout the Soviet countryside, kolkhoz households (and much of the urban population) still survived on the produce of the private plots. In 1938, these parcels apparently constituted 3.9 percent of the sown acreage but 45 percent of the total national farm output, and held together the kolkhoz economy. Without them, the kolkhozniki, and perhaps the country, would have starved; the kolkhoz produced grain, the private plots produced everything else. By contrast, the intensive, communal farming branches provided sufficient food and residual income for the Jewish collectives. From all indications, the strength of these farm units grew toward the close of the decade. Consequently, the private plots supplied a far smaller part of the household income for the Jewish kolkhozniki.99

Joseph Rosen’s former beneficiaries resembled the would-be Soviet model in another way. According to Nellie Ohr’s study of collectivized farm life in the Smolensk region, the most persistent and enterprising people were the ones who thrived under collectivization. Among Jewish kolkhozes, however, the larger share of collective income meant greater equity even if some settlers excelled. Furthermore, if persistent complainers most often received consideration in the conventional collective farm, the Jewish kolkhoz and responsible authorities usually showed very little tolerance toward unrelenting grumblers. Moreover, Jewish kolkhozes stopped or slowed the jettisoning of single (and therefore vulnerable) women at a time when this practice reportedly was gaining popularity in non-Jewish kolkhozes.100

A Soviet-Jewish Hybrid

Proponents of colonization on both sides of the Atlantic saw themselves as advancing the cause of productivization among the Jews of the former Pale. Now we must determine whether agrarianization did in fact transform the students, peddlers, and shopkeepers of the shtetl into farmers.

Change came slowly during the first decade of colonization. An Agro-Joint official complained in 1925 that the Russian peasant tended livestock before himself, whereas the Jewish colonist treated farm animals like dormant equipment.101 The first signs of transformation surfaced in 1929: “A new man is perceptible in this child. He lacks that softness and indefiniteness present in the urban child, and in many Jews. This illness is cured on the steppe.”102 The Soviets left little to chance and mobilized a range of resources to expedite the transformation. For example, reading primers in the elementary schools of the
colonies featured the “new” Jew riding a tractor and the “new” Soviet-Jewish village, complete with orderly buildings, a neat market, tractor shop, and hogs.103

Descriptions of this physical and moral renaissance on the steppe were neither a faithful depiction of reality nor a total falsification. In fact, the transformation, such as it was, exhibited both practical and iconoclastic elements. Pig production came forward as the most contextually loaded image in Soviet and American reports—a clear break with tradition. It was no coincidence that a Zionist commune and Vojo Nova (the commune founded by and partly composed of Jewish-communist émigrés from Palestine) operated the largest hog breeding farms in Crimea: both groups were religious iconoclasts. The hogs served a practical purpose as well; Agro-Joint introduced them to entire kolkhozes and individual households in parallel to a Soviet policy of promoting pork production. An ORT workshop in the Evpatoria district even produced toy pigs.104 Elsewhere, accounts of transformation featured the plodding, strong ox turned pedagogue to the colonists.105 Even dogs, never before associated with Jewish life, became companions of the “new” Jew on the steppe. Soviet and American observers shared the same awe for the symbolic and concrete value of the Jews’ physical transformation. Both commented on the change in Jews who now, “look[ed] like farmers, act[ed] like farmers, and smell[ed] like farmers.”106

Given the premium put on productivity, even in the darkest days of the nationwide purges the Soviet regime praised the accomplishments of the colonists. Their technological breakthroughs were a welcomed change from the mediocre performance of the Soviet rural economy in the years before World War II. One particularly celebrated episode involved construction of an electric tractor by a settler, Zalmon El’kin.107 Many colonists received public honors and awards, as well as frequent invitations to national agricultural exhibitions and other farmers’ gatherings.108 For example, Jews constituted 64 of 256 Crimean kolkhozniki listed in the commemorative book of the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition held in Moscow in 1939. Hence, Agro-Joint’s tractors and combines pushed Jewish colonists from the tail to the head of Soviet farming, while other peasants not infrequently looked on machines with suspicion.109

Popularization of the colonists shaped the domestic image of the Soviet Jew. Even if their number never surpassed 8 or 9 percent of the nation’s total Jewish population, the state promoted the farmer as the new model Soviet Jew for domestic and international consumption. Here was a true Soviet prototype—
pioneer of mechanized agriculture who reaped acclaim from the state and was meant to instill pride in the nation’s Jews.\textsuperscript{110} The nationwide effect of this popularized image should not be underestimated because the Soviet reading public expanded quickly during this period. The image of the “new” Jew therefore had far wider resonance than similar attempts before the revolution.\textsuperscript{111} After fifteen years of this systematic campaign, an informed Soviet citizen would be no less likely to see the Soviet Jew as a successful farmer than a by-product of the old world or a “parasitic” shtetl resident. As one Soviet author concluded: “How do yesterday’s shtetl Jews live in the Crimean and Ukrainian valleys? Here, once again, amazing Jewish adaptability has shown itself. The same urban Jew, who can adapt to working in a London sweatshop, or can establish a tailoring business in New York, or run a haberdashery in Paris, or create a colony in Argentina, and build highways in Palestine has managed, when circumstances demand, to become a farmer on the Ukrainian steppe.”\textsuperscript{112} Signs of transformation in Russia also served domestic agendas in New York. Just as continued religious observance in Crimea soothed uneasiness over assimilation in America, JDC leaders found comfort in the reported progress of the female colonist who “did not mind getting wrinkles, no foolish lipsticks or youthful short flapper costumes. They have sacrificed their comforts to find and build homes for their children.”\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, colonist mothers seemed to represent the archetypal Jewish matriarch more than decadent New York women. Therefore, the colonies carried a promise of moral renewal unimaginable in American Jewry.

Because people came and left, a stable group of colonists—suitable for scholarly observation—coalesced only in the few years before the war, if at all. A fundamental question of the colonization enterprise—whether these former shtetl dwellers and their children absorbed a proprietary and professional sense—can therefore only be assessed by including in the calculation the behavior of the colonists after the war.\textsuperscript{114} Though hard data are wanting, perhaps up to 60 percent of all the former settlers who evacuated to Central Asia in 1941 voluntarily returned to the Crimean settlements between 1944 and 1946. True, a food and supply crisis in the immediate postwar years encouraged rural life. This alone, however, would not offset the risks and travails involved in the return to Crimea. The quest for food could have been answered simply by remaining in their kolkhozes in Central Asia, where most colonists had passed the war. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish evacuees from the European regions of the USSR did remain to the east of the Urals after 1945. In contrast, many former colonists went back to their farms. This was no small feat be-
cause the state offered no organized transports back to Crimea or to southern Ukraine.115

THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

The end of systematic Jewish colonization around the Black Sea is a tragic chapter in the catastrophe of European Jewry during the Holocaust. The dispersal of the colonists and the murder of those who remained behind reflect the desperation of the time and the barbarity of the occupiers (often aided by local collaborators). It is a chapter in the history of the colonies that stands totally apart from the preceding seventeen years of life on the steppe. The Nazi armies, and no other factor, extinguished Jewish life in the compact settlement blocs.

The fate of the colonists, however, deserves a few words. Polish refugees arrived in Crimea in 1939, informing the colonists and regional authorities about conditions under German occupation. While some settlers still remained oblivious to the meaning of Nazism before the summer of 1941, the effect of the reports from the Polish refugees and other sources about German atrocities probably encouraged compliance among Jewish kolkhozniki when the evacuation orders arrived from the obkom that autumn.116 From all of the available evidence, it seems that most Jews evacuated the Crimean kolkhozes in an organized fashion before the German army arrived.117 In the case of the kolkhozes in southern Ukraine, fewer escaped—in part a result of the shorter time available for orderly evacuation. Except for small numbers of elderly or infirm people, colonists evacuated the kolkhozes in Crimea (with their livestock and grain) across the Kerch Peninsula. In many cases, the kolkhozes remained intact in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. It appears, however, that the Germans caught and murdered some of the colonists as they moved along the evacuation routes.118

A bitter end awaited those who could not or would not leave. The behavior of the local population toward the Jewish colonists during the Nazi occupation did not depart greatly from patterns witnessed in other parts of Eastern Europe; the testimonies of Holocaust survivors speak mostly of betrayal, but also of compassion, on the part of the neighboring peasants.119 Precise figures on the murder of the colonists who remained behind are not available; some were killed close to the colonies, and the Germans slaughtered others together with the Jews in the provincial cities, some of whom had fled from the Jewish compact settlement blocs to the north. By the latter part of 1942, the destruction of the Jewish population in the region had been completed.120 Most conscript-
tion-age young men were inducted into the Red Army during the months before the invasion. Many of them never returned from the front.

Different patterns emerged in southern Ukraine and Crimea after the war. In both cases, many colonists went back to their original kolkhozes. The first shock for the Ukrainian returnees came when the new, non-Jewish occupants of their former homes refused to move out. Even more devastating for the former colonists, the local and republican administrations denied them permission to resettle.121 As a result, very few (if any) Jewish colonists reestablished themselves in Ukraine. The Crimean experience differed appreciably. Here, large contingents of former colonists repopulated a number of the kolkhozes. Among these, some resettled in their vacant homes. In cases where indigenous families had occupied the Jews’ homes, the returnees received alternate accommodations. Estimates on the proportion of Crimean returnees vary wildly; in general, sources in closer proximity to Crimea cite higher proportions. Greater consensus emerges, however, on the disproportionately high number of leadership positions that the returnees assumed in the postwar kolkhozes. In addition, some Agro-Joint agronomists who had survived the purges and returned from the wartime evacuation received jobs in the Soviet economic ministries.122

The return of some Jewish families did not revitalize the prewar compact settlement blocs. Following the reconquest by the Soviet armies, the autonomous Jewish districts in Ukraine and Crimea lost their official status. More important, the war fundamentally changed the composition of the former colonies and had, in effect, reduced the Jews to small pockets within some of the ethnic Russian kolkhozes. Furthermore, it appears that assimilation was now as marked among the former colonists as among their urban brethren after 1944. Nonetheless, identifiable Jewish populations existed, at least in the kolkhozes of the Krasnogvardeiskoe district (formerly Telman), in the immediate postwar years.

For reasons that are still not entirely clear, the Jewish population of the kolkhozes in northern Crimea fell rapidly after 1948. One possibility is that the pull to the cities increased once the quality of life there began to rise above that in the rural areas. As a result, most of the returnees from Central Asia uprooted themselves again within a few years, often moving to Simferopol—the political, cultural, and educational capital of Crimea. Another explanation has it that conditions in the kolkhozes deteriorated as waves of antisemitic settlers from western Ukraine came to the area in the early 1950s. Evidently, Jews felt less vulnerable to such pressure in the cities.

Links between official Soviet antisemitism and Crimea first manifested
themselves immediately after the war. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC), a group of prominent Soviet Jews established by the government during the war, began in 1944 to consider the establishment of a Jewish republic in Crimea. With still-fresh memories of the success Agro-Joint achieved in the region before 1941, the leaders of the JAFC came to the conclusion that the creation of such a republic would be the best way to accelerate the postwar recovery of Soviet Jewry. Briefly encouraged by renewed interest on the part of the JDC for the “republican” idea, the JAFC nonetheless found no steady support in the Kremlin, and the plan had withered away by the close of 1944.

Whatever the outcome of renewed Jewish land settlement, the paranoid postwar Stalinist regime could not tolerate the real or perceived potential of the JAFC as a focal point of Jewish nationalist sentiments. Much like Komzet during the interwar period, the JAFC had become an “address” for Soviet Jews in lieu of any alternative to represent their collective interests. Worried by an upsurge in Zionist sympathies among Soviet Jews in the second half of 1948, the regime disbanded the committee and concocted evidence to demonize it in the midst of the general antinationalist and “anticosmopolitan” campaign. The party included the proposal of the JAFC for a Jewish republic in Crimea four years earlier as grounds for the arrest of its leaders in late 1948. The persecution of the JAFC opened an era, unprecedented in Soviet rule, of official and undisguised antisemitism. The regime’s resurrection of the “republican” (Crimean) myth became one more factor in the all-encompassing assault on Jewish culture. A military tribunal convicted and shot all but one of the leaders of the JAFC in August 1952 for their part in this so-called Crimean Plot.

At the end of that year, the state renewed the onslaught on what remained of the Jewish leadership. A diverse group of Jewish political, social, and cultural elites in Moscow were arrested and confronted with fabricated evidence that tied them to an American-Jewish conspiracy against the Soviet government—an episode known widely as the Doctors’ Plot. Only Stalin’s death in March 1953 ended rumors (of unclear foundation) that these arrests might lead to a full-scale repression or the exile of Soviet Jews to Siberia. The prosecution of the JAFC and the storm of the Doctors’ Plot created an ominous environment of conspiracy in the Kremlin; the image of Crimea as a potential American-Jewish bridgehead in the USSR persisted among Soviet leaders until considerably after Stalin’s death. This, in effect, closed the door on open JDC activity in the USSR until the last years of communist rule.

The postwar experience of the colonists reinforces conclusions from the prewar period: the policy and behavior of the Kremlin toward its rural Jews must
be disaggregated from general assumptions about the Soviet state. Just as Moscow exercised a double-edged policy toward Agro-Joint and the settlements during the prewar years, clear distinctions remained after 1945 between the “Jewish question” and the treatment of Jewish kolkhozniki. In practice, official antisemitism in the Kremlin coexisted with the returnees’ integration into Crimean academic and professional life. Moreover, even if the returnees constituted only a fraction of those who had been evacuated, their homecoming substantially annuls the claim among Zionist authors that the colonists never adapted to agriculture.¹²⁷

Departure from the Soviet Union did not dim the enthusiasm of the JDC for colonization as a solution for the European refugee crisis. It earmarked the residual $1 million left from the ASJFSR for this purpose. As early as 1937, the Joint began considering safe havens for Germany’s Jews in Latin America, Madagascar, and the Philippines. Joseph Rosen himself was dispatched to survey some of these sites before and after his final visit to the USSR in mid-1938. The experiences with Agro-Joint in Soviet Russia had convinced him that only territorial solutions, not mere colonization, justified the effort required for mass immigration. As he discovered, however, no such avenues opened for the refugees on the eve of World War II. Consequently, Rosen was only able to institute a small colonization program in the Dominican Republic. There, the JDC facilitated immigration for several hundred German Jews in 1940.¹²⁸ Joseph Rosen never recovered from the malaria he contracted during these months in Latin America. The ASJFSR officially dissolved on December 9, 1948; Agro-Joint followed in May 1952.¹²⁹

CONCLUSION

The last six years of organized Jewish agricultural settlement in Crimea and southern Ukraine coincided with a most volatile and dangerous period in Soviet history. Throughout these years, the state exhibited as many signs of weakness as of strength in the countryside. This situation enabled Agro-Joint to shield and advance the colonists until its departure in 1937–1938. Of greater and lasting importance, a combination of unique political factors kept the Jewish compact settlement blocs and the vast majority of colonists above the tide of political repression, even if the purges struck down many Agro-Joint employees. In much the same way, the Jewish kolkhozes show that the rhetoric of Russification and secularization from Moscow was one thing, and implementation in the geographic periphery was another.
Two concerns guided Soviet decisions on the Jewish kolkhozes in the late 1930s. On one hand, Soviet suspiciousness led to the replacement of Agro-Joint, Komzet, and Ozet with the more obedient NKVD and Narkomzem. On the other hand, and more important for the colonists, these successor bodies left no doubt that the state welcomed, or at least accepted, the colonies. The fate of foreign service organizations and their local personnel was thus not synonymous with the experience of the Jewish kolkhozes around the Black Sea during the prewar years.¹³⁰

Soviet-Jewish farmers plowed the fields of northern Crimea up to the autumn of 1941, both in practice and in more abstract forms. They represented a hybrid of shtetl commercialism, Agro-Joint mechanization, and the new Soviet society. Although most young people left the kolkhozes in search of higher education, a permanent core of successful colonists was forged on the steppe, more akin to the model Soviet kolkhoznik than were most of the indigenous peasants. Moscow’s campaign of popularization produced a picture of the “new” Soviet-Jewish farmer rooted to the land, at the cutting edge of the rural economy. The results obtained by those who stayed in the kolkhozes largely substantiated this image.
Max Belenky, one of the original American members of Joseph Rosen’s tractor teams, sensed in 1924 that Jewish colonization was on the verge of something grand. He had seen much enthusiasm among the young settlers—they did not want to “sell air” as their parents had done. “Going to the land” had given them a new lease on life; even neighboring non-Jewish villagers in southern Ukraine had begun to see the newcomers in a positive light.¹ At least through Belenky’s eyes, anything was then possible.

Whatever its accomplishments, though, we now know that agricultural colonization did not redirect Jewish history and was never the most important component in Soviet-Jewish life. Nonetheless, this movement was significant on its own merits; it cannot be dismissed, derogated, or demonized, especially as the bogey in the representation of many Zionist leaders during the interwar period. However important, the rebirth of the State of Israel should not entirely eclipse non-Zionist activity in Jewish historiography. With the opening of Soviet archives, the previous barrier to the study of this and other episodes in Soviet-Jewish history no longer exists.
Joseph Rosen was an impressive man, without whom colonization would have been inconceivable. But he was no magician. Several preconditions were necessary to make the three sides of the triangle described in this book—the settlers, the foreign philanthropies led by the JDC, and the Soviet regime—join together successfully in a mass colonization program. It first needed a large pool of volunteers from the former Pale; given the ravages of war, the restrictive immigration policies in the West, and the Bolshevik laws governing lishentsy, these were plentiful during the early 1920s. The Black Sea littoral more than satisfied the second demand—an alluring site. Colonization also required a favorable political formula: the regime had to see enough potential benefit from foreign aid to go forward while recognizing that it had insufficient strength to support the project on its own. If the state had controlled the Jewish colonies from the start, they would have become as downtrodden as the surrounding villages. A wealthy foreign patron was also an absolute necessity. Without this unusual combination of circumstances, Jewish agricultural resettlement would have been just another tale of internal migration in the early years of the Soviet Union.

COLONIZATION: A VIEW FROM ABOVE

A unique fusion of visionaries and activists on both sides of the Atlantic drove the colonization enterprise forward. Most of the Komzet and JDC leaders had a previous history of identification with the ideals of productivization or of Jewish nationalism. In short order, however, grand visions of a reborn Israelite farmer or of a Jewish republic were put aside. Even if the leaders of Komzet and the Joint lived in very different worlds, conditions on the ground brought them to support the same practical solution for the “Jewish question” in Soviet Russia.

The Bolshevik regime quickly capitalized on Joseph Rosen’s initiative because it was, after all, an easy way to address severe economic distress in the western borderlands. Perhaps more important, only Jewish colonization (via Agro-Joint) gave Soviet economic planners exactly what they needed: a working prototype for modern farming. It is not amiss to suggest an indirect link to the total collectivization campaign. Indeed, lessons that Soviet administrators, specialists, and political activists absorbed from the Agro-Joint project resembled some professional—but not political—aspects of the MTS and the kolkhoz superstructure. Using less evidence than that presented above, both contemporary and modern observers noticed the same similarities.2
In many ways, organized Jewish agricultural colonization had few drawbacks for the Soviets, and its adoption highlighted their tendency to form and shed local alliances with the changing calculus of political control in the periphery. At one level, it allowed Moscow to dilute problematic indigenous minorities in Crimea with “reliable” Jews. In a similar fashion, the state exploited the colonization in its preexisting center-periphery and nationalist conflict with the Tatar communists. Added to that, the Soviets used the colonies as a justification to destroy what remained of the Hehalutz movement. Because the Kremlin accepted almost anyone who could guarantee a modicum of rural order during the 1920s, it also gained from the surrogate authority of Agro-Joint around the Black Sea. The findings here therefore demonstrate the priority of power, not prejudice, in Soviet policy toward Jewish colonization.

The history of the colonization project also illuminates peculiarities of early Soviet officialdom. Uniform, coglike cadres did not staff the middle and upper echelons of the political hierarchies; rather, the Soviet bureaucracy was highly heterogeneous in mentality, background, and behavior. As a result, Jewish colonization enjoyed a bountiful network of supporters within the emerging Soviet elites. This constellation simultaneously facilitated the success of Agro-Joint in negotiations with Moscow and made possible a steady flow of information from the colonies to the Kremlin. No less important for our understanding of the period, Soviet appreciation for the colonization project had grown to such an extent that the colonies themselves did not suffer even after Stalin’s regime swept away these patrons of Agro-Joint in the 1930s. The fortunes of Komzet also reflect the odd state of affairs in the early Soviet hierarchy. Overall, it failed in its titular mission: the supervision of Jewish colonization. Komzet did become, however, the focus for Russian-Jewish communal sentiments in the absence of a better alternative, particularly after the liquidation of the Evsektsiia in 1930.3

Judging from the case of these colonies, the Stalinist regime did not—however much it may have wished—exercise “totalitarian” control over daily life during the 1920s and 1930s. As recent studies of collectivization have shown, the growth of dictatorial rule at the center was accompanied by both spasmodic repression and socioeconomic neglect in the countryside. For their part, the Jewish farms experienced a distinctly more benign side of Soviet rule than their non-Jewish neighbors and most Soviet-Jewish communities.4 In and around the Agro-Joint colonies, the real source of rural power and social coherence was situated neither in the selsoviets nor in the national autonomous districts mandated from the Kremlin. Rather, the center of Jewish identity and economic or-
ganization was the unofficial compact settlement bloc—a unit whose authority at the local level was neither formalized nor restricted before 1941.

From all indications, one cannot avoid the conclusion that this same Stalinist state co-opted far more of its young citizens with the aid of the schoolbook rather than of the pistol. Whether they left the colonies or not, most of the youth jettisoned religious observance within ten years. Moreover, if their parents often viewed the Soviet regime with ambivalence, the young colonists for the most part willingly leaped into the national economic and political life of the USSR. In effect, the state transformed a generation of potential critics (with firsthand, unpleasant memories from years as lishentsy) into dedicated servants of the country's industries and bureaucracies.

Far from the colonies, the project exacerbated the key problems confronting interwar American Jewry. Even if the conflict with Zionists never debilitated Agro-Joint, it resulted in a great irony of the period: the JDC found cooperation with the Kremlin easier than with most Zionists and other philanthropists in the Diaspora. Over time, the colonization debate strengthened both the Joint and American Zionism by forcing the JDC to pioneer and perfect fund-raising techniques. Though damaging in the short term, the Zionists benefited when men like David Brown joined forces with them in the late 1930s and applied aggressive fund-raising tactics to their cause. Complete cessation of the venomous rhetoric between the Joint and American Zionists, however, came only after the outbreak of war in Europe.5

Steady progress demanded moral courage and political acumen from the architects of colonization. At first glance, the JDC's decision to skirt such thorny issues as Soviet antireligious policy can be seen as a reflection of institutional or personal cowardice. But given the conditions, these moves can just as easily be interpreted as judicious Realpolitik; Joseph Rosen, Felix Warburg, James Rosenberg, and others did what they could to further relief and productivization. Guided by their professional training and experience, they cut their losses on unwinnable issues. Agro-Joint never planned to remain as a permanent presence in Russia. Stalin may have pushed it out of the door, but the Americans had already been engaged in their own process of withdrawal.

COLONIZATION: A VIEW FROM THE GRASSROOTS

The Agro-Joint episode is a fine canvas on which to assess Soviet rural policy during the interwar era. In the 1920s, the meaning of the NEP was governmen-
tal neglect for most of the non-Jewish neighbors of the Agro-Joint colonies. When, in the next decade, the state intervened forcefully in the countryside, it did more damage than good in attempts to modernize and cow the Soviet peasantry. Throughout these years, Agro-Joint brought systematic progress to its clients. Through its delivery of modern agricultural methods to the Crimean countryside, it reminded the contemporary Soviet leaders, the neighboring population, and the historian of what was possible in the USSR, despite the state. The success of the Agro-Joint colonies is also a reminder of what kept the Soviet periphery backward for so long.

How did the Jewish colonies endure the years of collectivization—a period recognized as the worst of ordeals for Russia’s countryside? In hindsight, it becomes clear that the basic features of life in the colonies, which had coalesced during the 1920s, remained firm until 1941. Cooperative tendencies clearly distinguished them during the NEP years from the indigenous villages. If their non-Jewish neighbors were backing away from the more traditional forms of cooperative associations just when the Bolsheviks unleashed their fateful assault on traditional village life in 1929–1930, among Jewish colonists “collectivization was one of the qualities of the settlements” and became one of the most important instruments of their survival.\(^6\) The colonists’ experience with cooperative arrangements before that horrific winter proved to be of fundamental significance. Most important, the institutional structures of the NEP era stabilized the colonies and greatly insulated their members from the worst abuses of the government collectivizers.

National economic trends and local pressures influenced daily life far more than high politics. Jewish colonists knew little and cared even less about the eugenic or “republican” dreams grafted onto colonization by the Joint or by communist party activists. The settlers and the Agro-Joint agronomists were also too busy with daily affairs to be troubled by nuances of the center-periphery conflict between Moscow and Simferopol. In Crimea, early hostility from the indigenous neighbors melted away despite stubborn opposition to colonization from Tatar communists in the obkom. In the final analysis, the level of unemployment at the points of origin was the salient factor governing the “push” of recruits to the Jewish settlements, just as the “pull” of the urban economy determined the rate of upward flight. The Jewish colonies also revealed the underside of early Soviet life. As seen through the archival documents, the pressures on all of society meant that colonization often brought out the worst in people. Indeed, the range of social problems and of stratification grew as the system invested kolkhoz officials with new power over the members.
Joseph Rosen’s colonies foreshadowed broader rural phenomena that would emerge during the 1930s and beyond. Despite the chaos unleashed during total collectivization, life remained manageable for the Jewish kolkhozes insofar as they capitalized on opportunities in non-grain crops. They also were part of a large, “second” economy—led by intensive crops, commercial livestock, and cottage industries—that existed outside the framework of state grain procurements and the MTS. In these cases and others, Agro-Joint colonies applied nonviolent defense mechanisms (first toward Agro-Joint agronomists and then toward Soviet officials) that the surrounding settlements mastered only years, sometimes decades, later.

What of the family unit in the colonies? The strongest demographic change of the era—youth flight—determined much of what happened there. Such movement was, in fact, a chronic problem of the Soviet village, intensified by the high priority the Jewish colonists gave to education. Because most colonist-parents had risked resettlement precisely to attain professional mobility for their children, they readily offered the younger generation to the colossal labor needs of the Five-Year Plans. After the shock of relocation subsided, colonization erased some of the gender inequalities brought from the shtetl. Through education, most young female colonists entered the mainstream of Soviet society and detached themselves from patriarchal households. Ambitious young women who remained in the colonies empowered themselves as employees of the state, the party, or Agro-Joint. The rest could find a relative sanctuary of gender equality in farm branches monopolized by women. But female colonists could not totally cast off ingrained inequality in the home; they had to cope with farm work as well as the bulk of household chores. This dual burden was endemic to Soviet society, partially offset everywhere by daycare facilities and some communal services.

Colonization forces us to reconsider earlier views on cultural life at the Soviet periphery. If, over time, the Jewish colonists abandoned religion and the use of Yiddish, the cause was often more bottom-up than top-down. Private religious practice remained safe for those who wished it, but the reservoir of observant colonists was often confined to the aged members of the community. For the most part, young Jewish kolkhozniki did not wait for government campaigns to abandon traditions. Nonetheless, the compact settlement blocs survived the purges with their cultural and social coherence intact despite the murder of prominent Jewish cultural figures, the antireligious campaigns ordered from above, and the process of internationalization in Jewish kolkhozes elsewhere in the country. This development should not be taken for granted,
nor attributed to the existence of titular Jewish districts. In the Birobidzhan Autonomous Oblast, for example, the high judicial status granted to the Jewish nationality did not deter massive intermarriage or the rapid loss of all signs of religious life.9

COLONIZATION: A REASSESSMENT

Personal and institutional factors have marginalized the Agro-Joint episode in the grand narrative of twentieth-century Jewish history. Simply stated, very few people capable of relating the story survived beyond 1952; the senior staff of Agro-Joint, Komzet, and Ozet perished during the purges of 1937 and 1938. After the war, the regime murdered the leading Soviet-Jewish cultural elites. For reasons both political and objective, the many dozens of Hehalutz commune members whom Rosen helped to enter Palestine in the second half of the 1920s made only a negligible contribution to the memory of Agro-Joint after they arrived in the Promised Land. At the most basic level, these halutzim had a fundamentally different experience compared with the mass of colonists: the regime repressed the former whereas it applauded the latter.

Until the fall of the Soviet Union, the memory of Agro-Joint appeared destined to fade away. Most important, the government systematically discredited the Joint from the late 1940s onward, making serious study of the episode of colonization in the USSR unthinkable.10 As for the colonists, those who returned to Crimea after 1944 were no longer a uniform community. As individual Jews in non-Jewish surroundings, the returnees had little interest in upholding the memory of Agro-Joint, particularly in the antisemitic environment from late 1948 into the early 1950s. Once occupied during and after World War II by non-Jews, the former colonies lost any obvious justification for memorialization. It must also be remembered that Stalin’s brutal deportation of the Tatar and other minority communities to Central Asia in 1944 attracted most scholarly and journalistic attention in the ensuing decades.

Among America’s Jews, memories also dimmed. During World War II, American Jewry committed itself wholeheartedly to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Consequently, non-Zionist subjects left the front page of Jewish historiography. As leaders of the JDC in the postwar years dedicated themselves to the rescue of Holocaust survivors and the building of the State of Israel, very little time or interest remained for the defunct Soviet-Jewish colonies. Finally, the bogus accusations leveled during Stalin’s last years against the JDC dampened any residual desire to commemorate Agro-Joint.11
Balanced appraisal of Jewish colonization in Soviet Russia must transcend simple juxtaposition with the history of Zionism. It should focus on the historical context and the parameters employed by the parties engaged in the enterprise. As the preeminent agronomist from the Yishuv reasoned in 1928: “Anyone who judges [settlement in the USSR and Palestine] from a single vantage point necessarily discriminates against one of them. Only if we see the Russian colonization as a humanitarian project for tens of thousands of families in Russia, and the settlement in Palestine as a step toward creation of a Jewish national-spiritual center for all Jews—only then we can properly judge them.”

Because the captains of the JDC never envisioned Agro-Joint as a permanent body, its end is not tantamount to failure. In 1938, it left behind eighty-six demographically stable, prosperous Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea and approximately twice that number in southern Ukraine, under the reasonably competent leadership of state agencies. Barring the German invasion, the colonies might well have prospered for many years.

Criteria used to assess other voluntary, cooperative, agricultural movements underscore the effect of these Jewish colonies. Yaacov Oved has argued that judgments regarding experiments in communal settlement should never be absolute, but should rather consider their specific goals and circumstances. The managers and colonists in Crimea never intended to change the world or Soviet Jewry. The goal was not a utopia (barring the three quantitatively insignificant Hehalutz communes and the Yungvald commune) but the creation of new homes for desperate Jews. We now know that Rosen’s organization provided the colonists not just with loans, machinery, and new agricultural techniques; Agro-Joint also shielded them from the horrors of collectivization, dekulakization, and the purges.

Qualitative, not quantitative, measurements reveal the extent of Agro-Joint’s contribution. As the moving force behind organized colonization (as well as in the smaller agricultural and industrial operations nearer the shtetls), it probably settled on the land fewer than the 250,000 people frequently cited by contemporary JDC leaders and some secondary sources. Including its industrial training enterprises and its aid to agricultural plots adjacent to the shtetls, Agro-Joint did provide direct aid to approximately 200,000 Jews. Compared with the total Jewish population in the USSR at the time—slightly more than 3 million people—this number might seem insignificant. But colonization did not just save 200,000 people from poverty and the discriminatory lishenets status, it also propelled colonists into respected professions and improved the quality of life for the Jews who remained in the former shtetls. In addition, although the
parties to the project never raised the issue, the rate of intermarriage in the colonies was considerably lower than in the former Pale during the interwar period. As discussed in Chapter 6, comparison with the fate of Jewish colonization in Belorussia and Birobidzhan further elucidates the value of Agro-Joint for those it served in Crimea and southern Ukraine.16

Additional factors enter into the final tabulation of Agro-Joint’s value. First, Rosen’s timely intervention on behalf of the young Zionists under the heel of the Evsektsiia in the late 1920s meant that “hundreds or thousands of these young [Hehalutz members] are in Israel or all over the world.”17 The organized labor movement in Israel, as well as several kibbutzim and moshavim, thereby owe him a debt. Next, if Agro-Joint did nothing else during these hard times, according to the JDC’s most vehement scholarly critic, then distribution to Soviet Jews of money sent by relatives in America was enough.18 Considerable evidence also suggests that the vibrancy, value, and international prestige of the colonization project probably softened repressive tendencies in Moscow toward the colonies and perhaps toward other aspects of Soviet-Jewish life. Finally, colonization kept the JDC engaged in Russia for some fifteen years longer than it had intended when the ARA terminated in 1922. Considering its contributions to Soviet Jewry, this factor alone made colonization a success.

Although the new image of Jews as colonists did not really fit the majority of Soviet Jewry, it changed at least to some degree how non-Jews viewed the Jewish minority and legitimized a self-confident Jewish national identity during an era of growing assimilatory pressures from above. The deep resonance of this imagery returned with a vengeance during the period of the “Crimean Plot” from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. Owing to the power and frequency of the image of the “new” Jew cultivated between the world wars, this otherwise preposterous “conspiracy” unmasked by the regime may have been received with considerable credence among the Soviet public. For many, the idea of a flourishing, Jewish national entity in this strategic area was apparently plausible, and in the environment of high Stalinism, quite ominous. One can only observe with horror how the Soviet authorities cynically used Agro-Joint’s impressive legacy and the imagery it had produced as a pretext to destroy Jewish culture from 1948 to 1953. Even today, the lingering power of the image of the “new” Soviet Jew and his foreign benefactor infects the discourse of nationalists and antisemites in the former Soviet Union.

Organized Jewish colonization reignited an old debate in the Jewish world about nationalism, territorialism, and rebirth. It kept the JDC at the forefront of American-Jewish life and hinted at a reversal of the ethnic disintegration ev-
ident in the Diaspora. Agro-Joint lasted for thirteen years in the Soviet Union for two reasons: it provided order in a geographic periphery where the state had little authority well into the 1930s, and it brought an exceedingly rare combination of expertise and matériel to a nation longing for quick economic “fixes.” The Soviets studied and tried to emulate parts of this model with a professional network more suited to the eighteenth than the twentieth century. The colonists benefited most, for agrarianization, above all, was a means of survival and an early springboard into Soviet society.¹⁹

The Jewish kolkhozes demonstrated an underlying truth of Soviet life during this era: although the regime acted with lethal brutality toward anyone perceived as a potential threat, a majority of the working public (particularly in the countryside) remained outside its line of sight. In many ways, the state “discovered” rural Crimea only in the second half of the 1930s. And whatever the evils and loopholes of Stalinism, the Wehrmacht (and nothing else) terminated coherent Jewish life in the compact agricultural settlement blocs around the Black Sea. The end of the colonies was a result of the murderous actions of the German army, not a cautionary tale of failure or of Stalinist repression. Their history is that of adaptation to a complex and, at times, dangerous state—and of the generosity and determination displayed by Jews overseas.
Appendixes

APPENDIX 1. THE WESTERN USSR DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Courtesy of Tamar Soffer, Department of Geography, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
APPENDIX 2. AREAS OF JEWISH AGRICULTURAL COLONIZATION IN CRIMEA
AND SOUTHERN UKRAINE, 1923–1941

The colonies marked are a sampling derived from settlements mentioned in this book. Courtesy of Tamar Soffer, Department of Geography, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
## APPENDIX 3. CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1918</td>
<td>Narkomnats created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1918</td>
<td>Evsektsiia created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Iuli Gol'de writes first memorandum to Narkomzem on Jewish colonization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1921</td>
<td>X Party Congress launches korenizatsiia (reinforced by XII Party Congress in 1923) and NEP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 20, 1921</td>
<td>ARA signs agreement with the Soviet government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1921</td>
<td>Chicago Conference of the JDC ends palliative relief work and begins rehabilitation period in American-Jewish overseas relief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921–1922</td>
<td>Famine in the Volga region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early July 1922</td>
<td>JDC makes its first $100,000 appropriation for equipment and seeds in Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 7, 1922</td>
<td>JDC takes over many ARA operations in Ukraine under an agreement with the Ukrainian Sovnarkom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 20, 1922</td>
<td>Rosen signs agreement with the Ukrainian Sovnarkom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 21, 1922</td>
<td>JDC approves Rosen's request for $1.22 million designated for agricultural reconstruction work in Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 14, 1923</td>
<td>JCA agreement with the Soviet government to renew aid to old Kherson colonies and vocational schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 15, 1923</td>
<td>ARA liquidated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1923</td>
<td>Politburo discusses Abram Bragin's colonization proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923–1924</td>
<td>Period of spontaneous colonization to southern Ukraine and Crimea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Narkomnats abolished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24, 1924</td>
<td>Komzet formally established by Politburo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 17, 1924</td>
<td>JDC allocates $400,000 for a trial settlement project in Ukraine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21, 1924</td>
<td>JDC establishes Agro-Joint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August–September 1924</td>
<td>Komzet board appointed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 9, 1924</td>
<td>All-Union Sovnarkom gives Jews the right to settle on government land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28, 1924</td>
<td>Komzet decides to settle one thousand Jewish families in Crimea during 1925.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 29, 1924</td>
<td>First formal agreement between Agro-Joint and the Soviets (ratified by the All-Union Sovnarkom on December 16, 1924).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1925</td>
<td>Ozet established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1925</td>
<td>XIV Party Congress accepts “Socialism in One Country.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 9, 1925</td>
<td>ORT (Farband)–Komzet agreement (approved by the Soviet government in March 1926).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1926</td>
<td>Establishment of the first Jewish selsoviet in Ratendorf.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
February 8, 1926  JCA-Komzet agreement.
1927–1928  Removal, arrest, and execution of Veli Ibrahimov.
March 22, 1927  First Jewish national district established in Kalinindorf.
October 1927  XV Party Congress discusses collectivization.
February 8, 1928  Rosen formally declines Soviet request to participate in the development of Birobidzhan.
March 28, 1928  Soviet decree allots Birobidzhan for Jewish colonization.
Spring 1928  Grain procurement crisis begins.
October 1928  Start of the First Five-Year Plan.
November 13, 1928  ASJFSR registers in America as a joint stock corporation.
January 21, 1929  ASJFSR agreement signed through 1935.
April 1929  Soviet “Decree on Religious Associations.” XVI Party Congress determines that comprehensive collectivization requires almost all peasants to enter kolkhozes. Defeat of the Right Opposition.

Early summer 1929  Nationwide application of the Ural-Siberian method.
October 14, 1929  Komzet issues orders for the collectivization of Jewish settlements.
November 1929  Mobilization of the 25,000ers.
November 3, 1929  Stalin announces the “Great Turn.”
December 27, 1929  Stalin announces the “liquidation of kulaks as a class.”
Late 1929  Novo Zlatopol Jewish national district established. Agro-Joint replaces Ozet supervision of the Evpatoria region in Crimea.
1930  Cessation of JCA agricultural activity in the USSR.
January 1930  “Total” collectivization enacted by the Politburo.
January 30, 1930  Politburo decrees dekulakization.
March 2, 1930  Stalin’s article in Pravda, “Dizzy with Success.”
June 5, 1930  Government decree restores civil rights to about one-half of Jewish ishentsy.
July 14, 1930  Stalindorf Jewish national district established.
Late 1930  Agro-Joint leaves Ukraine.
December 1930  Aleksei Rykov removed from chairmanship of Sovnarkom.
February 15, 1931  Fraidorf Jewish national district established.
1932–1934  Nationwide famine; particularly severe in Ukraine.
May 20, 1932  Law allowing peasant trade.
December 27, 1932  Commencement of the internal passport system for all Soviet citizens, except kolkhozniki who are at least sixteen years old.
January 6, 1933  Agro-Joint officially returns to Ukraine.
April 14, 1933  Formal signing of renegotiated 1929 ASJFSR agreement.
November 17, 1933  U.S. government formally recognizes the USSR.
1933  Five-year extension of ORT-Komzet agreement on industrialization.
May 1934  Declaration of the Jewish Autonomous Region [oblast] in Birobidzhan.
December 1934  Assassination of Sergei Kirov ushers in the purges of the communist party.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 23, 1934</td>
<td>Soviet government cancels all debts incurred by collectives before January 1, 1933.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1935</td>
<td>First trial of Lev Kamenev and Grigorii Zinoviev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15, 1935</td>
<td>Larindorf Jewish national district established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1935</td>
<td>Agro-Joint discussions with Komzet on immigration of Jews from Germany to Birobidzhan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1935</td>
<td>Model Collective Farm Charter codifies what kolkhoz members can own, legalizes private plots, allows members to rent kolkhoz horses, and gives collective land to the kolkhoz in perpetuity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1936</td>
<td>Second trial of Kamenev and Zinoviev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 1936</td>
<td>Harvest failure in many regions; mini-famine in early 1937.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1936</td>
<td>“Stalin Constitution.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>New Crimean constitution ends the autonomy of the oblast for all practical purposes. Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) formally adopts Zionism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20, 1937</td>
<td>Soviet government forgives arrears on agricultural procurements for 1936.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 1937</td>
<td>First liquidation agreement signed with Ozet (goes into effect January 1, 1938).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1938</td>
<td>Soviets decline to renew agreement with ORT-Farband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late February 1938</td>
<td>Agro-Joint announces it will transfer its remaining assets to Ozet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 16, 1938</td>
<td>Komzet liquidated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2, 1938</td>
<td>Ozet liquidated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1938</td>
<td>Final Agro-Joint liquidation agreement in USSR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1941</td>
<td>German invasion of Crimea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 9, 1948</td>
<td>ASJFSR dissolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 1952</td>
<td>Agro-Joint dissolved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All citations of primary and secondary sources (except for newspapers) follow the “short” form. Full details for every work can be found in the bibliography. For brevity, all citations of oral interviews also appear in the “short” form in the notes. Full descriptions of the interviews are located in the “Oral History Interviews” section of the bibliography.

ABBREVIATIONS

AJA  American Jewish Archives
AJHS  Archive of the American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass.
BP   Jacob Billikopf Papers, Manuscript Collection 13, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio
GAARK  (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv pri Sovete Ministrov Avtonomnoi Respubliki Krym) The State Archive of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea; formerly TsGAK
GARF  (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii) The State Archive of the Russian Federation
ICJ   Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Oral History Division
INTRODUCTION

1. For more on tsarist policies and life in the Pale of Settlement, see Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*; Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews*; and Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*. Hundert and Bacon’s *The Jews in Poland and Russia* remains a standard bibliography of this subject.

2. The JDC is a nongovernmental, nondenominational Jewish philanthropy. For details concerning its creation and earliest programs, see Bauer, *My Brother’s Keeper*, 3–18.

3. According to Arcadius Kahan (*Essays in Jewish Social and Economic History*, 84, 102), demographic, economic, and political pressures triggered the mass emigration from Eastern Europe around the turn of the twentieth century. For other interpretations, see M. Mintz, “Mekomah shel tnuat ha-poalim,” 257; and Kuznets, “Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States,” 67, 88, 92.

4. By comparison, the Jewish National Fund owned approximately 250,000 acres of arable land in Palestine in May 1948—the moment of Israel’s independence. Between 1925 and 1931, the Soviet government allotted approximately 840,000 acres (341,000 hectares) to Jewish colonies in Crimea; see Gol’d, *Evrei-zemledel’tsy v Krymu*, 14.


6. Rogger, *Russia in the Age of Modernization and Revolution*, 183. For the traditional deliberations of liberal Russia on the “Jewish question,” see Klier, *Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question*; and Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia*.

8. For example, see Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, 77–79.
9. A. Etinger, *Im haklaim yehudim be-tefutsot*, 238; Yehudit Simhoni interview; Yeshayahu Simhoni, *Derekh zo halakhbi bab*, 11. The JCA (based in Paris) also supported Jewish agricultural colonization in Bessarabia, the Americas, and Palestine.
11. Stalin wrote that Jews constituted a nationality only on paper, that Zionism was a reactionary bourgeois movement, and that Yiddish was only a jargon.
12. For example, six members of the twenty-one-member All-Union Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) were of Jewish descent as of August 1917.
14. The average proportion of lishentsy in the rural USSR hovered between 5 and 7.7 percent in the second half of the 1920s; see Kimerling, “Civil Rights and Social Policy,” 27. The Joint believed that approximately 70 percent of Soviet Jews fell under the lishentsy category in 1924; see AJA, WP Box 222/5, p. 12 (Rosen’s report to JDC and Agro-Joint trustees, August 25, 1925). Soviet sources counted as many as 42 percent lishentsy among Ukrainian Jews in 1926–1927; see Kimerling, “Civil Rights and Social Policy,” 44. Benjamin Pinkus (*Jews of the Soviet Union*, 93) concluded that the rate was considerably higher. According to Salo Baron (*The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, 190–91), disenfranchisement reached 45 percent of the former Pale population as late as 1926–1927. The state gradually eased restrictions on lishentsy, finally enfranchising all victims of tsarist oppression in November 1930. Other aspects of discrimination persisted until the mid-1930s.
16. Benjamin Nathans (*Beyond the Pale*, 2, 375–77) has argued that Jewish integration into Russian society began considerably before 1917.
17. Agro-Joint existed nominally from 1924 until 1952.
19. In contrast to the narrow studies of Crimea and southern Ukraine, more comprehensive scholarship exists on the cases of Birobidzhan and Belorussia. See Weinberg, *Stalin’s Forgotten Zion*; Levavi, *Birobizhan*; Kuchenbecker, *Zionismus ohne Zion*; Shmeruk, “Ha-kibutz ha-yehudi.”
20. These limited sources resulted in the frequent replication of Agro-Joint historiography from 1942 until now. See the progression begun in Akiva Etinger’s first synthetic account of the Crimean colonization (*Im haklaim yehudim*). Etinger was then cited by Feingold (*Time for Searching*, 178–87) and Silver (“Mi-dfus pail le-dfus savil,” 226–30). Mark A. Raider (*Emergence of American Zionism*, 194–95) subsequently cited Feingold. Former colonists who emigrated to Israel left a number of important memoirs that are enlight-
ningen only on the small Zionist pioneer (Hehalutz) communes that preceded Agro-Joint in Crimea.

21. Most caustic in this regard is Zosja Szajkowski, _The Mirage of American Jewish Aid in Soviet Russia, 1917–1939_. To his credit, Szajkowski made extensive use of Yiddish-language newspapers in the United States and pioneered study of the relevant archives in America and Israel. Zionist publicists inside Mandatory Palestine tended to emphasize the worst aspects of Jewish life and agricultural colonization in the USSR, particularly from the late 1920s. See Dotan, _Adumim_, 162–64.


23. Small parts of the archival puzzle remain locked in basements of the successor agencies to the KGB in the Russian Federation and Ukraine. While this information may be of considerable interest, particularly the interrogation reports of Agro-Joint personnel arrested in 1937–1938, such files are so notoriously corrupted and distorted that they cannot radically alter the general picture of colonization.

24. Details on the interviews appear in the “Oral History Interviews” section of the bibliography.


CHAPTER 1. FROM SHTETL TO COLONY, 1917–1924

1. Hosking, _The Russian Constitutional Experiment_, 58. In fact, the Bolsheviks simply accepted and codified the peasants’ seizure of land during the revolution. The regime created three types of land holding after the revolution: land under perpetual productive labor without rent, farmland rented from the state, and large land grants set aside mainly for foreign investors. The first form appealed most to the planners of colonization; see Levavi, “Atudat ha-karka,” 62.


3. Heinzen, “Professional Identity,” 10–11. There were approximately 600 tractors in the empire in 1917, of which 444 remained serviceable in 1922.

4. According to Vladlen Izmozik (“Politicheskii kontrol’ v Sovetskoi Rossi,” 44), the GPU knew that it lacked the workforce to fulfill its missions in the early 1920s. Less than one official oversaw an average NEP-era village soviet (selsoviet) of approximately 350 fami-


6. Ball (*Russia’s Last Capitalists*) shows that the level of stratification was far less than the official rhetoric or popular myth. There were approximately 120 major armed peasant disorders in 1921.

7. Shmelev, *Agrarnaia politika i agrarnye otnoshenia*, 117–29; Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 25, 98–101; Nove, *An Economic History*, 101; Davies, *Socialist Offensive*, 5, 9, 13. Parcelization and primitive crop rotation remained the norm in the NEP-era village. By 1927, only 17 percent of fields underwent multiple crop rotation, and only 20 percent of the land in the RSFSR had been consolidated. Most households did not own or rent horse-drawn machines. Much like the tsarist era, the technological deficiency was most acute in the non-Slavic regions of the Soviet Union.

8. It seems that state-sponsored collectives were less popular than private, ad hoc arrangements. The limited workforce available to the state cooperative agencies probably contributed to this phenomenon. The number of full-fledged peasant cooperatives and communes dropped steadily from 1918 to 1927.


12. Mordechai Altshuler (*Evsektsiia*, 13–14, 359) observed that the Evsektsiia formed spontaneously during World War I. The only major departure from the Jewish mainstream was the Evsektsiia’s acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat.


14. The XII Party Congress (1923) adopted korenizatsiia as the official nationality policy. For further description of early Jewish national institutions, see Pinkus, *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 49–63. The Kremlin abolished the Narkomnats in 1924 and transferred its responsibilities to the national sections of the party. The latter wielded more authority but less maneuvering room than the Narkomnats.


16. Simon, *Nationalism and Policy*, 147; Pinkus, “The Extra-Territorial National Minorities in the Soviet Union,” 76. According to this constitution, each of the sixteen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) had the right to secede, which, of course, they could not really exercise. Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR) and oblasti (provinces) were the
next level of administrative unit, followed by raiony (districts). The complexities of kor-
enizatsiia and its implementation are explored in Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*.

17. Klepinin, *Sel’skoe khoziaistvo Kryma*, 4–5; Ragatskin, “Sotsialisticheskoe sel’skoe khozi-
aiystvo,” 134; YIVO, RG 358/104, p. 4 (Komzet to Sovnarkom RSFSR, 1923). This report
noted much quicker recovery in southern Ukraine. David Marples and David Duke
(“Ukraine, Russia, and the Question of Crimea,” 265) found that the transfer of former
estates to peasants eased land hunger in Crimea.

He apparently overestimated the depopulation in Crimea but accurately contrasted its
low rural population density to Ukraine and Belorussia.

19. As an autonomous republic of the USSR, Crimea possessed parallel, though subordi-
nate, party and state organs to the central authority. The Crimean constitution of 1937
ended Crimean autonomy from Moscow for all practical purposes; see Kas’ianov, *Kryms-
kaia ASSR*, 9–10. The co-option of the nationalist Milli Firka resembled the Bolshevik
practice elsewhere during the civil war; see Suny and Martin, *State of Nations*, 10. The
gravitation of Milli Firka to the Soviets may also have reflected a tendency of the time in
regional politics throughout the Soviet Union—an attempt by a regional group to over-
come its local political competitors through the acquisition of a relatively powerful pa-
tron. See Adeeb Khalid, “Nationalizing the Revolution in Central Asia: The Transfor-

20. For a full description, see Williams, “A Community Reimagined,” 230–33. See also
Marples and Duke, “Ukraine, Russia, and the Question of Crimea,” 265. For an older in-
terpretation, see Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union*, 184–90. Unlike the Tatar ASSR in
the Volga region, the title “Crimean ASSR” did not include an ethnic reference.

Social and Economic History*, 48–49. Tatars constituted 60 percent of the civilian casual-
ties during the civil war because of their disproportion in the countryside. Illiteracy
among Tatars reached 70 percent.

22. The arrival of Germans paralleled the settlement of Jewish colonists in the Kherson and
Odessa regions, discussed above. In 1917, there were 314 German colonies in Crimea,
containing almost thirty-one thousand (predominantly Lutheran) colonists. Catherine
the Great invited an earlier wave of German colonists to the Volga region in 1763. See
53; Eisenbraun, “The German Settlements in the Crimea,” 22–23; Ahlborn, “People from
Heilbronn Settled in Siberia,” 36–38; Stumpp, *Die deutschen Siedlungen auf der Halbinsel Krim*;

23. During the 1920s, Komzet leaders presented material to the Politburo on dozens of occa-
sions. The political heavyweights in Moscow who supported colonization included Shi-
mon Dimanshtein (a senior advisor on nationalities affairs, Stalin’s one-time assistant at
the Narkomnats, among the founders of Komzet, and a prolific author on nationalities
issues), A. I. Vainshtein (senior official in the Soviet Commissariat of Finance), M. Kat-
senelenbogen (member of the State Bank board and a Central Committee staff mem-
ber), Nikolai Semashko (Commissar of Public Health), Grigorii Kaminskii (the Com-
missar of Public Health after Semashko, and Rosen’s brother-in-law), V. P. Vil’iams (a
highly respected agronomist), and A. L. Sheinman (member of the Gosplan secretariat and former president of the State Bank). See JDC Archive 52a, p. 1 (Rosen to Rosenberg and Baerwald, December 11, 1937); Bein interview, 13; “Kak Rossia poteriala Krym,” De-
lovaia zhizn’ 10 (1998): 27. For more on Sheinman, see GARF f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 100, l. 4 (report of the Komzet meeting with the foreign delegation of Agro-Joint, May 25, 1926); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 546, l. 7 (protocol no. 10 of Politburo meeting, February 11, 1926), d. 683, l. 3 (protocol no. 21 of Politburo meeting, April 19, 1928); and Davies, So-
cialist Offensive, 57n.

24. The most significant among them was Komzet’s first chairman, Petr Germochenovich Smidovich, a respected “old Bolshevik” who was also a member of the Central Commit-
tee Presidium and held numerous other official posts. Early colonization benefited
greatly from the cooperation of the Registrar of Associations in Crimea. See Levine in-
terview, 10–11; and, “Memoir from Mishmar” (Lavon Institute, Benjamin Vest Collec-
tion, IV-104-53-71), 11.

25. Larin’s writings concerning colonization showed a close familiarity with events on the
ground and belief that such methods should be implemented on a nationwide scale. Larin was Nikolai Bukharin’s father-in-law and a confidant of Rykov, Avel’ Enukidze (secretary of the Presidium of VTsIK, purged in 1935), and Leonid Krasin (foreign trade commissar and an original member of Komzet); see Pines, “Larin,” Davar, February 9, 1932, p. 2. As a native of Crimea, Larin may have had added enthusiasm for Jewish resettle-
ment in the peninsula.

26. Between July 1928 and April 1929, Stalin and his supporters among party intellectuals, young communists, and part of the urban proletariat forced the Right Opposition (headed by Bukharin, Rykov, and the trade unionist Mikhail Tomskii) from high gov-
ernment positions and removed most leading nonparty experts in the major government
departments. The Right Opposition wanted to continue the NEP, whereas Stalin insist-
ed on massive industrialization, which was to be funded by agricultural exports. See Carr, Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926–29, vol. 2, 75–99; Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution, 270–336; Weiner, “Razmychka,” 151–52. Unlike the more abrupt end for most of his political colleagues during the 1930s, Larin died of natural
causes in 1932, still a respected member of the party.

27. In the early 1920s, one railroad track passed from north to south, with single spurs to the
east and west. Four paved roads connected Simferopol with the resort towns along the
southern coastline. According to Fisher (The Crimean Tatars, 136–38), the famine of
1921–1922 hit Crimea’s Tatars with particular intensity.

28. Even in the late 1920s, half the Soviet peasantry was still illiterate. By contrast, the Ger-
mans in the Crimea had extraordinarily high literacy rates (71 percent); that of Tatars was
58 percent. The rural rate was undoubtedly lower, but contemporary statistics did not
disaggregate rural from urban populations. See Nikol’skii, Krym: naselenie, 16.

29. Williams, “A Homeland Lost,” 4, 547, 554. The demographic concentration of non-Tatars
was highest in the northern half of the peninsula. The two ethnic branches of Tatars in the
Crimea—steppe Tatars in the northern plains and lowland Tatars along the coast—con-
sider themselves distinct groups. Neither should be confused with Volga Tatars. The author
thanks Roza Airychinskaia, from the State Archive of Crimea, for this information.
30. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR*, 178, 369, 491. Only 192 of the 5,900 party members in Crimea in 1922 were Tatars. In 1927, 0.5 percent of Soviet-Germans belonged to the party. See Kas’ianov, *Krymskaia ASSR*, 4.

31. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, 135–36, 138–40. Simon claimed (Nationalism and Policy, 79) that the Tatar communists achieved significant control over Crimea through education and administration, but this view holds only for the urban and southern coastal regions. Throughout the Soviet Union, large internal migrations of ethnic groups or the deliberate incitement of hostility between minorities within national autonomous regions limited the power of majority nationalities during the NEP. See Simon, passim.

32. GARG, f. r-1235, op. 140, d. 219, l. 71 (TsIK information on Crimea, November 1920 to April 1925); Williams, “A Community Reimagined,” 233–34; Mattityahu Mintz (conversation with the author, Tel Aviv University, November 21, 1999). Though voiced only in closed meetings, even Tatar communist leaders lamented the strength of spiritual interests among their ethnic brethren. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 463, l. 79 (protocol of obkom bureau, August 27, 1927).

33. GARG, f. r-1235, op. 140, d. 219, ll. 70–73 (TsIK information on Crimea, November 1920 to April 1925); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 462, l. 162 (report of the obkom meeting, June 29, 1926).

34. Galiev was the highest-ranking Muslim in the communist party hierarchy, a member of the Tatar ASSR TsIK, and a close associate of Stalin. In 1924, he was the first prominent party functionary to be arrested for an alleged conspiracy with Ibrahimov (and other prominent Muslim republican leaders) to create a sovereign pan-Islamic state. Galiev never emerged from prison. See Simon, Nationalism and Policy, 77–78; Williams, “A Homeland Lost,” 555.


38. AJA, WP, Box 222/5, pp. 34, 36 (Rosen’s report to executive committee, August 25, 1925). Economic distress had also motivated many recruits to the Jewish colonies created in the early nineteenth century; see Fishman, Russia’s First Modern Jews, 123.


40. Gol’d, *Zemel’noe ustoistvo trudiasbchikhsia evreev*, 9; Kagedan, “Jewish Territorial Units,” 119. As in many other parts of Russia, affinity for the Bolsheviks grew in the Kherson colonies during the civil war; they seemed much more likely than the anarchists to put an end to the massive anti-Jewish violence. According to a Soviet source, twenty-five hundred pogroms occurred in nine hundred locations, resulting in two hun-
dred thousand Jewish deaths during the civil war. See Korshunov, *Evreiskoe pereсечение в Крыму*, 18.

41. JDC Archive 483, p. 10 (status of Crimean settlements, February 1, 1925). Other sources suggest from 250 to 750 families at this time in the spontaneous settlements of Crimea. See Keren, *Ha-bityashvut ha-haklait*, 78; YIVO, RG 358/19 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925), p. 22. By mid-1924, 2,240 new families settled in the Kherson region, 250 in Krivoy Rog. The population of the old colonies surpassed prewar levels in 1924.

42. For details on spontaneous settlement, see “Sel’sko-khoziaistvennaia artel’ ‘Zemledelets’: God kollektivnoi raboty,” *Krasnyi Krym*, July 30 [?], 1924. This newspaper was the party organ in Crimea, succeeded by *Krymskaia Pravda*. Zemledelets rented land and used equipment of a former estate. Members pooled personal savings to purchase equipment. They received seeds and some credit from Crimean authorities; their first tractor came from Agro-Joint.

43. Some Jewish authors also noted this problem; see Ha-elkoshi, *Mi-sham*, 49. The Crimean Narkomzem transferred parcels abandoned by groups of discharged Red Army veterans to spontaneous settlers; see Keren, *Ha-bityashvut ha-haklait*, 21.

44. Established in Odessa in 1905 as a socialist Zionist youth organization, Hehalutz grew rapidly after 1917; its Left branches even received official sanction in 1923. During World War I, Hehalutz groups formed in other countries. At the height of its activity in 1925, the total membership of Hehalutz in the Soviet Union reached fourteen thousand. By the end of the decade, the Soviet authorities openly repressed the “chauvinistic” movement; its members dispersed, emigrated, or were imprisoned. Joseph Trumpeldor captured a small group of Hehalutz pioneers in Crimea during 1919, but this commune quickly failed. The main branches of Hehalutz were located in Moscow and other large Soviet cities. Hehalutz also set up communes in other parts of Soviet Russia.

45. Yeshayahu Simhoni, *Derekh zo halakhti bah*, 65. Intense pressure from the local authorities disrupted a fourth Hehalutz commune (Kerem Tel Chai) near Yalta in 1922. See Veinshtein interview, ICJ, 14.

46. Two factors produced this disproportionately large literature. First, unlike Agro-Joint colonists, the veteran Hehalutz communards published memoirs after their emigration to Mandatory Palestine in the late 1920s. Until the opening of archives in the former Soviet Union, these were the best sources on the entirety of Crimean colonization. Second, Zionist communes fitted the general narrative of modern Israeli history, whereas non-Zionist colonies (whatever their success) contradicted the singular importance of settlement in the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine (referred to as the *Yishuv* among Zionists).

47. The sources indicate that a visit to the Hehalutz communes and other new colonies in May 1923 convinced Rosen of the potential for mass colonization; see Pines, *Hehalutz*, 212, 245.

48. Recent history did not substantiate these assumptions; the old colonies in southern Ukraine had suffered dearly during the pogroms of 1881–1882 and the civil war.

49. JDC Archive 483, pp. 3–5 (recollections by Billikopf’s brother, September 7, 1925).

50. Issued by Lord Arthur Balfour (the British foreign minister) in November 1917, this declaration signaled Britain’s commitment to the creation of a national homeland, but not necessarily a state, for the Jewish people in Palestine.
According to Ahad ha-Am (1856–1927), political autonomy in Palestine could not solve the dilemmas of world Jewry; only wide educational programs could regenerate the Jewish people.

52. Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership*, 12–13, 16, 19, 23–24. Shared leadership of the JDC by non-Zionists, anti-Zionists, and labor socialists also caused volatility and a degree of inconsistency; see AJA, WP, Box 244/15, pp. 2–3 (Vogelstein to Warburg, July 16, 1928).


54. JDC Archive 14, p. 5 (Warburg to Rosenberg, June 24, 1923); JDC Archive 483, p. 3 (Lehman to Rosen, December 11, 1923); JDC Archive 52b (Lehman to Rosenberg, December 14, 1924). For more on the sympathy evoked for Jewish lishentsy, see Kagedan, “American Jews and the Soviet Experiment,” 156–57.

55. For a study on the colonies in Argentina, see Avni, *Argentina*. The results achieved in Argentina and Palestine did not convince all observers that agrarianization held promise for masses of Jews; see Ha-elkoshi, *Mi-sham*, 63–64.


58. Max Belenky and Benjamin Schoenwetter led JDC tractor teams in Russia from 1922 to 1924. See JDC Archive 483 (Arons to Rosen, December 22, 1922); YIVO, RG 1531, Max Belenky Papers (material on Belenky). After arriving in America in 1903, Rosen worked on farms in the Midwest; see Handlin, *A Continuing Task*, 45.

59. Davidson, *Our Jewish Farmers*, 258; Brandes, *Immigrants to Freedom*, 134–35; Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in New Jersey*, 103, 143; Raider, “Jewish Immigrant Farmers,” 234–37. Rosenwald was the president of Sears & Roebuck, a renowned American-Jewish philanthropist, an ardent anti-Zionist, an active member of the JDC, and a proponent of social engineering. Adler had been a member of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society—an antecedent to the JAS in America. Bressler headed the Industrial Removal Office in America. Strauss sat on the JAS board of directors and filled important posts in the organization during the mid-1920s. Rosen also sat on the JAS board. Bogen had taught and directed several of the JAS’s educational programs.

60. Among the important figures in this regard was Haim Zhitlovskii, whose *Mysli ob istoricheskikh sud’bakh evreistva* (1887) and *Evrei k evreiam* (1892) were central to the productivist discourse of the time.

61. M. Mintz, “National Aspirations,” 11–14; M. Mintz, “Ha-moshavot ha-haklaiot ha-yehudiot be-pelekh Kherson,” 122–34; Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 552, 556, 559. The Jewish socialist parties (Bund, *Poalei Tzion*, and *Fareynikte*) underwent internal fissures in 1919–1921. Many former members joined the Bolsheviks in the years 1918–1921, and in many cases, the Evesksitia. The Bolsheviks suppressed the remnants of the Jewish parties, and many members subsequently left the USSR, as was the case with other parties considered hostile to Soviet rule.

For a discussion of the early eugenics discourse in Europe, see Pick, Rosenberg’s address on WRNY, June 1929 JDC Archive. For indications, social engineering appealed to a ready audience. John D. Rockefeller (JDC Archive 529 [Rockefeller to Rosenberg, November 5, 1928]) praised the JDC: “Your organization [has] impressed us all with the value of [colonization] as a notable and creative example of social engineering.” See also JDC Archive 536, p. 3 (résumé of Agro-Joint activities, March 6, 1930); AJA, WP, Box 325/5, pp. 2–3 (Seligman to Emmanuel, April 14, 1936); Joseph, History of the De Hirsch Fund, ix. JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Rosen, January 24, 1929).

JDC Archive 535 (galley proof of Rosenberg’s diary, 1926); AJA, WP, Box 222/5, p. 13 (Rosen’s report to JDC executive committee, August 25, 1925); JDC Archive 528 (Rosenberg to Enelow, June 8, 1928); JDC Archive 528, pp. 1–2 (Rosenberg’s address on WRNY, June 24, 1928). From all indications, social engineering appealed to a ready audience. John D. Rockefeller (JDC Archive 529 [Rockefeller to Rosenberg, November 5, 1928]) praised the JDC: “Your organization [has] impressed us all with the value of [colonization] as a notable and creative example of social engineering.” See also JDC Archive 536, p. 3 (résumé of Agro-Joint activities, March 6, 1930); AJA, WP, Box 325/5, pp. 2–3 (Seligman to Emmanuel, April 14, 1936); Joseph, History of the De Hirsch Fund, ix. JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Rosen, January 24, 1929).

JDC Archive 535 (galley proof of Rosenberg’s diary, 1926); AJA, WP, Box 222/5, p. 13 (Rosen’s report to JDC executive committee, August 25, 1925).

JDC Archive 536, p. 3 (résumé of Agro-Joint activities from August 1924 to December 1929, March 6, 1930); JDC Archive 457a, p. 7 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932).

JDC Archive 457a, p. 10 (luncheon for Kahn and Rosen, November 12, 1931); Gitelman, A Century of Ambivalence, 147; AJA, WP, Box 222/5, p. 42 (Rosen’s report to JDC executive committee, August 25, 1925).

YIVO, RG 358/244, p. 4 (Zaichik’s report on Agro-Joint in Kherson, 1925); AJA, WP, Box 325/5, pp. 2–3 (Seligman to Emmanuel, April 14, 1936).

For a discussion of the early eugenics discourse in Europe, see Pick, Faces of Degeneration. For Soviet views on genetics and eugenics, see Graham, Science in Russia, 272, n.46; and Graham, “Science and Values,” 1144–53.

Zinger and Belenkaia, “Stages in the Formation of Policy on the Jewish Question,” 143. National literacy hovered at 40 percent, according to the 1926 census; total Jewish literacy reached 72 percent, nearly 95 percent among young people.

Nikol’skii, Krym: naselenie, 6, 10–14. For an example of the imagery concerning shtetl life, see Veitsblit, Derazhnia.

75. Among others, Larin and Abram Bragin (a respected publicist, discussed further in the next chapter) underwent an epiphany at the exhibition. See Pines, “Larin,” Davan, February 9, 1932, p. 2.

76. The ARA supplied famine and other humanitarian relief to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after World War I. This included the distribution of food packages, the operation of soup kitchens, and the establishment of infirmaries. Among others, the ARA included Quaker, Mennonite, American Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, and YMCA contingents. The JDC expended $4–8 million of the ARA’s $58–61 million budget in the Soviet Union. The JDC apparently spent another $4 million for direct relief to Russian Jews from August 1921 to January 1923. See JDC Archive 455, p. 2 (JDC publicity report, February 9, 1924); Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 67, 76; Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 57. For descriptions of the ARA, see Patenaude, The Big Show in Bololand, and Weissman, Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Russia.

77. JDC Archive 509, p. 6 (Rosenberg to Warburg, October 7, 1926); Galperin, “Agro-Joint,” 14. JDC representatives in the ARA or those closely linked with its work formed the core of Agro-Joint’s American proponents. This service also introduced them to important public figures like Hoover and Colonel William Haskell.

78. JDC Archive 457a, p. 6 (Russian report, April 1, 1926). In addition to the tractor teams, Rosen replaced grain with corn as a staple crop for the indigenous population and experimented with commercial cheese and poultry production.


80. JDC Archive 483 (Kahn to JDC, July 5, 1922), (Rosen to JDC, September 8, 1922); Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 80–84. In addition to work under the ARA, the JDC helped create the Jewish Public Committee to assist Victims of the Pogroms (Yidgezkom) in 1920; see Pinkus, Jews of the Soviet Union, 63. During 1923, the JDC also investigated reconstructive industrial-training projects in Eastern Europe. See also JDC Archive 483 (Rosen to Rosenberg, December 4, 1922).

81. After the revolution, Russian-Jewish émigrés reconstituted ORT in Berlin as ORT-Farband. The original Russian ORT underwent Sovietization and was much less effective after 1917, with only modest impact on agricultural settlement.

82. JDC Archive 454, p. 1 (Rosen’s report on JDC work, 1923); JDC Archive 52b (Lehman to Rosenberg, January 14, 1924); AJA, WP, Box 234/3 (Schweitzer to Menorah, May 19, 1927). The first spontaneous settlements in Crimea received individual tractors from the JDC in addition to service from the tractor teams; see JDC Archive 483 (Belenky’s report, circa 1924); JDC Archive 455 (story by a member of the tractor squad, January 6, 1925). See also Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 83–85.

83. A central figure thought that the JDC should act only if Rosen could liquidate operations quickly. See JDC Archive 483, pp. 3–4 (Lehman to Rosen, September 21, 1922).

84. JDC Archive 483 (Thomas to Strauss, September 26, 1922), (Rosen to Strauss, October 13, 1922), (Wildman to Thomas, December 13, 1922), (Thomas to Strauss, January 16, 1923). At the time, the Quakers, the Mennonites, and the Nansen Committee (operating under the aegis of the League of Nations) retained small staffs in Soviet Russia; each sought unique charitable outlets after the ARA had left. Other partners in the ARA, such as the YMCA, withdrew immediately from the USSR.
Baron Ginzburg and other Jews owned estates in the region before 1914. Like other gentry holdings, the regime nationalized these after the revolution. JDC representatives first investigated, and then rejected, possible sites in Turkestan and the Kuban district.

AJA, WP, Box 222/1, pp. 3–4 (Hyman’s memorandum, May 13, 1925); Box 222/5, pp. 13, 30, 33 (Rosen’s report to the JDC executive committee and Agro-Joint trustees, August 25, 1925); JDC Archive 14, p. 5 (Warburg to Rosenberg, June 24, 1923); JDC Archive 530, p. 3 (Hyman’s impressions, December 28, 1928). As late as 1929, Agro-Joint sources reported at least 25 percent of Soviet Jewry as lishentsy; see JDC Archive 457a, pp. 1–3 (Grower’s notes, April 26, 1929).

An example of such reports is JDC Archive 483, pp. 12–13 (Belenky to Rosenberg). See also JDC Archive 483 (Rosen to JDC, February 10, 1923); JDC Archive 483, p. 3 (Lehman to Rosen, December 11, 1923).

YIVO, RG 358/104 (Rosen-Gaven agreement, August 28, 1923). Soviet assistance included the free transport of JDC equipment, draught animals, and employees, along with veterinary services and cheap fuel. See JDC Archive 483 (Lehman to Rosenberg, September 21, 1922); JDC Archive 536, p. 5 (résumé of Agro-Joint activities, March 6, 1930).

Livne, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Rusyah, 385. The Sovietized branch of ORT began small-scale support of the colonies during the civil war and was joined by ORT-Farband in 1922. For details of the JCA’s work in Romania, see Mazur, “Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait ha-yehudit be-Besarabia,” 36–90; and Ussoskin, Struggle for Survival.

JDC Archive 483 (Lehman to JDC, June 19, 1922); JDC Archive 484 (Kahn to JDC, October 3, 1922); Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 84; Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 139. Gol’de proposed large-scale colonization to ORT-Farband in 1923, but the latter balked at the requisite obligations; see M. Mintz, “Problems of Agricultural Resettlement,” 132.

Bol’shakov, Sovremennoe pereiselenie, 51–52.


Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 17.

Even twenty-two years after Israeli independence, James Rosenberg still felt that “for this great effort we Jews felt that Palestine could not alone solve the Jewish problems. We thought of the Crimea as a place remote and safe from the alarms and horrors of war and of persecution of our fellow Jews.” See JDC Archive 512a, p. 3 (Rosenberg to Kent, September 21, 1960).

Among them, Armand Hammer, Henry Ford, and the International Harvester Corporation. A joint trade office, Amtorg, facilitated most business between the countries before the reinstatement of diplomatic relations.

CHAPTER 2. BUILDING A COLONIZATION MOVEMENT

1. Shmeruk, Ha-kibuts ha-yehudi, 65; Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziaistvennaia kolonizatsiia,” 52.

2. According to Stalin’s theory on nationalities, only historic nations qualified for territorial units in the Soviet state; in his view, Jews did not.
3. JDC Archive 508, pp. 1–14 (meeting of the Committee of Seven, June 17, 1924). Signed on November 29, this contract unified the agreements reached earlier with the Ukrainian and Crimean republics. It also gave Agro-Joint independent legal status and framed its permissible activities, the obligations of the state, and the benefits awarded to the new settlers. Although not written into the text, the agreement included the allocation of approximately 210,000 acres of government land in Crimea and southern Ukraine. The contract can be found in JDC Archive 533. See also JDC Archive 508, p. 2 (Rosen to board of trustees, December 31, 1924).

4. Komzet, formed from April to August 1924, and Ozet, established by the Soviets in January 1925, are discussed in detail below.


6. Fitzgerald, “Blinded by Technology,” 485; C. White, British and American Commercial Relations with Soviet Russia, 197; Brooks, “The Press and Its Message,” 239–43. For a study of Western business ventures in tsarist Russia, see Friedgut, Izovoka and Revolution. Scholars disagree concerning the degree to which the Soviets understood Fordism. See Kotkin, “Modern Times,” 117. The interwar arrangements with Western firms are discussed in Chapter 3.

7. On the informal diplomatic roles filled by the JDC during this period, see Dekel-Chen, “An Unlikely Triangle.”

8. JDC Archive 508, p. 2 (minutes of the Committee of Seven, June 17, 1924). The JDC operated in Ukraine after the withdrawal of the ARA through a special agreement with Sovnarkom. In September 1922, the Soviets allowed the JDC to organize a credit bank in Ukraine for agricultural work and cooperatives.

9. YIVO, RG 358/104 (Rosen-Gaven agreement, August 28, 1923); JDC Archive 545, p. 1 (minutes of the special committee, February 2, 1937); JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Warburg, February 28, 1928). Under this agreement, JDC-sponsored settlers to Crimea rented land that was later transferred to the status of perpetual occupancy. Rosen tended to notify the JDC of such early agreements at a late stage of negotiation.

10. Such an incident occurred in December 1924. The Ukrainian Commissar of Agriculture sent an official of the commissariat, who knew Rosen from 1909, for a private discussion on land allotments; see RGASPI, f-151, op. 1, d. 42, ll. 26–31 (Vol’f to Iaroslavskii, December 1924).

11. Kallen, Frontiers of Hope, 416. Boris Smolar thought that Rosen’s intelligence sources might be former Mensheviks; see Smolar interview, ICJ, 20. For details of these contacts, see Chapter 1, n. 23.

12. The agreement with the Ukrainian Narkomzem in 1923 was facilitated in great part by Rosen’s relationship with Rakovskii (the chairman of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom). See JDC Archive 545, p. 1 (minutes of the special committee, February 2, 1937); AJA, WP, Box 228/5 (Rosenberg to JDC, April 28, 1926). While renegotiating the 1924 contract, Rosen assured worried JDC officials that highly placed friends in the state apparatus trusted the regime’s fiscal strength; see JDC Archive 539 (Rosen to Warburg, February 28, 1928).

14. AJA, WP, Box 228/2 (Rosen to Warburg, March 24, 1926). Rosen was instrumental in the release of many Hehalutz members and their emigration to Palestine; see Bein interview, 1.
15. JDC Archive 508 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, October 22, 1924), pp. 2, 5 (Kahn to Rosenberg, May 25, 1925), p. 1 (Rosen to board of trustees, December 31, 1924). In Rosen’s opinion, ratification by Sovnarkom ensured nationwide legitimacy for agreement whereas Komzet endorsement lacked such moral force. In addition, the Komzet chairmen in Kherson, Crimea, and Moscow were “men of our own selection. The representative in Kherson, Mr. Strachum, is a good personal friend of mine of 25 years.” The contracts Rosen had negotiated during the previous two years were with regional authorities.
16. RGASPI, f-17, op. 3, d. 683, l. 3 (protocol no. 21 Politburo, April 19, 1928). The Politburo expressed greater interest in the negotiations once it gauged the financial implications of the new contract.
17. JDC Archive 539 (Rosen to Warburg, January 12, 1928). The Left (or United) Opposition in the communist party—led by Leon Trotsky, Leo Kamenev, and Grigorii Zinoviev in 1926–1927—promoted rapid industrialization financed by extraction of produce from the peasantry and its sale abroad for hard currency. It also took a more aggressive approach than Stalin toward spreading socialism worldwide. See Nove, *Political Economy and Soviet Socialism*; Daniels, “The Left Opposition.” The Left Opposition also opposed Birobidzhan because of its nationalist implications; see Levavi, *Birobidzhan*, 52.
18. AJA, WP, Box 244/4, p. 4 (Warburg to Rosenwald, August 9, 1928).
19. Agro-Joint transferred its immovable property in Russia to the Society but remained the operative agency of colonization until 1938. Subscribers held bonds from the Soviet government, which were to be cashed on a set schedule. VTsIK first approved the land allotments called for by the ASJFSR agreement on August 13, 1928; see AJA, MP, Box 1/7 (extracts from protocol no. 70). Signed in January 1929, this contract gave enhanced benefits for a projected fifteen thousand families on 109,000 acres, $10 million in American investment, matched by $10 million in Soviet infrastructure and supplies, and an arbitration apparatus for future disputes between the JDC and Soviets. In accordance with Rosen’s request, the new agreement granted all additional lands to the settlers, not Agro-Joint. The bonds were to mature over twenty-seven years. The larger subscribers agreed to reinvest their dividends in colonization. See NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.48/2481A, p. 2 (Hyman to Ropes, May 1936); JDC Archive 544 (Rosenberg to Ropes, October 8, 1935).
20. The subscription of $2,500 by Charles Mayer shown in the accompanying illustrations was quite small. Julius Rosenwald pledged $5 million, Felix Warburg contributed $1 million, and John D. Rockefeller $500,000. The thirty-four founding subscribers pledged a total of $7 million; twenty-one subsequent subscribers pledged another $810,000. For a full inventory of payments received from the subscribers, see Szajkowski, *The Mirage of American Jewish Aid*, 135.
22. AJA, WP, Box 216/3 (Marshall to Warburg, August 26, 1924). Zinoviev chaired the Comintern (Communist International) from its inception in 1919 until 1926.
23. Examples are GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 462, l. 147 (report of the Crimean Obkom bureau,
June 29, 1926), d. 830, ll. 15–17 (Kovner’s supplement to the obkom Evsektiia, May 26, 1928), d. 990, ll. 96–107 (Kantor to obkom, December 6, 1930), ll. 140–49 (report of the Crimean GPU on Jewish settlement, Agro-Joint, and Komzet, December 27, 1930); and GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 211, ll. 90–96 (Fridman to Komzet, May 26, 1928).

24. RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 42, l. 27 (Vol’f to Iaroslavskii, December 6, 1924).

25. Ezekiel Grower, who had recently returned from the United States, informed Agro-Joint employees that American Jews were always willing to answer sentimental appeals from their European brethren, but those resources were finite. He cautioned the audience not to exaggerate the potential of American Jewry, particularly in light of the conflict between the JDC and Zionism because “every Jew considers it a duty to rank himself among the friends of Palestine. No American Jews, of course, intend to move to Palestine.” See YIVO, RG 358/158, pp. 3–7 (report on the Agro-Joint meeting, January 31 to February 7, 1927).

26. JDC Archive 508, pp. 8–9 (minutes of the Committee of Seven, June 17, 1924); AJA, WP, Box 222/6 (Rosen to JDC, December 10, 1923); JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Adler, May 11, 1928); AJA, MP, Box 1/7 (Rosen to Marshall, May 11, 1928). Rosen’s pleas for immediate action appeared in almost every JDC discussion on Agro-Joint until the early 1930s. He also pleaded repeatedly for additional money to absorb overflow demand from potential Jewish colonists. See AJA, WP, Box 215/8 (Rosen and Kahn to JDC, December 12, 1924); JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to JDC, March 1, 1926).

27. JDC Archive 509, p. 2 (Rosenberg to Warburg, May 26, 1926). Smidovich informed Rosenberg that all available Ukrainian lands could accommodate only two thousand more families; therefore, Crimea must become the new focus for Jewish colonization.

28. JDC Archive 509 (Baerwald to Warburg, May 25, 1926). Warburg cautioned Rosen against overextension of Agro-Joint operations, even if land was available; see AJA, WP, Box 228/2 (Warburg to Rosen, June 29, 1926).

29. See the correspondence between Rosen, Warburg, Hyman, and Rosenberg in AJA, MP, Box 1/7, in particular (first draft of Rosenberg to Hyman, September 19, 1928). See also JDC Archive 539 (Rosen to JDC, December 28, 1927). In response to Rosen’s concern over hesitance in the New York office, Warburg wrote him: “You are not dragging us [into a new agreement with the Soviets], on [the] contrary we are anxious to see [the] enterprise launched, but as businessmen [we] cannot proceed too fast.” See JDC Archive 539 (January 13, 1928).

30. JDC Archive 508 (Urisson to Rosen, February 25, 1923); (Grower to Rosen, February 20, 1923). By late 1928, Rosen believed that an emergent Right faction of the communist party would restore Russia’s economy; see JDC Archive 539, p. 1 (Hyman to Warburg, Rosenberg, and Marshall, December 14, 1928). In a letter to Rosenwald on August 9, 1928 (AJA, WP, Box 244/4, p. 3), Warburg commented: “One cannot but feel that the last year has not improved conditions generally in Russia, and that it [was] Trotsky [who] has torn the parties further apart. The people who would like to do constructive things in government circles feel that they are so closely watched at present by their opponents that they do not dare to take more moderate steps, even if they wanted to.” Such an observation seems greatly influenced by Rosen’s prior input. See JDC Archive 539 (Rosen to Warburg, January 12, 1928); JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Warburg, January 26, 1928).

32. Smolar interview, ICJ, 19. No other source substantiated this view. It does not appear that sensitive information flowed voluntarily from Agro-Joint to Soviet officials through personal friendships.

33. GARF, f. r-5546, op. 55, d. 856, ll. 12–28 (concerning allotments to Jews, May–September 1925). Other Soviet leaders also received material from the colonies. According to Sotnichenko (“Eveiskaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia kolonizatsiia,” 54), Lazar Kaganovich (an important Jewish communist party official and confidant of Stalin) read a report from the colonies in February 1925 authored by Professor A. O. Fabrikant—an Agro-Joint consultant and director of the Economics Department at the Moscow Agricultural Academy.

34. Gorev, *Protiv antissemitov*, 148. As the Joint’s most ambitious public fund-raising effort of the period, the United Jewish Campaign became the subject of intense conflict between the Zionists and the JDC. At the time, *Forverts* had the widest circulation of all Yiddish newspapers in the United States. By November 1927, it publicly endorsed Russian colonization; see “Jewish Colonization in Soviet Russia a Success,” *Forward* (English version of *Forverts*), November 6, 1927, p. E2.

35. RGASPI, f. 445, op. 1, d. 86, ll. 115–19 (Katz’s report, September 15, 1926); Ostrovskii, “Druz’ia i nedrugi,” 118–20.

36. JDC Archive 509 (Brown to JDC, January 11, 1926).

37. YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 32 (minutes of Agro-Joint staff meeting, January 1926). Merezhin complained later to JDC visitors that the Philadelphia Conference had not produced a stronger endorsement of colonization; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 100, l. 5 (minutes of the Komzet meeting with the Agro-Joint delegation, May 25, 1926).

38. GARF, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 1–32 (study of the Jewish National Conference, September 1925).

39. AJA, WP, Box 237/2 (Warburg to Adler, October 24, 1928).

40. JDC Archive 475 (Hyman’s memorandum, October 13, 1928); JDC Archive 475 (Hyman to Adler, July 20, 1928), (Adler to Hyman, July 22, 1928), (Morrissey to Warburg, July 23, 1928), pp. 2, 4 (Zeitlin to Adler, August 14, 1928). The JDC appropriated separate funds for religious matters until at least the mid-1930s.

41. For more on this phenomenon, see Chapter 3.

42. JDC Archive 508 (Warburg to JDC, March 21, 1925); AJA, WP, Box 221/15, p. 13 (Brown’s report on Russia, July 1925); JDC Archive 544, p. 22 (minutes of informal meeting, June 15, 1935). More than four years after collectivization, Warburg commented: “I do not know of a single [government] that has been as reliable in living up to its reputation. Naturally I still have some misgivings. But at this time the Russian government has been the only government that has not talked of franchise for the Jews but has acted on it.” Popular fascination with the USSR increased in the United States during the second half of the 1920s; see Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 96.

43. Warburg wrote to Adler on October 24, 1928: “I would be perfectly willing to trust Lunacharskii and the non-Jews in the Russian government [concerning religious issues],
but I seriously fear the fanaticism, bigotry and dirty politics of the Evsektsiia.” See AJA, WP, Box 237/2.


45. AJA, MP, Box 1/7 (Marshall to Rosenberg, December 24, 1928).

46. Bragin and Kol'tsov, Sud'ba evreiskikh mass v Sovetskom Soiuze. The pamphlet was re-issued in a larger publication run in late 1924. A total of fifteen thousand copies appeared, a substantial number by the paper-starved standards of the time. Bragin first encountered Jewish colonists as a director of the Moscow Agricultural Exhibition in 1923. Kol'tsov was a well-known publicist in the mid-1920s. The pamphlet proposed massive agrarianization by settling Jews near extant colonies and the introduction of intensive crops (predicated upon investment of $10 million from foreign Jews). This rigorous settlement would then result in local Jewish majorities. Contemporary readers recognized that such conditions would qualify the area as a national region.

47. M. Mintz, “Ha-moshavot ha-haklaiot,” 110–30. Two settlers’ meetings in Kherson and Novo Poltava, Ukraine, in August 1917 discussed agricultural settlement as a solution for the problems of Russian Jewry. It is likely that Liubarskii attended the latter meeting. Around this time, Polish and Russian antisemites also proposed a solution of the Jewish problem through removal of Jews to remote parts of the country; see Mattityahu Mintz, conversation at Tel Aviv University, November 21, 1999. Further resonance of “republican” ideas emerged shortly thereafter as representatives of eighteen Jewish colonies around Kherson instructed their delegate to the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 to lobby for the consolidation of compact Jewish settlement areas in their region; see M. Mintz, “Hityashvut haklait,” 10.

48. RGASPI, f-445, op. 1, d. 19, II. 2–4 (Gol’de’s report, 1919). Gol’de proposed revitalization of the old Jewish colonies around Odessa. At the time, he worked for the Russian ORT. From 1924 until he vanished during the purges, Gol’de fulfilled various functions with Ozet and Komzet. Because much of the prerevolutionary political activity in the Pale depended heavily on the ability of all the Jewish political parties to raise funds in America (see Frankel, Prophecy and Politics, 557), Bragin’s and Kol’tsov’s call for foreign aid probably would not have shocked the readers of this pamphlet.

49. A prospective plan for Jewish resettlement had existed for ten years with the same general contours. It had never adopted concrete form because no specific lands were available and significant foreign aid was inconceivable; see YIVO, RG 358/152, p. 1 (Bruk’s plan, 1927–1936). Consciously or not, Bragin and Kol’tsov replicated the borders of the former Tauride Republic for their proposal.

50. Levavi, “Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim,” Chapter 2, p. 3. The author thanks Professor Mordechai Altshuler of the Hebrew University for granting access to this manuscript. See also Levavi, “Mikhail Efimovich Kol’tsov,” 91; RGASPI, f-445, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 11–15 (Bragin to Merezhin, November 1923). This letter was the thematic outline for the mass-circulation pamphlet. It came much closer than the final product to proposing a republic.
51. Among these venues was the first Ozet Conference in 1926. Bragin promoted the republican idea to Joint leaders visiting Russia in May 1926; by that time he must have known that it had negligible support in the USSR. See GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 100, l. 5 (protocol of the meeting with the foreign delegation of Agro-Joint, May 25, 1926); Hirsh Smolar, Tokhelet ve-shivrah, 252.

52. Fatuev, “K probleme natsional’no-gosudarstvennogo stroitel’stva,” 206–7; Bugai, “20-e–50-e gody: pereseleniia i deportatsii evreev,” 176; RGASPI, f-445, op. 1, d. 19, l. 25 (Smirnov to Tsiurupa, Piatakov, and Kuibyshev, February 13, 1924). The recipients comprised a Politburo investigative commission on Jewish land settlement. The formation of Komzet demonstrates that the Politburo accepted only part of Smirnov’s criticism. Mattityahu Mintz found that Esther Frumkin (a leader of the Evsektsiia) wrote the commission to support, and expand upon, Bragin’s plan; see “Neyarot avodah,” 166–69.

53. It is possible that Evsektsiia activists were not aware of this important divide between rhetoric and reality; see Pinkus, “Extra-Territorial National Minorities,” 83. Dependence on contemporary publications from Moscow led to chronic overestimates of the discourse on the Jewish republic in Western historiography. In particular, existing studies misjudged the importance of the Ozet and Evsektsiia conferences in late 1926. These were not, in fact, watershed events in the discourse over the Jewish republic because the Politburo had already rejected the idea and the practitioners of colonization never focused on it. See for example Pinkus, Jews in the Soviet Union, 72; Kagedan, Soviet Zion, 88–92.

54. RGASPI, f-17, op. 3, d. 464, l. 3 (protocol no. 24 Politburo, September 18, 1924), d. 546, l. 7 (protocol no. 10 Politburo, February 11, 1926), d. 557, l. 6 (protocol no. 21 Politburo, April 22, 1926), d. 560, l. 5 (protocol no. 25 Politburo, May 13, 1926), d. 573, ll. 4–5 (protocol no. 39 Politburo, July 8, 1926). The Politburo in 1925 approved settlement of one hundred thousand Jewish families in Crimea and southern Ukraine. Dr. Arthur Ruppin (a pioneer of Jewish agricultural settlement in Mandatory Palestine) thought that the vacant land in this area could accommodate no more than thirty thousand families by the mid-1920s; see his Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 37.


56. A later manifestation of party dogmatism, gigantomaniia probably led to another critical Politburo decision on Jewish colonization—development of Birobidzhan as the final site of Jewish colonization and autonomy; see Levavi, Birobizhan, 44. Gigantomaniia preached large-scale solutions to systemic problems in Soviet economics during the late 1920s and 1930s.

57. Altshuler, Evsektsiia, 192. The Evsektsiia activists Litvakov and Chemeriskii were among those who advocated the practical benefits. Most Komzet personnel assumed that the resident nationalities in Crimea and southern Ukraine would eventually fuse; national autonomous areas were only a temporary remedy for the immediate socioeconomic crisis; see Baron, The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets, 220.

58. Iurii Larin (first chairman of Ozet and a highly respected economic planner) advised the
government on Jewish problems from 1925 and contributed frequently to *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. For the depth of his views on a Jewish republic, see Hefetz, “Ha-makhon ha-haklai,” 112. Despite his support for colonization, Larin believed that the majority of Soviet Jews would have to be absorbed into urban industry; see Kagedan, *Soviet Zion*, 32. Overall, he was a strong proponent of minority rights in the Soviet republics; see Sullivant, *Soviet Politics and the Ukraine*, 124–26, 139–45. Anatoli Lunacharskii (Commissar of Enlightenment) was another influential proponent of Jewish agrarianization as a partial solution for the “Jewish question.” See Lunacharskii, *Ob antismitizme*, 45.

Stalin may have first voiced disapproval of the idea of a Jewish republic in Crimea in 1926. See N. Levin, *Jews in the Soviet Union*, 149. The first official pronouncement on the colonization of Birobidzhan came at the Second Conference of Jewish farmers in Belorussia, convened in January 1928; see Shmeruk, *Ha-kibuts ha-yehudi*, 95. Archival documentation illustrates Larin’s access to the highest levels of Soviet life and impact on events in relation to colonization. For instance, he campaigned against native Crimean Tatar leaders who obstructed colonization; see GARF, f. r-5546, op. 55, d. 1030, ll. 5–14 (Larin to Central Committee, circa 1926). For more on this issue, see Chapter 4. In subsequent years, Larin sent optimistic reports to Sovnarkom and other central Soviet and party organs while applying pressure on local authorities. See GARF, f. r-5546, op. 55, d. 1955, ll. 112–24 (notes on Crimean land tracts, circa 1930); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 622, ll. 57–62 (report to the Crimean Obkom secretariat, September 26, 1927), d. 990, ll. 115–17 (proposal for the VTsIK secretariat on Jewish settlers, December 11, 1930), ll. 163–65 (proposal for the Central Committee on the settlement of Jews, January 28, 1931). See also Levavi, *Birobizhan*, 54.

Mikhail Kalinin, president of the Soviet Union, was the central figure in this respect. A steady proponent of colonization, he made vague references to a Jewish autonomous state in Crimea as late as 1929; see Edelhertz, *The Russian Paradox*, 115. Kagedan (*Soviet Zion*, 39–46) and others (S. Levenberg, “Soviet Jewry: Some Problems and Perspectives,” in *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, ed. Lionel Kochan, 33–34, 67; and Benjamini, *Medinot le-yehudim*, 104) assigned undue importance to Kalinin’s role in colonization. Although far superior to Larin in terms of his official rank, the “All-Union peasant elder” was a powerless figurehead. At most, Kalinin’s stature helped legitimize and popularize colonization in the general public through widely circulated pamphlets generated after the first Ozet Conference in November 1926. JDC visitors to the Soviet Union doubted Kalinin’s influence; see AJA, BP, Box 35/11 (Billikopf to Brown, August 7, 1926).

Keren, *Ha-bityashvut ha-haklai*, 132–33. Contemporary literature confirms this conclusion, whereas oral histories from former settlers contained no clear references to republicanism. This may not accurately represent attitudes at the time: the interviewees were usually too young at the time of migration to recall any republican discourse. For an institutional observation on the settlers’ motivations, see GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 26 (visit of the Timiriazev Academy, 1929). For an example in contemporary literature of local excitement for Crimean colonization and its implications, see Feigin, “Direktor MTS,” 279–83.

Lifshitz, *Istoriia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri*, 8–9. This memoir describes the develop-
ment of a small Jewish kolkhoz in Siberia. The first proposals on Crimea, spontaneous colonization, creation of Komzet, and Kalinin’s endorsement of colonization drove the creation of this kolkhoz. The author thanks Professor Theodore Friedgut from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for pointing out this little known work.

63. Gol’de, “Problema priazovskikh plaven’.”
64. What Does Russian Jewry Think of Russian Jewish Agricultural Colonization?, 6–7; JDC Archive 531, p. 2 (Margolin to Choulguine, December 22, 1928). Rosen stated in 1925: “Our project has absolutely nothing to do with the ill-famed fable of an autonomous Jewish republic in Russia.” He also rejected pronouncements that the colonization could solve the global Jewish problem; see YIVO RG 358/158, p. 2 (report of the meeting of Agro-Joint personnel, January 31 to February 7, 1927). Even in hindsight, Rosen still rejected republicanism; see JDC Archive 516, p. 9 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937).
65. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 100, l. 7 (protocol of the meeting with the foreign delegation of Agro-Joint, May 25, 1926). See also JDC Archive 509 (Rosenberg to Warburg, June 16, 1926), (Marshall to Strauss, June 16, 1926).
66. YIVO RG 358/244, p. 4 (Zaichik’s report on the Kherson district, 1925).
67. AJA, WP, Box 234/7, p. 3 (Warburg’s address to the Chicago Conference, October 1927); JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Warburg, February 28, 1928); Keren, Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 148. Their maneuvering room shrank after 1931, however, when the Kremlin declared the primacy of Birobidzhan for Jewish colonization; see Levavi, “Ozet-Gezerd,” 127. The Politburo formally established the Jewish Autonomous Oblast of Birobidzhan in May 1934. Even recent accounts incorrectly associated Agro-Joint with the Soviet experiment in the Far East. For example, see Raider, Emergence of American Zionism, 194–95.
68. YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 92 (protocol of second conference at Sde Menucha, December 1923). Hirsh Smolar (in Tokhelet ve-shivrah, 303–4) stated that the Evsektsiia rank and file generated post-facto explanations for the regime’s shift from Crimea to Birobidzhan; the Evsektsiia was not privy to the policy decision. See also d’Encausse, The Great Challenge, 148–51.
69. Altshuler, Evsektsiia, 364; Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics, 226. For an illustration of the Evsektsiia’s alienation from Jews in the shtetls, see Persov, Krasnyi rog, passim.
70. Intensive crops are those that demand greater expertise and attention but offer far greater returns than conventional grains.
71. YIVO, RG 358/191 (Liubarskii’s report on attracting Jews to Crimea, 1924). Liubarskii concluded that land hunger among local, non-Jewish peasants precluded agrarianization of Jews adjacent to their points of origin. In contrast, northern Crimea and the Kherson region remained largely vacant, and the native populations seemed receptive to Jewish immigration. The delegation calculated that each family required approximately $750 in foreign assistance to establish a farm of twenty-five desiatins. They also recommended the establishment of a cooperative lending apparatus. Finally, settlement of the first four thousand Jewish families (at a cost of $3 million) would have to be accompanied by an additional $1.5 million investment for the surrounding non-Jewish villages. Liubarskii’s
survey team consisted of veteran agronomists from the old Jewish colonies and accountants.

72. JDC Archive 457a, p. 2 (Rosen’s report to the executive committee, December 4, 1930); Galperin, “Agro-Joint,” 13. The obligations undertaken by the Soviet government under the 1924 contract added significantly to the cost efficiency of colonization; these included tax exemptions, free fuel for tractor teams, free transportation, and the construction of infrastructure. In addition, the contracts granted voting rights to the settlers (despite their former professions) and exemption from military service. See JDC Archive 508, p. 2 (Rosen to Board of Trustees, December 31, 1924). Komzet calculations were considerably less than $750 per household in 1927; see YIVO, RG 358/121, p. 9 (settler contingent, 1925–1927).

73. Initial JDC calculations excluded infrastructure and the cost of agricultural instruction. By 1930, real expenditure reached 2,423 rubles (approximately $1,210) per household, of which 60 percent was to construct homes; see YIVO, RG 358/58, p. 12 (report on Agro-Joint activity, January–December, 1929).

74. JDC Archive 62a, p. 18 (Billikopf’s statements at press conference, August 30, 1926). Arthur Ruppin (Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 38) shared similar sentiments. Billikopf was perhaps the least inclined of all JDC officials toward grand ideas of Jewish political autonomy. He had led (with Jacob Schiff, Israel Zangwill, and Morris Waldman) the much-maligned Galveston movement that funneled Jewish immigrants to the American Southwest to relieve overcrowded neighborhoods on the East Coast and Midwest from 1907 to 1914. See AJHS, Abba Hillel Silver Papers, series 1, folder 333 (Billikopf to Steuer, September 14, 1927); and “Galveston Movement,” Encyclopedia Judaica, CD Version, 1997.

75. M. Mintz, “Problems of Agricultural Resettlement,” 136. The same man, Grigorii Broido (rector of the Communist University of the East in Tashkent), argued in Pravda in early 1924 that Jews, like all ethnic groups, deserved an autonomous unit, provided that this did not interfere with economic planning. He added that colonization could also help in propaganda against Poland and Romania, each with significant Jewish populations; see Kagedan, Soviet Zion, 20. Use of the “Jewish question” against hostile leaders in Eastern Europe or domestic, right-wing groups was not new to Russian politics; see Dekel-Chen, “Back from Eternal Damnation.”

76. YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 9 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925); JDC Archive 508, p. 15 (meeting of the Committee of Seven, June 17, 1924). As noted above, national farm output had plummeted in the decade after 1914.

77. YIVO, RG 358/104, pp. 1, 7 (Komzet to Sovnarkom, 1925). Crimea lacked railways by Western standards but was above average in Soviet terms. At the time, Komzet and Agro-Joint believed that the Tatars and Germans adjacent to the settlement tracts would gladly accept the new colonists.

78. Edelhertz, The Russian Paradox, 120–21. Although transmitted through a Western journalist, Smidovich’s comments match all other evidence.

79. Martin, Affirmative Action Empire, 44.

80. AJA, MP, Box 1/7 (Morrissey to Warburg and Rosenberg, November 1, 1928).

81. Komzet was formally under the authority of the Presidium (or Council) of Nationalities,
itself a consultative body to VTsIK. This council was the forerunner of the postwar Soviet of Nationalities. According to the finding aid (registrarnyi opis’) for GARF collection r-7541, Komzet offices in the republics (activated by the central office in Moscow) contained five people and another three for each oblast. Like other Soviet commissions, Komzet had permanent bodies (a presidium, chancellery, etc.) and ad hoc committees for short-term missions (for example, importation of machinery and agreement with individual contractors). Similar committees were not formed for other nationalities because, according to Kalinin, only Soviet Jews lacked a distinct territorial unit; therefore, Jews needed a special bureaucratic organ. See Korshunov, Evreiskoe pere sele nie v Krymu, 49.

82. Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-haklait, 64. According to a Sovnarkom decree from September 9, 1924, Jews could join cooperative associations, even while still lishentsy; see YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 9 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1923). Komzet’s initial membership included Larin, Petr Smidovich (who was also an advisor on ethnic minority affairs to the VTsIK), Miacheslav Litvinov (the Vice-Chairman of Foreign Affairs, himself a Jew), Leonid Krasin (Foreign Trade Commissar), the republican and All-Union Narkomzem chairs, representatives of the Commissariat of Forestry, and the State Bank. The Jewish communists were Simeon Dimanshtein (assistant to Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities and an old, respected Bolshevik), Merezhin, and Gol’dé. Merezhin ran daily affairs; Smidovich intervened episodically, particularly on major policy questions.

83. The archives overturn a common misperception among contemporary Zionists (for example, Ha-ellokshi, Mi-sham, 43) that Komzet worked under the tutelage of the Evsektsiia.


85. For discussions of mass mobilization during the NEP, see Kenez, Birth of the Propaganda State; Stites, Revolutionary Dreams; Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society; and Bonnell, Iconography of Power.


87. A series of agreements with foreign philanthropies from 1924 to 1926 delineated the regions for colonization: Agro-Joint in northern Crimea, Krivoi Rog, and Kherson; the JCA in Mariupol and Zaporozhie, Ukraine; and the ORT in the Odessa region. Around 1925, Agro-Joint turned over the technical supervision and loan services of the Jewish colonies of Belorussia to ORT-Farband. Although it operated mainly with funds from Agro-Joint and had ample candidates for colonization, problems with Komzet prevented consistent support of the settlements in Belorussia. See Munitz, Irgunei ORT, 139.

88. See the inside covers of Evreiskii krest’ianin 2 (1926).

89. “Raspisanie vyigryshei,” Tribuna 10 (1929): 18. Ozet’s lotteries in 1929 and 1930 sold 1 and 2 million tickets, respectively. Ozet planned the sale of 6 million tickets in 1931; see Ozet, Chto takoe Ozet? (1931), 15. Ozet’s organizational network reached South Africa, Latvia,
Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, England, Austria, and the Americas. See *Chto takoe Ozet?* (1931), 16.

90. GARP, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 211, ll. 60–73 (Fridman to Moscow Komzet, May 12, 1928); GARP, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, ll. 6–7 (report of the Pioneer delegation to the Crimean colonies, June 22, 1928); GAARK, f. r-315, op. 1, d. 108, l. 215 (Gold'e and Bregman to Temkin, May 8, 1929), l. 208 (Babushkin to Temkin, July 6, 1929), d. 152, l. 59 (Zotov to Moscow Ozet, July 1930); “Rabota KrymOzeta napravlena byla v 1925г. v storonu popolnenia pomoshchi, okazyvaemoi Agro-Dzhointom,” *Evresikii krest'ianin* 2 (1926), 134. On the transfer of Nikopol to JCA, see Levavi, “Ozet-Gezerd,” 122. Levavi argued (without access to archives) that Ozet voluntarily relinquished these districts to facilitate greater overall foreign aid and to refocus Soviet resources on Birobidzhan. Archival documents suggest that Ozet was simply inept.


92. Liverant, “Gezerd be-Dnepropetrovsk,” 117–18. The Ozet in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine—adjacent to a Jewish settlement district (Stalindorf)—maintained close contact with recruits, actively distributed *Tribuna*, and sent speakers to factories, neighborhoods, and movie theaters.


94. GARP, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 35, ll. 1–2 (protocol of the meeting of Komzet, Ozet, and Agro-Joint, October 14, 1925), op. 3, d. 5, ll. 3–4 (protocol of the meeting of Komzet and Agro-Joint, March 10, 1923); GARP, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 520, l. 23 (Segal to Ozet, June 1, 1929), d. 334, ll. 1, 5, 17, 23 (material on Jewish settlements, 1926). Agro-Joint allocated 1,750 to 1,900 rubles for each family’s house, barn, farm equipment, and livestock. ORT and JCA invested 1,500 rubles or more per settler family, whereas Ozet rarely exceeded 550 rubles for a home and barn and added another 550 rubles for livestock and equipment. Agro-Joint homes were larger than those of JCA and ORT, and larger still than Ozet homes; see Ruppin, *Ha-hityashvat ha-haklalit*, 19–21. Criticism of “luxurious” Agro-Joint homes reached contemporary popular literature; see Epshtein, “Po evreiskim poselkam,” 223, 226.

95. Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia kolonizatsiia,” 51; Shmeruk, *Ha-kibuts ha-yehudi*, 79; GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 300, ll. 9–10 (Smidovich’s and Timofeev’s instructions, January 27, 1932). The Ukrainian Central Committee started its campaign for Jewish land settlement in July 1924. Evidently, they recruited only Jews from within Ukraine. Komzet formed in August 1924. It allotted space in Crimea for 500 Belorussian Jewish families in 1926. Of the 314 families who departed for Crimea, half returned to Belorussia.

97. JDC Archive 457a, p. 6 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932); YIVO, RG 358/115 (instructions for registration of artels, May 11, 1924). These instructions also required every artel to register with local authorities. Each artel then petitioned Narkomzem for permission to appraise tracts in the available allotments. According to the instructions, the service organizations would aid the artels only after the latter arrived in Crimea or southern Ukraine.

98. Ukrainian Jews enjoyed distinct advantages over non-Jews despite these obstacles. The former needed 300 rubles and two working-age family members to qualify for Komzet land allocations whereas non-Jews needed 500 rubles and three working-age family members to qualify for similar parcels according to regulations set by the Ukrainian Narkomzem; see Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziaistvennaiia kolonizatsiia,” 52.

99. Other considerations included the size and age distribution within settlers’ groups and procedures for replacing departed artel members; see YIVO, RG 358/115, pp. 1–5 (Komzet instructions on settlement work, July 2, 1925). See also YIVO, RG 358/19, pp. 24–25 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925).

100. Merezhin and Larin concurred with the early preference given to wealthy families; see YIVO, RG 358/115 (material for the conference, circa 1925). See also GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 102, l. 14 (Pikman’s report on Podolia and Volynia, 1926). Agro-Joint contributed, at most, 300 rubles in cash to each family in the first two years of settlement.

101. JDC Archive 508 (Warburg to JDC, March 21, 1925); AJA, WP, Box 221/15, p. 10 (Brown’s report, July 1925), Box 223/25 (Kellock to Warburg, October 25, 1925); Levavi, “Tsionei derekh,” 28; Keren, Ha-hityashvut ha-haklai, 18; Gol’de, Zemel’noe ustroistvo, 9. Based on Soviet sources of the era, Baron (The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets, 219) calculated that Jews cultivated 122,000 acres by January 1925, most of it adjacent to the shtetls. Another source suggested that Agro-Joint plowed at least 275,000 acres for use by Jews by October 1924. This discrepancy is typical of confusion caused by multiple units of measurement in use at the time (e.g. desiatins, hectares, acres, sazhens, etc.); see JDC Archive 483 (Belenky’s report, late 1924).

102. YIVO, RG 358/121, p. 7 (settlers’ contingent, 1925–1927); YIVO, RG 358/115, p. 1 (Komzet instructions on settlement work, July 2, 1925); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 102, l. 17 (Pikman’s report on Podolia and Volynia, 1926). Merchants and shopkeepers constituted 42 percent of settlers but only 20 percent of the shtetl population. The former bourgeois professions had little future in the Soviet economy but most still had enough residual savings to invest in resettlement.

103. YIVO, RG 358/121, pp. 2–3 (settlers’ contingent, 1925–1927). Immense demographic fluidity characterized the post–civil war era in the Soviet Union. People of all nationalities migrated relatively freely between the cities and countryside in search of jobs and food.

104. Many recruits quickly returned home because they ran out of food en route to the settlement tracts; see YIVO, RG 358/202, p. 14 (Friedman’s report, January 1, 1928).
105. YIVO, RG 358/121, pp. 7, 9, 14 (settlers’ contingent, 1925–1927). This report discussed Ozet offices only in the Russian Republic. Its estimate may be somewhat inflated.

106. Approximately 65 percent of Belorussia’s Jews registered for migration between 1925 and 1927. Registration in Belorussia and Ukraine during 1925 topped one hundred thousand, but the vast majority of candidates could not pay the 300-ruble fee; see YIVO, RG 358/121, pp. 1–3 (settlers’ contingent, 1925–1927).

107. YIVO, RG 358/115 (blank Komzet registration form, 1925–1926). The new questionnaires referred to a household’s distance from the railroad stations, the families’ preferred destination, the number of working-age family members, knowledge of farm work, and willingness to join an artel.

108. YIVO, RG 358/121, p. 8 (settlers’ contingent, 1925–1927). Cash assets, draft animals, wagons, and access to building materials figured in the newest calculation. Households fit into one of six economic categories ranging from those unable to contribute to the costs of resettlement to those without need of outside assistance. These questionnaires also appeared in a mass-circulation pamphlet; see Korshunov, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 50.

109. Once allotted land, registrants had to settle by the following August or forfeit their parcels; see Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziaistvennaiia kolonizatsiia,” 52. Construction of a dugout presumably constituted a legitimate presence on the land, comparable to homesteading in the American West.

110. Ruppin, Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 13. Zaichik (an Agro-Joint agronomist) observed that economic hardship in the shtetls induced most Jews to register. Many refused to depart for colonies, however, because in the intervening months their conditions improved; see YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 6 (report on the meeting of Agro-Joint workers, January 31 to February 7, 1927). Another Agro-Joint agronomist reported that leaders of land associations embezzled registration funds and that others sent young men to the tracts as “guinea pigs” before migration of whole households; see YIVO, RG 358/87 (Levintan’s report on shtetl Jews, June 2, 1926). See also Kamenshtein, “Prichiny otseva pereselentsev,” 11–12.


112. GARF, f. 7746, op. 1, d. 102, ll. 14, 19 (Pikman’s report on the shtetls in Podolia and Volynia, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 18 (Levintan’s report on Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 39–40 (Narkomzem observation of Jewish farmers, late 1930); GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 2, l. 180 (Narkomzem instructions for settlement, August 1, 1938); JDC Archive 457a, p. 1 (Rosen’s report, November 11, 1931).

113. YIVO, RG 358/87, p. 4 (Levintan’s report, June 2, 1926); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 40 (Narkomzem conclusions and proposals, late 1936); GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 300, l. 37 (Keselman to Presidium, February 1932); Berezhanskaia, “Evreiskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 83–85; Oral histories revealed a preponderance of such families or those who suffered from previous class-based repression (dekulakization). See Vul’f interview, Mikhlina interview, Kublanovskaia interview, Gendina interview, and Al’tman interview. For Agro-Joint’s knowledge of this phenomenon, see Smolar interview, 18. Given the state of Soviet social welfare services at the time, the removal to the colonies by local
authorities may have been the most humane solution for many single-parent families or households with few working-age members.

114. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 300, ll. 9–10 (Smidovich’s and Timofeev’s instructions, January 27, 1932). Reasons for criticism varied. In addition to the shortcomings of recruits discussed above, Tribuna often blamed Ozet offices for the inadequate preparation of newcomers; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 46 (Narkomzem conclusions and proposals on Jewish farmers, late 1930).

115. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 31 (Merezhin to Crimean Obkom and Komzet, March 9, 1930). Mass-circulation pamphlets reported on Komzet’s new recruitment goals and priorities; see for example Frukht, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 33. The change in recruitment policy coincided with the collectivization campaign to be explored further in Chapter 5.

116. A. B. Superfin interview, Dubrovskii interview, Lukomskaia interview, Margolina interview, Kopeleva interview, Furman interview, and Kabakova interview. Only one interviewee indicated that her family migrated as a result of recruitment by an “agitator”; see Fradkina interview. One Soviet author met colonists who first heard of the settlements from an Ozet recruiter; see Bytovoi, Dorogi, 95. One former settler recalled: “[In Kiev, during the 1933 famine] we heard rumors that in Crimea, in the Jewish kolkhozes, people were eating milk and challah”; see Yeshiyahu Schreibshtein memoir, Machon Lavon, Vest Collection, IV-104-53-154, p. 1.

117. Neiman, Deti evreiskoi kommuny, 9–18. These images are particularly important because they are not in a politicized Ozet publication.

118. Rubin, Voices of a People, 410. Simferopol and Sevastopol are major Crimean cities. “Zhankoye” and “zhan” refer to Dzhankoi, a large railroad depot and administrative center of the Crimean colonies. This song apparently originated in Crimea and became popular among Jews in America, Canada, and the Yishuv.
122. JDC Archive 483, p. 2 (Jewish settlers assisted by Agro-Joint, June 1925); YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 22 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925).
123. GARF, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 327, ll. 3–4 (Agro-Joint credit, March 1925). The credit agreement made several demands on artels: funds could be spent only with the approval of Agro-Joint; monthly and yearly reports had to be filed with Agro-Joint; and Agro-Joint could repossess property and funds in case of default. The interest rate depended on the goal of the loan. The introduction of a collective loan system partly replicated the Joint’s ongoing experience from its loan kassas program in Poland.
124. One such Agro-Joint loan certificate in the author’s possession for 800 rubles, to a L. Io. Norshtein, shows a repayment schedule that began in 1932, three years after arrival of his family in Crimea. According to the original plan, the installments would continue until 1949. In this case, the colonist completed repayment in January 1939. I thank V. S. Norshtein (a granddaughter of L. Io. Norshtein), from the Hesed Shimon (“Yad Ezra”) office in Simferopol, for the use of this rare document.
125. YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 28 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925). Ozet had only nominal effect in this capacity.
126. YIVO, RG 358/115, p. 3 (Komzet instructions, July 2, 1925). On May 21, 1925, VTsIK transferred all lands previously rented by existing Jewish colonies to perpetual land use, without rental payments.
127. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 2–4 (Levin to Krasnyi Krym, December 2, 1925). Levin (an employee of Agro-Joint’s office in Simferopol) responded to an article in the Crimean communist party newspaper that sharply criticized the apparent neglect of the Sholoim artel. Levin justified Agro-Joint’s actions because Sholoim had not complied with regulations on land use and resources. He added that one disgruntled member of Sholoim had manufactured the whole affair. The cooperative aspect of Jewish colonization is discussed further in Chapter 4.
128. Komzet computed land allotments to associations according to the number of households, their size, and the quality of land in each area. Each household received between 15 and 27.5 desiatins in Kherson and Crimea, between 12 and 18 desiatins in Krivoi Rog; see Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziaistvennaiia kolonizatsiia,” 52.
129. Kallen, Frontiers of Hope, 421.
130. YIVO, RG 358/105 (Crimean land surveys by Krupp and Redkin, January–March 1926); YIVO, RG 358/106 (supplements to the surveys of the Dzhankoi region, September 20, 1928); YIVO, RG 358/198 (review of the inspection in the Dzhankoi region, October 1, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/198 (questionnaire on the tracts in the Evpatoria region). Rosen had previously told New York that these lands were vacant.
131. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 609, l. 105 (protocol no. 10a of the Crimean Obkom bureau, March 17, 1927); YIVO, RG 358/106 (supplements to the surveys of the Dzhankoi region, September 20, 1928). Most tracts had no or, at best, broken wells. Among the first machines imported by Agro-Joint were “Caseton” drillers. Its wells in Crimea averaged ninety meters, an impractical depth for manual digging. For details on this facet of Agro-Joint work, see Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 12, pp. 1–2; and Levitan interview.
132. Komzet and Agro-Joint first calculated forty to sixty households per colony for maxi-
mum agricultural efficiency. In the early 1930s, Agro-Joint adjusted this to one hundred to two hundred households; see YIVO, RG 358/180, p. 16 (general principles of agricultural development, 1925–1932).

133. While Jewish populations in the steppe regions of the peninsula were very high in proportion to the rest of the country, Jews never constituted a majority in any region in Crimea. See GAARK, f. p-116, op. 1, d. 17, l. 12 (characterization of the Saki region, August 1, 1939); GAARK, f. p-121, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 2–8 (outline of the Dzhankoi region, July 20, 1939); GAARK, f. p-140, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 2–5 (outline of the Larindorf region, August 1, 1939); GAARK, f. p-76, op. 1, d. 180, ll. 10–16 (outline of the Evpatoria region, July 30, 1939); Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-hakelet, 141–43.

134. The Jewish districts in Ukraine were named Kalinindorf (1927), Novo Zlatopol (1929), and Stalindorf (1930); in Crimea, Fraidorf (1931) and Larindorf (1933). There were twenty-three ethnic districts in Ukraine by 1927; see Kagedan, “Jewish Territorial Units,” 129. In 1930–1931, there were approximately 250 Jewish national soviets and sixty-seven Jewish law courts throughout the USSR; see Pinkus, “Development of the Idea of Jewish National Autonomy,” 104. For discussion of Soviet regional administration, see Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 174–75.

135. The first Jewish selsoviet in Crimea was founded in February 1926, the next twenty from early 1929 through 1930. By January 1, 1932, there were thirty-two. This remained unchanged through 1937; see Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 20, p. 1. See also Muniz, “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 47–50. For other statistical data, see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626 (Shapiro’s report on Fraidorf region, May 2, 1934); GAARK, f. p-140, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 2–5 (report on Larindorf region, August 1, 1939); Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Table 30. A recent study suggests that Jews comprised only 30.5 percent of Fraidorf’s population but as much as 60 percent of Larindorf; see Broshevan, “Natsional’nye raiony v Krymu,” 121, 127. Based on the problematic 1939 census, an earlier study found lower numbers. See Kruglova, “Unichtozhenie evreiskogo nase-lenii,” 217–18.

136. The spontaneous colonies had settled along railroad lines in the northern half of Crimea. Settlement tracts for 1925 concentrated around Dzhankoi, Kolai (Azovsk), Simferopol, and Kurman-Kemel’chi (Telman, later renamed Krasnogvardiyske); in 1927, new blocs appeared in the Fraidorf (Novoselovskoe), Saki, and Seitler (Nizhnegorskii) regions. In the last year of massive expansion (1929) new blocs arose in the Kerch peninsula, as well as in the Larindorf (Pervomaiskoe) and Karasubazar (Belogorsk) regions, in addition to expansion of the existing blocs.


138. YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 28 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925). For an accounting of the JDC’s early tractor work, see JDC Archive 483 (Belenky’s report, October 1924); JDC Archive 455, pp. 8, 18 (memorandum of meeting with Belenky, January 6, 1925). Agro-Joint imported a total of 721 tractors, 720 plows, 70 grain sowers, 61 trucks, 60 discs, 500 potato planters, and 36 combines and trained 1,600 tractor drivers. See R. I. Goldstein, “Historical Facts of Agricultural Joint,” 15–19. Payment was often due to Agro-Joint only after the harvest, months after the work had been performed.

139. Pines, Hehalutz, 253. The establishment of the machine shop at Mishmar came mostly
by default; the only two Jews in Russia with proper mechanical skills were both Hehapultz members; see Vest, Naftolei dor, 365–66. American Jews had manned earlier tractor teams; see JDC Archive 483 (Arons to Rosen, December 22, 1922).

140. YIVO, RG 358/180, pp. 36–37 (general principles of agricultural development, 1925–1032). By 1929, Ozet homes were uninhabitable.

141. YIVO, RG 358/206, pp. 1–2 (outline for organization of Crimean settlements, 1929). According to this report, the average Crimean colony contained 330 settlers, with 5.5 people per household, of which 2.5 were working age. Each colony cultivated 1,500 dekatsins of total farmland and possessed 90 horses, 60 oxen, 90 head of cattle, 90 dairy cows, 1,200 sheep, 1,800 chickens, 2 bulls, and 2 tractors. Agro-Joint also introduced cheese-making machines from Switzerland; see JDC Archive 509 (Boris Smolar interview for United Jewish Appeal Oral History, June 22, 1977).

142. JDC Archive 509 (Rosen to Brown, November 12, 1928). Agro-Joint supplied credits and equipment to trade schools and urban cooperatives. It thereby helped to integrate tens of thousands into the burgeoning industries of the First Five-Year Plan; see JDC Archive 457a, p. 2 (Rosen’s report to the executive committee, November 11, 1931). In addition, the JDC supplied medical services and loans for urban artisans; see JDC Archive 457a, p. 4 (Rosen’s report to the executive committee, December 4, 1930). The need for medical aid was most acute among lishentsy who were deprived of such services by Soviet law. Agro-Joint spent $1 million on the creation of fifty-four infirmaries; see JDC Archive 543, p. 5 (meeting of ASJFSR board, July 2, 1934).

143. Rosen was not alone in this regard. See YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 2 (Fabrikant’s remarks, January 1926).

144. Szajkowski (The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 141) suggests that Agro-Joint employed as many as 3,000 people at the peak of its activity. Levavi cited much lower figures; see Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 7, pp. 8–9. Levavi noted that only 223 of the 722 employees at the Dzhankoi shop were Jews in 1938.

145. Strashun, “Na mestakh poseleniia,” 77; Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Appendix 13. Szajkowski (in The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 142) compared this $17 million to JDC investments during the same period in Poland ($15.8 million), Romania ($8.2 million), and Palestine ($8.9 million). Agro-Joint calculated 18.7 million rubles (approximately $9.2 million) in expenditure for colonization from 1924 to 1929, about $4.9 million of which were spent on agricultural projects; see YIVO, RG 358/58, p. 10 (Agro-Joint report, January–December 1929); AJA, Brown Papers, MS Coll 18, Box 1/8 (notes, late 1932). According to Galperin (“Agro-Joint,” 22), Agro-Joint spent 5.8 million rubles on construction, whereas Komzet spent more than 12 million.

146. Smidovich was quoted by Edelhertz in The Russian Paradox, 121.

147. Kagedan, “Soviet-Jewish Territorial Units,” 123. These conclusions were often the product of a narrow, unrepresentative body of sources.

CHAPTER 3. COLONIZATION AND DIASPORA POLITICS

1. In 1926, a Zionist author (Ha-elkoshi, Mi-sham, 67) argued that “‘The ‘Ugandism’ of the ‘Crimean scheme’ will pass.” Territorialist organizations surfaced in the West as late
as World War II; see Leksikon min ha-masad, 109; Benjamini, Medinot le-yehudim, passim. See also JDC 455, p. 2 [JTA [Jewish Telegraph Agency] Bulletin, March 20, 1924]; M. Mintz, “Mekomah shel tuat ha-poalim,” 262.


3. The Yidn arrived in the United States from approximately 1882 until World War I. Yahudim had come to America from the mid-1840s through the 1880s. Although composed mostly of relatively assimilated Jews of German descent, some East European and observant Jews filled important posts in the JDC: for example, Jacob Billikopf and Cyrus Adler.

4. JDC 62a (digest of editorials from the Yiddish press, April 17, 1928). The Jewish Morning Journal doubted that the large donors recruited for the ASJFSR (read “Yahudim”) would ultimately provide more stable funding than mass contributions; see JDC Archive 527 (digest of the Yiddish press, April 17, 1928). In addition, the Hebrew-language newspaper HaDoar published (on March 23, 1928) an extremely negative article, “The New Book of Lamentations,” a purported letter from a disgruntled colonist in Kherson. The ASJFSR is explained in Chapter 2.

5. Teller, Strangers and Natives, 28, 46. Yahudim published and edited the following journals: American Hebrew, American Israelite, and Menorah. Up to the 1920s, Zionist organizations had found it difficult to enlist support from wealthy American Jews; see Laqueur, A History of Zionism, 465.

6. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 7 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928). The Crimean Evsektsiia reported that talk of Jewish nationalism had sparked increased antisemitism in Simferopol’s non-Jewish schools.

7. Louis Brandeis withdrew from leadership of the ZOA in 1921 after a split with the group led by Chaim Weizmann and Louis Lipsky. Brandeis returned to prominent roles in the late 1920s. Internal fissures characterized American Zionism into the late 1930s, perhaps even as late as the “Biltmore” Declaration in 1942. The need to stake out unique political space in this conflict may also have intensified the criticism of Crimea among some Zionists. For details, see Fox, “American Zionism in the 1920s,” 299–315; and Feingold, A Time for Searching, 166–75. Great difficulties confront scholars who wish to determine with any accuracy when an ideological consensus in the Jewish Diaspora coalesced around Zionism. This discord left ample public space in the Jewish community for the JDC and other organizations.

8. Though outside the scope of this study, Zionists also obstructed JDC fund-raising in South Africa; see JDC Archive 540 (Alexander to Marshall, June 12, 1929), and (Marshall to Hyman, June 12, 1929). American Zionists exercised a degree of caution toward Louis Marshall in these affairs; see Central Zionist Archives, File L9/444 (Kisch to Zionist Executive Committee, February 19, 1929).

9. For example, JDC Archive 539, p. 1 (Rosen to Warburg, January 26, 1928); AJA, WP, Box 265/1 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, May 27, 1930); JDC Archive 541, p. 1 (Rosen to ASJFSR, April 30, 1931). The Left or United Opposition in the communist party referred to an al-
liance between Leon Trotsky, Grigorii Zinoviev, and Leo Kamenev. Rare doubt about Rosen’s reports is expressed in JDC Archive 483 (Morrissey to Hyman, June 17, 1927).

10. AJA, WP, Box 237/8 (Billikopf to Warburg, December 26, 1928). Billikopf argued that effective fund-raising required that all members of the JDC feel a “proprietary share” in deliberations.

11. AJA, WP, Box 234/1 (Hertz to Billikopf, September 15, 1927). This letter from a member of the community illustrated the depth of the Yidn-Yahudim conflict, even within the JDC. He complained that the JDC campaign manager in New York “did not want to know me, I am not one of his kind and am not named after one of the many German villages from which his ancestors came.”

12. This is the impression from JDC Archive 62/1 (“Open Letter of Importance,” February 1, 1929).

13. AJHS, Papers of Stephen S. Wise, Box 84, Reel 74-58 (Wise to Weizmann, September 14, 1925). For Rabbi Wise, Rosenwald’s $5 million donation signaled “the utter breakdown of the Jewish nation.” See Voss, Stephen S. Wise, 154. At the time, Jewish agricultural colonization continued in the Americas under the JCA and JAS. While the figures quoted by Feingold (A Time for Searching, 177) are inaccurate ($500 in Crimea versus $5,000 in Palestine to settle a family), they exemplified the contemporary debate over cost differentials.

14. AJA, Maurice Hexter Papers, Box 547 (interview by M. Alperin, 1978–1979). Hexter was a JDC official and directed the Emergency Fund for Palestine. Rabbi Wise directed the Palestine Foundation Fund, chaired the United Palestine Appeal, served as president of the Jewish National Fund and World Jewish Congress, was a member of the Jewish Agency, and founded a splinter faction of Reform Jewish congregations in New York. He also had national stature as a founding member of the NAACP and ACLU.

15. Fox, “American Zionism in the 1920s,” 144–45; Feingold, A Time for Searching, 180; JDC Archive 508 (resolution by American Jewish Congress, October 26, 1925). Marshall responded in JDC Archive 508 (statement on behalf of the JDC). Matthew Silver observed (“Mi-dfus pail le-dfus savil,” 226) that the Agro-Joint’s budget of $4.5 million during 1925–1928—compared with $1.5 million collected by the Palestine Economic Corporation in the same period—caused panic among Zionists.


18. Feingold, A Time for Searching, 176. In addition, the Yishuv faced violent, organized attacks from local Arabs starting in 1926.

19. AJA, MP, Box 9/6 (Marshall to Weizmann, May 28, 1926), (Marshall to Rosenwald, February 9, 1927), (Marshall to Stern, February 2, 1929); AJA, WP, Box 229/3 (Marshall to Warburg, May 29, 1926); AJA, BP, Box 3/16 (Billikopf to Brown, November 10, 1925). Under the terms of the British Mandate, the World Zionist Organization and its operating body, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, represented the Jews in the Yishuv. The en-
largement of the Jewish Agency in 1929 with non-Zionist members was intended, among other goals, to defuse tensions between these camps. Results were mixed, however. The ideological background of the conflict between Zionists and non-Zionists is discussed in Chapter 1.

20. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 305, 311. Weizmann was president of the World Zionist Organization from 1920 to 1931 and from 1935 to 1946. In the minds of Joint leaders, the two projects could not be equated because “the problems to be solved in [Palestine], in comparison to [Russia], are like cooking recipes given by one’s grandmother in comparison to working out health programs and schools for domestic science in college.” See AJA, WP, Box 222/3 (Warburg to Kahn, February 5, 1925).


22. JDC Archive 526 (Glickman to Hyman, August 6, 1926). Another concerned donor added warnings about traditional Ukrainian antisemitism, Soviet political instability, and the global communist conspiracy; see JDC Archive 526 (Rubin to Adler, September 3, 1925).

23. JDC Archive 526 (Margolin to Rosenberg, September 13, 1926); AJA, WP, Box 222/6 (Margolin to Warburg, September 7, 1925); Feingold, *A Time for Searching*, 179. N. I. Stone’s letter in August 1925 to Colonel Herbert Lehman (a top JDC official who later became governor of New York) illustrated a widespread sentiment in American Jewry. He warned that Jewish settlers would eventually fall under the control of the Evseks, “an especially detestable type of Communist in Russia.” He also worried that Russian peasants would “rise and cut the throats of every Jewish family” at the first opportunity; see AJA, WP, Box 222/8.

24. Stopniker, *Ha-yehudim be-Rusyah*, 35. The author had recently arrived in Palestine from Ukraine but provided no documentation for his observations.

25. Quoted in AJA, WP, Box 283/1 (Hyman to Warburg et al., January 19, 1932). See also JDC Archive 531 (Rosenberg to Strunsky, March 4, 1930).

26. JDC Archive 508 (Fischer to Rosen, October 15, 1925); JDC Archive 508 (Rosen to Brown, September 22, 1926); Silver, “Mi-dfus pail le-dfus savil,” 226, 230. Later in the decade, Wise still rejected positive reports about colonization; see AJHS, Wise Papers, Box 84, Reel 74-58 (Edelhertz to Wise, April 16, 1929).

27. As Daniel Soyer has shown (“Back to the Future,” 124–41), many Americans visited Soviet Russia—and even the Jewish colonies—during the interwar period. Officials from the JDC, however, had a different purpose and got a much closer look at daily life than most of the other visitors.

28. AJA, WP, Box 221/15 (Brown to Warburg, May 13, 1925); JDC Archive 509, p. 1 (Rosenberg to Warburg, May 5, 1926), (Rosenberg to Warburg, October 7, 1926); JDC Archive 62a, p. 17 (Billikopf’s statements at press conference, August 30, 1926); AJA, WP, Box 225/8 (Billikopf to Woll, November 18, 1926), Box 233/10 (Becker to JDC, May 20,
1927), (Warburg to JDC, May 20, 1927); JDC Archive 530 (Hyman’s impressions, December 28, 1928); JDC Archive 52a (Hyman to Seligman, December 2, 1936). Smidovich particularly impressed visitors from the JDC; see AJA, BP, Box 35/11 (Billikopf to Brown, August 7, 11, 15, 1926). Rykov left a similar mark; see JDC Archive 457a, pp. 25–26 (Becker, “Russia, 1927”).

29. Weizmann commented (Trial and Error, 311): “A typical American go-getter with a noisy technique for conjuring millions from the pockets of wealthy American Jews. People used to tell me wistfully that if we could only get for Zionism the whole-hearted support of Mr. David A. Brown, all our troubles would be over.”

30. Weizmann, quoted in Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 116. See also Voss, Stephen S. Wise, 144. Emanuel Neumann displayed similar distaste for Brown fifty years after the events: “Things might have gone much better but for the fact that, to head the new campaign, the JDC hit upon a man who seemed the last person capable of handling the delicate situation. David Brown was inclined to be as ruthless as he was energetic, and seemed to have little respect for American Zionists.” See Neumann, In the Arena, 84. Neumann directed the Jewish National Fund in America during this period and was extremely active in Zionist affairs.

31. JDC Archive 62/1 (Brown to Warburg, August 5, 1925).

32. JDC Archive 62a (Brown to Billikopf, December 20, 1926). Billikopf cautioned Brown, unsuccessfully, against emotional distractions: “Already (you may not be aware of it) you have developed definite ‘resentment complexes,’ they are bound to weaken your creative energies.” See AJA, BP, Box 3/16 (Billikopf to Brown, October 13, 1925). See also Parzen, “The Enlargement of the Jewish Agency,” 145.

33. JDC Archive 48 (Hyman to Hurwitz, April 23, 1926). Among other rumors, Hyman rebutted accusations that Brown embezzled funds from the United Jewish Campaign. He also denied innuendo that the International Harvester Company employed Rosen as a salesman and that American automobile manufacturers retained Brown and Rosen.

34. Kallen, Frontiers of Hope, 418–21; What Does Russian Jewry Think of Russian Jewish Agricultural Colonization?, 6–7; Professor Mordechai Altshuler (conversation with the author in Jerusalem, November 25, 1999). The communist campaign to undermine Zionism through popularization of Russian colonization in the world press deepened suspicions; see Parzen, “The Enlargement of the Jewish Agency,” 142, 146. British Mandatory policy repeatedly deflated the political effect of the Balfour Declaration and reduced the quotas for Jewish immigration from 1921 until the late 1930s.

35. AJA, WP, Box 222/2 (Warburg to Brown, July 13, 1925); Rosen in Izvestiia (no. 140, June 20, 1926), as translated in NARA, Decimal File 1910–1929, 861.52/64 (Coleman to the secretary of state, July 23, 1926).

36. Shapira, Yehudim hadashim, yehudim yeshanim, 201; Efron, Defenders of the Race, 11–12, 173. The Hebrew term ha-aliyah ha-reviit connotes the years 1924–1931. It contrasted the second and third waves of immigration from Europe to Palestine (1904–1914 and 1919–1923, respectively).

37. Neumann, In the Arena, 83.

38. Voss, Stephen S. Wise, 156. This quote came from a letter to Nahum Goldman, July 11, 1928. Competition between American and British Zionists for preeminence in the world
Zionist forums further complicated attempts to unify global Jewish leadership under an enlarged Jewish Agency for Palestine; see Parzen, “The Enlargement of the Jewish Agency,” 136–41. For other factors, see Laqueur, A History of Zionism, 468.

39. AJA, WP, Box 237/8. Billikopf wrote Warburg on March 7, 1928—while enlisting subscribers to the ASJFSR—that information should be restricted in order to avert any possible backlash from Zionists.

40. Feingold, A Time for Searching, 182.

41. AJA, MP, Box 9/6 (Weizmann to Marshall, January 17, 1927); JDC Archive 62a (Marshall and Warburg to Weizmann, April 5, 1926). Weizmann did not live in Palestine but was intimately familiar with conditions there.

42. JDC Archive 62a (notes between Brown and Rosalsky, January 2, 1927), (Weizmann to Marshall, January 17, 1927), (Marshall to Weizmann, January 17, 1927), (Brown to Marshall, January 20, 1927); Beizer, Evrei Leningrada, 265; Levavi, Birobizhan, 50; Benjamini, Medinot le-yehudim, 32, 94.

43. Central Zionist Archives, A24/177 (Ussishkin to editor of Univers-Israélite, February 24, 1926); M. Mintz, “Mekomah shel tnuat ha-poalim,” 262. Ussishkin directed the Jewish National Fund in Palestine. There was less understanding among recent Russian émigrés in Palestine; for example, see Ha-elkoshi, Mi-sham, 62.

44. Ruppin, Ha-biyashvut ha-baklait, 38–39. He thought that Jews should engage in all sectors of the Russian economy. A small delegation of Palestinian communist party leaders and labor unionists also visited the colonies in 1928; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, ll. 62–71 (Gurevich’s report on the Palestinian delegation, January 13, 1928). David Ben-Gurion, at the time the general secretary of the Federation of Jewish Workers in the Yishuv, visited the Hehalutz display at the Moscow Agricultural Exhibition in 1923.

45. AJA, WP, Box 231/12 (Silver to Billikopf, September 15, 1927), (Billikopf to Warburg, October 3, 1927). Rabbi Silver met with Ozet representatives in Moscow but did not visit the colonies. He believed that the colonists would remain on the land only as long as urban economic conditions remained poor. See AJHS, Abba Hillel Silver Papers, Series 1, Reel 15, Folder 333 (Billikopf to Silver, September 30, 1927), (Silver to Billikopf, October 7, 1927).

46. Kallen, Frontiers of Hope, 433. According to Maier Bryan Fox (in “American Zionism in the 1920s,” 299–300), an understanding of Palestine’s physical limitations among Labor Zionists brought them to accept the rationale of the “Crimean Plan.”


48. According to David Fishman (in “Religioznye lidery,” 192), the Lubavitch community in Russia numbered several tens of thousands.

49. Habad (a Hebrew acronym signifying “Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge") was a Hasidic movement founded in the eighteenth century in the town of Lubavitch, Ukraine.

50. Rosen identified urban rates of intermarriage in excess of 20 percent. Modern studies concur; see Altshuler, Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust, 270. Tensions between Zionists in Russia and Schneersohn worried JDC officials. Warburg suspected that denunciations from Zionists triggered Schneersohn’s arrest in the summer of 1927; see AJA,
WP 457, Box 231/12 (Warburg to Billikopf, July 14, 1927). As chairman of the Rabbinical Committee and head of the Lubavitch movement, Schneersohn maintained contact with rabbis throughout the USSR and abroad.

51. Many Orthodox rabbis had fled Russia between 1917 and 1921. For a discussion of Rabbi Schneersohn’s leadership, his relations with the Orthodox community, and resistance to him from non-Hasidim, see Fishman, “Religioznye lidery,” 191–95; and Beizer, Evrei Leningrada, 204–35.

52. Soviet policy discouraged religious instruction. Schneersohn drew more attention from the authorities than other rabbis, even in connection to colonization. A contemporary Soviet author (Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 173) observed: “Reb Schneersohn tries to convince Jews to return to the traditional patriarchal lifestyle. He receives significant sums from American religious and national organizations. With this foreign money, [he] aggressively plants rabbis, religious instructors, cantors, etc., into the settlements.”


54. Schneersohn voiced this opinion directly to Joint officials and orchestrated protests from his supporters. For example, see JDC Archive 473 (rabbinical committee to Warburg, May 1927). See also Glitsenshtein, Sefer ha-toledot, 91; and JDC Archive 476 (Gourary to Adler, October 22, 1929).

55. Schneersohn requested support of handicraft workshops for religious shtetl dwellers. He suspected that industrial work might promote assimilation. He likewise thought farming an un-Jewish profession and a dangerous incitement of rural antisemitism. See JDC Archive 475 (Schneersohn to Adler, April 16, 1928); JDC Archive 509 (summary of Schneersohn’s memorandum, April 19, 1928). See also Fishman, “Religioznye lidery,” 197–98.

56. As an illustration of the conceptual gap, Agro-Joint helped a group of religious Jews form a colony but later refused additional appropriations for construction of a ritual bath. The head of the colony could not overcome Rosen’s opposition, even when the former coyly asked if the bath “could not be reported as an extra tractor.” See JDC Archive 457a, pp. 8, 10 (luncheon for Kahn and Rosen).

57. In 1928, the JDC appropriated $200,000 of the $300,000 requested by Schneersohn for religious life; see JDC Archive 475 (Rosen to Adler, January 26, 1928). Rabbi Schneersohn wrote to and met regularly with Joint visitors in Russia before his arrest and subsequent flight from Leningrad in the autumn of 1927. Most important, he sent a letter to the Philadelphia Conference in support of colonization. After a short exile in Riga, he emigrated to America; see Glitsenshtein, Sefer ha-toledot, 29–71, 101.

58. JDC Archive 475 (Kahn to Adler, February 29, 1928), (Hyman to Kahn, May 24, 1928); JDC Archive 477 (Adler to Hyman, January 29, 1932). Adler, though highly critical of Soviet policy and sincerely committed to support of religious life, adamantly opposed involvement in illegal activity, both in principle and in order to protect Agro-Joint; see JDC Archive 476 (Adler to Gourary, December 13, 1929). At this time, there was no law against foreign assistance to religious organizations. Rather, it was illegal for the religious community in the Soviet Union to be associated with foreign bodies.

59. While in Riga, Schneersohn acquired large sums in rubles from Russian émigrés in exchange for foreign currency. Since rubles were not convertible outside of Russia,
Schneersohn exacted a favorable exchange rate from the émigrés. Soviet law forbade this type of transaction. See JDC Archive 476, p. 2 (Hyman to Adler, October 7, 1929); JDC Archive 539, p. 7 (Hyman to Warburg et al., December 14, 1928).

60. Warburg wrote Billikopf on November 16, 1927 (AJA, WP, Box 231/12): “Schneersohn is doing very nicely for himself. He belongs to the self-righteous lot of ministers who have no patience with other people’s opinions and is anything but cooperative. I am not seriously worried about him, having seen him travel in state, dressed with the greatest of care, with secretaries and ladies seeing him off with flowers and candy. Now that he is in Riga, he probably will be supported by his adherents in the same style to which he is accustomed—which is a good deal better than rabbis do in [America].” Time did not heal these wounds, as Warburg commented to Hyman on February 5, 1932 (JDC Archive 477): “I have no confidence whatsoever in Schneersohn, who has lived in luxury in Russia at the expense of his co-religionists and does not act like a holy man of the Ghandi [sic] type.”

61. JDC Archive 475 (Hyman’s memorandum, October 13, 1928); JDC Archive 476 (Adler to Hyman, January 31, 1929). By this time, Adler opposed cooperation with Schneersohn. An exchange of letters in February 1930 added to this sentiment; Adler reprimanded Schneersohn after the latter apparently fabricated reports on the arrest of rabbis. Adler concluded that the rabbis had been harassed but not endangered; see JDC Archive 477 (Adler to Schneersohn, February 28, 1930), (Grodzensky to Adler, February 17, 1930), (Schneersohn to Rosen, February 19, 1930), (Schneersohn to Hyman, February 21, 1930), and (Schneersohn to Warburg, February 23, 1930). On the eve of formation of the ASJFSR, Adler received an appeal for $3 million for the religious councils in the USSR; see JDC Archive 476 (Gourary to Adler, October 22, 1929).

62. JDC Archive 476 (Marshall to Hyman, April 4, 1929). Schneersohn’s son-in-law, Rabbi Gourary, also served as his representative in America.

63. JDC Archive 474 (Adler to Hyman, December 19, 1927); JDC Archive 475 (Hyman’s memorandum, October 13, 1925), (Adler to Hyman, June 22, 1928); JDC Archive 476 (Adler to Hyman, January 28, 1929). Adler handled religious matters in the USSR for the JDC, served as president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and was a founder of the American Jewish Committee. From 1930, Adler avoided contact with Schneersohn and his emissaries; see JDC Archive 477 (telephone conversation with Adler, March 13, 1930), (Adler to Hyman, June 24, 1931), (Adler to Schneersohn, June 29, 1931), (Morrissey to Schneersohn, July 1, 1931).

64. JDC Archive 477 (Hyman to Adler, February 25, 1930). Hyman and Rosen concurred that no data on future funding be released to Rabbi Gourary. Bernhard Kahn advised secrecy concerning the appropriation of $20,000 earmarked for the emigration of important rabbis and others, lest the former “make life impossible for me and my friend Oungre [the director of JCA].” See JDC Archive 510 (Kahn to Adler, August 30, 1930).

65. JDC Archive 476 (Hyman to Schneersohn, April 3, 1929); JDC Archive 476 (Gourary to Adler, October 22, 1929).

66. For examples of earlier requests by Schneersohn and his loyal rabbis, see JDC Archive 474 (Schneersohn to Warburg, May 24, 1927); and JDC Archive 475 (Grodzensky to Adler, June 24, 1928).
67. For an illustration, see the Joint’s response to requests for Passover packages in AJA, WP, Box 283/1 (Hyman to Baerwald, January 19, 1932).

68. JDC Archive 457a, p. 2 (Rosen’s report to the executive committee, November 11, 1931); JDC Archive 477 (Adler to Hyman, January 29, 1932); Beizer, Evrei Leningrada, 359. David Fishman (“Religioznye lidery,” 199) concluded that the stock market crash caused the JDC to cease aid for religious institutions. The archival findings do not corroborate this. In fact, these sums were quite small, thereby relatively immune to the general financial crisis.

69. JDC Archive 475 (Morrissey to Kahn, October 19, 1928); JDC Archive 477 (Warburg to Hyman, February 5, 1932). Joint officers argued that the Soviets applied a uniform policy toward all religions and had consistently fought antisemitism; see JDC Archive 531 (Warburg to Goldman, March 7, 1930).

70. AJA, WP, Box 228/2 (Rosenberg to Warburg, February 23, 1926), Box 229/15 (Emmanuel to Stephens).

71. JDC Archive 515a (Billikopf to Hyman, January 24, 1928).

72. AJA, WP, Box 234/3 (Bulletin of Russian Reconstruction Farms, 1926). For another abortive American service organization, see Fitzgerald, “Blinded by Technology,” 468–85. For other semipublic organizations involved in Soviet agriculture, see NARA, Decennial File 1930–1939, 861.602/213 (Philander Cable to the secretary of state, February 25, 1930). Other Western philanthropies offered narrow, specialized cooperation with Soviet counterparts. For example, see Solomon, “Knowing the ‘Local’.”

73. Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 186. The pivotal event seemed to be the death of the JDC’s first chairman (Jacob Schiff) in 1920. Background information on the JCA and ORT can be found in Chapter 1.

74. The Foundation replaced the JDC’s Reconstruction Department. It established affordable cooperative credit institutions for Jewish merchants and artisans in Eastern Europe. See Ussoskin, Struggle for Survival, passim; Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 36.

75. AJA, WP, Box 215/8 (Sack report, May 10, 1924). See also Norman, An Outstretched Arm, 139; AJA, WP, Box 222/6 (Kahn et al. to Warburg, July 13, 1925); JDC Archive 508, p. 13 (minutes of the Committee of Seven, June 17, 1924). The JCA refused, at least in part, because of fiscal troubles; it had exhausted much of its financial base in feverish activity during the first postwar years.

76. AJA, WP, Box 222/2 (Kahn to Baerwald, May 12, 1925).

77. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 7, l. 1 (Pikman’s report, 1926). For details on JCA activity, see EKO, Dva goda raboty, and EKO, Piat’ let raboty.

78. Mirkin’s memorandum to the JCA (JDC Archive 469, February 12, 1930) fueled this pessimism. As Bauer also recognized (in My Brother’s Keeper, 74), a thorough reading of the memorandum reveals mixed conclusions about colonization. The JCA started to remove funds from Russia in April 1932 but remained nominally active in the USSR until May 1938; see Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 189. At the peak of operations in the late 1920s, the JCA employed five agronomists in its Russian colonies; see Norman, An Outstretched Arm, 140.

79. JDC Archive 508 (Kahn to Rosenberg, May 25, 1925); AJA, MP, Box 11/7 (Morrissey to Warburg and Rosenberg, November 1, 1928). During negotiations with the Soviets on
creation of the ASJFSR, Joint officials still naïvely presumed that the JCA and ORT would also accept five thousand new families into their settlement areas.

80. YIVO, RG 358/26 (Rosenberg to Warburg, May 2, 1928). The JCA refused new investments because it had already committed $3 million to agricultural work in Russia. See AJA, WP, Box 244/4 (Warburg to Rosenwald, August 9, 1928).

81. AJA, WP, Box 265/2 (“JCA-Agro-Joint,” February 1930). Warburg expressed a degree of vindication in 1937: “The JCA, which was previously considered a moneybag without a heart, does an extraordinarily broad job now. They have done things which a few years ago we considered impossible.” See AJA, WP, Box 343/5, p. 5 (minutes of JDC board meeting, April 29, 1937). At this time, the JCA invested heavily on colonization work in South America, in expectation of immigration from Germany.

82. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 7, ll. 2–12 (Pikman’s report, 1926). Pikman remarked (p. 3) that many Agro-Joint instructors gained experience in the early 1920s while working for ORT in the old colonies. The JDC underwrote much of ORT’s work from 1922 through 1925. See JDC Archive 483 (Kahn to JDC, July 5, 1922); JDC Archive 508, p. 3 (Rosen to Rosenberg, March 27, 1925); Munitz, Irgunei ORT, 90.

83. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 7, ll. 14–20 (Pikman’s report, 1926); Szajkowski, The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 192–93. Even in the mid-1930s, acrimony persisted to the detriment of settlers: the JDC refused to help German refugees stranded on a French farm after the failure of ORT’s support network; see AJA, WP, Box 315/2 (Kahn to Hyman, March 8, 1935).

84. AJA, Bogen Papers, Manuscript Collection 3, Box 3/6 (Bogen to Billikopf, September 19, 1924).

85. Suspicions surfaced early; see JDC Archive 483 (Lehman to JDC, June 19, 1922). Lehman observed: “[I] know that ORT and other organizations make [the] Soviet government believe they are powerful enough [to] bring Joint’s money into Russia and keep Joint itself out.” It is still unclear whether the pressure came from ORT-Farband or the Sovietized branch of ORT. See Munitz, Irgunei ORT, 85.

86. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, ll. 33–37 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928). ORT left Belorussia after total collectivization.

87. In the autumn of 1927, between 60 and 70 percent of all the households and acreage in the colonization project came under Agro-Joint authority. See YIVO, RG 358/158 (activities of service organizations, 1925–1926); JDC Archive 483 (Liubarskii’s report at the Agro-Joint conference, February 1927). In 1926, Agro-Joint spent 2.2 million rubles of the total 4.7 million invested in colonization; JCA, 200,000; and ORT, 150,000. The remainder came from the settlers and the Soviet government; see American Jewish Yearbook, vol. 29 (1927): 66. ORT expended another $75,000 on industrial training; see AJA, WP, Box 234/6 (Moskovitz press release, December 21, 1927). Szajkowski (The Mirage of American Jewish Aid, 188) presented much higher figures for JCA investment: he calculated $4.1 million spent in Russian colonization from 1926 to 1930. See also Norman, An Outstretched Arm, 138–48; Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 103; Glubochanskii and Rivkina, “Via Nova,” 41.

88. Ikor had similar branches in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Lithuania, Palestine, and South Africa.


91. The ARA provided humanitarian relief aid with short-term, clearly quantifiable results. The JCA, the Jewish Agricultural Society, the Galveston Plan, and assorted resettlement ventures in the Americas relied only on wealthy donors.

92. The British-Jewish Federation requested that Agro-Joint name a colony [Israel] “Zangwill,” in honor of this local luminary and leader of the territorialist movement. The federation believed this would spark donations in Britain and offset Zionist attacks against Russian colonization; see AJA, BP, Box 3/16 (Jochelman to Brown, September 25, 1926).

93. AJA, WP, Box 234/3 (Schweitzer to *Menorah*, May 19, 1927). Billikopf bemoaned the shallowness of donors: “Too bad that [big donors] are not blessed with those facilities which would enable us to appeal almost exclusively to their heads and not to their hearts.” See AJA, WP, Box 231/12 (Rosenberg to Hurwitz, December 6, 1927).

94. AJA, BP, Box 3/16 (Billikopf to Brown, October 13, 1925). JDC leaders also adjusted the fund-raising message to fit particular events; see AJA, WP, Box 224/20 (Adler to Warburg, October 4, 1926).

95. JDC Archive 474, p. 3 (Hyman to Adler, September 16, 1927); AJA, BP, Box 11/4 (Billikopf to Hertz, October 12, 1927). Also, see the correspondence between Billikopf and Rabbi Hertz from October 1927 until February 1928 in AJA, BP, Box 11/4.

96. Details of the Society appear in Chapter 2.

97. JDC Archive 539 (Rosenberg to Rosen, January 4, 1928); AJA, WP, Box 237/8 (Billikopf to Warburg, March 7, 1928). Louis Marshall was instrumental in this effort. Unique among his Jewish contemporaries, he corresponded as an equal with present and future presidents, secretaries of state, and corporate giants. Marshall’s moral weight on behalf of colonization cannot be overestimated. His help in securing Herbert Hoover’s endorsement (while still Secretary of Commerce) for Russian settlement was a springboard for fund-raising efforts in the United States and sine qua non for large donors such as Julius Rosenwald; see AJA, WP, Box 2189 (Rosenwald to Billikopf, September 21, 1925). Henry Ford’s refusal to subscribe to the ASJFSR constituted Marshall’s only known public relations failure; see AJA, MP, Box 1/7 (Marshall to Ford, December 14, 1928). For general discussion of Marshall’s role, see Rosenthal, “The Public Life of Louis Marshall,” 629–45; Rosenthal, “Dealing with the Devil”; and, Dalin “Louis Marshall,” 54–84.

98. Examples abound for this tactic. For instance, see JDC Archive 62a, p. 19 (Billikopf at press conference, August 30, 1926); JDC Archive 483 (Rosen’s report to the Constructive Relief Conference, October 23, 1927).


100. JDC Archive 530, p. 14 (Hyman’s impressions, December 28, 1928).

101. Extreme reactions surfaced from all quarters in 1928–1929. In response to negative reports on the colonies carried by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and *Jewish Bulletin,*
Brown complained to Hyman (JDC Archive 528, July 19, 1928) that “there have been orders placed to send in every negative item of news from Russia. This would be one way of souring the people of this country against Russia in favor of Palestine.” Brown counterattacked in the *New York Times* on July 12.

102. In response to Rabbi Wise’s recent accusations against Russian colonization, Rosenberg asked Simeon Strunsky of the *New York Times* on March 4, 1930 (JDC Archive 531): “How far would you advise me to make any statements and particularly how far, if at all, would you advise me to make any controversial statements?” For a profile of Rosenberg, see Kagedan, *Soviet Zion*, 49–62.

103. JDC Archive 527 (Rosenberg to Brisbane, March 26, 1928).

104. For example, see JDC Archive 531 (Rosenwald to Stolz, April 30, 1929).

105. AJA, WP, Box 237/8 (Billikopf to Rosenberg, March 23, 1928). Billikopf regretted that a Philadelphia daily carried news of Rosenwald’s $5 million donation on a news-saturated weekday. He noted that Franklin Roosevelt’s popularity stemmed from understanding the importance of timely press releases.

106. JDC Archive 528 (Levine to Frisch, August 6, 1928). Hoover’s letter appeared in the *New York Times* and *Herald* on September 23, 1928.

107. AJA, WP, Box 221/15 (Billikopf to Hyman, July 20, 1925); JDC Archive 527 (Rosenberg to Gannett, March 30, 1928); JDC Archive 528 (Brown to Reid, August 3, 1928), (Solow to Rosenberg, September 19, 1928), (Rosenberg to Solow, September 20, 1928), (Rosenberg to Solow, October 1, 1928). Reaction to a *Chicago Tribune* article on April 14, 1928, illustrated Rosenberg’s orchestrated response. The paper reported a pogrom against an Agro-Joint colony in Crimea. In a rapid exchange of cables, Rosenberg arranged Kahn’s letter to the editor, while applying pressure directly on the *Tribune* (via James Becker) to retract the article. See the correspondence between Kahn, Rosenberg, Becker, and the editor from April 16 to 19, 1928, in JDC Archive 527. Joseph Marcus (a former JDC official and businessman from the Chicago area) also wrote an angry letter to the editor on April 25, 1928. While there is no direct connection between Rosenberg and Marcus’s letter, its presence in the file is highly suggestive.

108. JDC Archive 474, p. 3 (Hyman to Adler, September 16, 1927); JDC Archive 531 (protocol of discussion between Rosen and the New York Yiddish press, February 13, 1930); JDC Archive 457a (Rosen’s statement for the press, February 19, 1930).

109. See for example JDC Archive 527 (“The Next Ten Years of Farm Settlement in Russia”); and JDC Archive 457a (luncheon for Kahn and Rosen attended by the Yiddish press, November 12, 1931). Clippings in JDC Archive 527 show that almost all the major newspapers in New York and Chicago carried the announcement. Rosenberg also coordinated release of news about Rosenwald’s $5 million subscription; see JDC Archive 527 (Rosenberg to Warburg, February 3, 1928). Hyman felt that the JDC squandered an opportunity by ineffective coverage of the formal signature of the ASJFSR agreement in January 1929. See JDC Archive 530 (Hyman to Rosenberg, January 16, 1929).

110. JDC Archive 527, p. 2 (Grun to Rosenberg, May 11, 1928); “Felix Warburg: ‘How We Aid Jewish Farmers in Russia,’” *New York American*, May 27, 1928. Rosenberg thanked William Randolph Hearst on May 29, 1928 (JDC Archive 527), for publishing this article and his donation of one hundred thousand offprints to the United Jewish Cam-
campaign for national distribution. Elsewhere, Rosenberg stated that “[the colonists] support themselves as pioneers on the land just as American men and women did when in the covered wagon they ventured into our great Western plains”; see JDC Archive 528, p. 1 (address for WRNY, June 24, 1928). Some Soviet authors used a similar approach: “Historical circumstances drive the Jews toward pioneering measures. Just as Quakers and sectarians traversed the oceans to find a new homeland, the Jews are leaving their shtetls and making a new life in the Ukrainian steppe and Crimean mountains.” See Vendrov, “Po evreiskim koloniiam,” 214.

111. JDC Archive 62a, p. 8 (Billikopf at press conference, August 30, 1926).
112. JDC Archive 527 (Spiegelman to Hyman, April 25, 1928), p. 2 (Grun to Rosenberg, May 11, 1928), (Levine to Rosenberg, May 31, 1928).
113. Almost every JDC public statement and publication promoted the image of ethnic harmony. See JDC Archive 62a, p. 11 (Billikopf at press conference, August 30, 1926); AJA, WP, Box 254/4, p. M-1 (Rosenberg’s speech in “Proceedings of National Conference”); Embree, “Jews on the Steppes,” 14. The JDC distributed offprints of this rosy report, highlighting the fact that Edwin Embree (the executor of Julius Rosenwald’s estate) was not Jewish. For more on interethnic relations, see JDC Archive 534 (Rosenberg’s report to the Philadelphia Conference, September 1925); and JDC Archive 540 (Rosenberg to Alexander, December 18, 1929). Periodic reports from Rosen also appeared in pamphlet form.
114. Hyman, Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe; Brown, $25 Million—and Why?, “An Alliance of American Israel for All Israel”; “After Three Years: The Progress of the Jewish Farm Colonies in Russia. Reports of Joseph Rosen, Felix Warburg, and James Becker”; Rosen, The Present Status of Russian Jewish Agricultural Colonization and the Outlook. Among those who wrote to Warburg in the summer of 1925: the Queens Borough president, the president of the Corn Exchange Bank, the director of the New York Jewish Federation, the presidents of several companies and the New York Times. See AJA, WP, Box 222/7 (responses sent to Warburg).
115. AJA, WP, Box 229/12 (Rosenberg to Warburg, September 15, 1926), Box 229/3 (Marshall to Warburg, September 25, 1926), (Marshall to Rosenberg, September 25, 1926); JDC Archive 52b (Adler to Rosenberg, October 4, 1926). Marshall’s editorial pen also riddled drafts of Warburg’s published report on Russia in 1927. He removed criticisms of other Jewish philanthropies and requested additional descriptions of personal contacts with colonists because “the human touch is of the utmost importance.” See AJA, WP, Box 234/9 (Marshall to Warburg, June 22, 1927).
116. JDC Archive 528 (Rosenberg to Enelow, June 8, 1928), (Enelow’s speech to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, July 17, 1928); JDC Archive 476 (Fram to Rosenwald, August 26, 1929); JDC Archive 477 (Goldman to Warburg, March 4, 1930); JDC Archive 531 (Warburg to Goldman, March 7, 1930).
117. AJA, WP, Box 251/14 (Fox to Warburg, October 26, 1927).
118. AJA, “American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, James H. Becker, Motion Picture Footage” (videotape recording no. 368). Becker inserted captions like “From New York to Weisbrunnen” (a colony near Kherson) to strengthen the emotional appeal to donors.
119. For example, JDC Archive 528 (address by Rosenberg on WRNY, June 24, 1928).

120. One such artist was Frank Horowitz. His paintings displayed in Moscow in early 1928 (according to reviews in Pravda and Nasha gazeta) and later that year in New York; see JDC Archive 528 (Rosenberg to Rosen, June 21, 1928). The JDC also helped send Issachar Ryback (a noted Russian-Jewish artist living in Paris) to the colonies in 1925. He published a bound reprint of paintings (On the Jewish Fields of the Ukraine) made during this visit; see AJA, WP, Box 228/6 (Warburg to Kahn, November 30, 1926). It is unknown whether Ryback displayed the original works.

121. Edelhertz, The Russian Paradox, 133.

CHAPTER 4. SOVIET POWER AND LIFE IN THE COLONIES, 1925–1929

1. A small Jewish presence had been in Crimea since late antiquity. After the Russian conquest in the eighteenth century, the Ashkenazi population came to outnumber the Krymchaks and Karaites communities, who had lived for centuries in the region.

2. In 1900, Moscow had 8,546 poorly trained rural police officers to control 90 million peasants. See Daly, “On the Significance of Emergency Legislation in Late Imperial Russia,” 624. While the secret police force multiplied rapidly after the 1905 revolution, its focus remained urban and its attempts to pacify the countryside often backfired.

3. For discussions of the state’s historic weakness in borderland areas, see Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia; Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors; Robbins, The Tsar’s Viceroys; Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control in Russia; Jones, Provincial Development in Russia; N. Weissman, Reform in Tsarist Russia; and Avrich, Russian Rebels.

4. Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War; Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society; Pinkus, “The Extra-Territorial National Minorities,” 73–91. Soviet administrative power did not penetrate either the geographic periphery or rural Russia during the NEP. See Lewin, Russian Peasants; Lewin, The Making of the Soviet System; N. Weissman, “Policing the NEP Countryside.”

5. Keller, To Moscow, Not Mecca, xv, 248, 253; Kuromiya, Freedom and Terror in the Donbas, 2, 336. Lynne Viola (in “The Role of the OGPU,” 37) discussed the limitations of the secret police until the early 1930s. Beginning in the late 1960s, Western scholarship recognized the chronic understaffing of the Soviet bureaucracy; see Ofer, The Service Sector, 5, 141, 147, 157, 162.

6. Older Western and recent Russian scholarship generally interpreted Soviet nationality policy before 1941 in narrow, anti-Stalinist terms. For example, see Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow; Liuks, “Evreiskii vopros v politike Stalina,” 41–59; Bugai, “20-e–50-e gody: pereseleniia i deportatsii evreev,” 176.

7. For examples, see Edgar, “Emancipation of the Unveiled”; Keller, To Moscow, Not Mecca; and some of the essays in Suny and Martin, A State of Nations.

8. Simon, Nationalism and Policy, 13. Simon is representative of newer Western scholarship that balances between central and local power. The policy of korenizatsiia is described above in Chapter 1. According to James Hughes (in Stalin, Siberia and the Crisis of the NEP, 205–7, 211), the political uncertainty in the center after Lenin’s death (1924) prolonged the life span of korenizatsiia.
9. Pinkus, *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 52. The Yiddish language flowered under korenizatsiia through a Yiddish school system, press, theater, and court system; see Gitelman, “Formirovanie evreiskoi kul’tury,” 23. When the regime abandoned korenizatsiia in the late 1930s, the official use of Yiddish went into sharp decline.

10. For general observations on this aspect of Soviet nationality policy, see Schwartz, “Regional Population Redistribution,” 129–34. Soviet attempts to foster cultural and national distinctiveness as a means to create a unified state are discussed in Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations.”

11. Katz, *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, 368. Soviet peasants were ambivalent toward the Bolsheviks; the revolution brought them more land, but not more profits because of the lack of draught power. See Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 98. In 1922, Jews represented 5.2 percent of party membership but only 1.8 percent of the population. From 1927 to 1940, the Jewish percentage in the general population remained steady, while its proportion in the party declined to as low as 3.8 percent. See Gitelman, “Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust,” in Gitelman, *Bitter Legacy*, 78–80.

12. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 378, l. 13 (protocol no. 11 of obkom secretariat, February 14, 1925), d. 376, ll. 35–36 (protocol no. 22 of obkom presidium, June 4, 1925), ll. 45–49 (protocol no. 26 of obkom presidium, June 16, 1925), d. 463, ll. 77–78 (protocol of obkom bureau, August 27, 1926). From the third protocol (p. 45), it appears that some members of the obkom feared Soviet retribution but still favored limited resistance. For the public aspects and specific reasons for Tatar resistance, see Levavi, “Ha-Ibrahimovshchina,” 35–40; Levavi, *Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim*, Chapter 3, p. 5.

13. Other national minorities occasionally enjoyed some contact with foreign organizations, but these were evidently not nearly as effective as in the Jewish case. For example, see Ostasheva, “Vlast’ bez vlasti,” 285–97.

14. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 699, ll. 104–11 (protocol no. 10a: closed meeting of the obkom bureau, March 17, 1927). This behavior bore striking similarities to how the Argentine state countered the JCA’s attempts to form a compact territory through the allotment of dispersed tracts. It was also a trait common to other Soviet national autonomous entities; see Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 384.


16. JDC leaders were aware of this aspect of colonization almost from its inception; see JDC Archive 508, p. 2 (Rosen to Board of Trustees, December 31, 1924). Earlier, Rosen mistakenly predicted that the Crimean government would welcome colonization. Meetings with low-level Ukrainian officials convinced him that a desire to improve rural conditions outweighed any resistance; see JDC Archive 508, pp. 10–11 (minutes of the meeting of the Committee of Seven, June 17, 1924).

17. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 19, l. 14 (Gol’del’s report on trip to Crimea, November 8 to December 4, 1924). Tatar communists, among them Ibrahimov, informed Gol’del that local
considerations precluded fulfillment of Moscow’s orders on land allotments for Jewish colonization.

18. Komzet sent Liubarskii to conclude land allotments after the debacle with Gol’de; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 19 (Liubarskii’s mandate, January 1925). Komzet’s policy recommendation to the Sovnarkom of the RSFSR drew heavily from Liubarskii’s report. See YIVO, RG 358/104, pp. 1–9 (1925).

19. YIVO, RG 358/195, p. 19 (Liubarskii’s report on Crimea, January 17–31, 1925); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 19, l. 108 (Rosen to Merezhin, March 10, 1925), ll. 103–4 (Merezhin and Bragin to Komzet, March 19, 1925); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 84, d. 722, ll. 128, 132, 135 (Petropavlovskii to Stalin, October 15, 1925). He accused Tatar “right-nationalists” of advancing only the interests of Tatars. He recommended removal of these class enemies, kulaks, bourgeois, and intelligentsia.

20. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 94–95 (Gol’de). Gol’de voiced similar criticism and added an international dimension; see his report, GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 19, l. 15.

21. YIVO, RG 358/104, p. 6 (Komzet to Sovnarkom, 1925); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 131, ll. 1–2 (protocol no. 1 of the TsIK presidium commission, February 16, 1927), ll. 3–4 (protocol no. 2 of the TsIK presidium commission, February 17, 1927). By early 1927, Moscow apparently demanded the physical presence of the relevant Tatar communist leaders at central meetings to decide colonization policy.

22. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 699, ll. 108–11 (protocol no. 10a: restricted meeting of the obkom bureau, March 17, 1927). Tatar communists eventually appropriated land for colonization after they lost an appeal to the Economic Council of the USSR; see Keren, Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 75–76.

23. GARF, f. r-5546, op. 55, d. 1030, ll. 5–14 (Larin to the Central Committee, late 1926), d. 1744 (protocol of Ibrahimov’s interrogation, February 9, 1928); Williams, “A Homeland Lost,” 555–56; Marples and Duke, “Ukraine, Russia, and the Question of Crimea,” 266; “Kak Rossiia poteriala Krym,” Delovaia zhizn’, 1998, no. 10: 29. Although widely respected as an economic planner, Larin did not hold high office in the Soviet administration. In the aftermath of Ibrahimov’s arrest, the OGPU executed or exiled up to thirty-five hundred Crimean Tatar leaders and intelligentsia (“the flower of Tatar intelligentsia”). Most of the victims had connections to Milli Firka. The sources do not concur on the charges brought against Ibrahimov and others; they range from kidnapping, murder, and embezzlement to conspiracy with a foreign power.

24. Kagedan, “Soviet Jewish Territorial Units,” 126–27, 129, 131. Ukrainians feared that creation of Jewish territorial units would adversely affect the republic’s autonomy. Kagedan argued that the Soviets compromised by granting Jews autonomous districts instead of an ASSR or SSR. He missed the critical point that very few people took republican notions seriously, nor were they ever an operative goal for Agro-Joint or its Soviet partners. The Ukrainian Narkomzem chairman clearly put the colonization in center-periphery terms; see YIVO, RG 358/88 (A. Shlikhter, “Pravda o evreiskom pereselenii,” Bolshevik Ukrainy, no. 9, September 1927).

25. RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 26–31 (Vol’f to Iaroslavskii, December 1924); Zinger and Belenkaia, “Stages in the Formation of Policy,” 144. Arthur Ruppin (Ha-hityashvut ha-
haklait, 12) observed that the Ukrainian government allowed land settlement on its territory only for Jews from the western provinces of Ukraine. Mattityahu Mintz suggested that the resistance of authorities in Ukraine and Crimea forced the Soviet regime to seek a solution for the Jewish problem elsewhere; see “Problems of Agricultural Resettlement,” 144–45. Kagedan (in Soviet Zion, 78–79) similarly overstated the effect of Ukrainian resistance. In fact, the shift to Birobidzhan came after removal of the Tatar communist leadership and suppression of the Ukrainian tactics.

26. American Jewish Yearbook, vol. 27 (1925): 61. This installment noted that “while the government of Ukraine has shown its interest in the colonization of Jews, the Crimean authorities, according to press reports, appear to be unfavorably inclined toward the project.”

27. GARF, f. r-5546, op. 55, d. 856, l. 9 (Smidovich to Stalin, May 26, 1925), d. 1516, ll. 132–34 (Smidovich and Merezhin to Politburo, November 28, 1927). Moscow eliminated Ukrainian maneuvering room on colonization in the early 1930s; it, not Kiev, negotiated Agro-Joint’s temporary withdrawal and return to southern Ukraine (in late 1930 and January 1933). According to an Agro-Joint source, Moscow wanted the Ukrainian republic to fund Jewish colonization, thereby maximizing Agro-Joint’s investment in Crimea; see JDC Archive 457a, p. 1 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932). In the Belorussian case, roles reversed; local authorities lost the battle with Moscow to develop local Jewish colonies. Instead, Ozet actively recruited Belorussian Jews for settlement elsewhere; see Shmeruk, Ha-kibutz ha-yehudi, 65, 72, 74, 94.

28. For more on Vojo Nova, see Shapira, “Goralah shel kvutsat Elkind”; Glubochanskii and Rivkina, “Via Nova”; and Hillig, Aufschwung und Krise der Kibbutzbewegung. In Soviet and in some scholarly sources, “Vojo Nova” is rendered “Voio Nova” “Via Nova.” The name of the commune was derived from the Esperanto “Vojo Nova” (“New Way”).

29. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 831, l. 13 (Evsektsiia Obkom materials connected with liquidation of Hehalutz, March 1928). The Komsomol was the youth movement of the communist party. In the first half of the 1920s, Jews comprised from 23 to 37 percent of Politburo membership. In 1939, after heavy purges of old Jewish Bolsheviks, Jews still constituted more than 10 percent of the Central Committee; see Pinkus, Jews of the Soviet Union, 80.

30. Pines, Hehalutz, 212–13. This was the sentiment in “Pod vyveskoi kommumy,” Krasnyi Krym, February 27, 1929. Communal arrangements in monasteries and convents provoked similar responses from the state. The Evsektsiia bridled against the nationalist aspects of Hehalutz as well the cultural implications of the promotion of Hebrew instead of Yiddish. Evsektsiia and concerned communists feared that public trials of Hehalutz members generated antiregime sympathy; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, ll. 70–71 (Gurevich’s report, January 13, 1928). Therefore, liquidation assumed a more bureaucratic form.

31. GAARK, f. p-121, op. 1, d. 26, l. 30 (report on the Dzhankoi Evsektsiia, late 1925); Keren, Ha-bityahurat ha-haklait, 48. Renunciation of Zionism by several Hehalutz members emboldened the Evsektsiia; see Rashba interview, 14. Ozet and local authors later employed similar tactics against the Palestinian émigrés in Vojo Nova; see Reitanovskii, Na kol’ko khoznoi zemle, 10. Tribuna published highly politicized reports on Vojo Nova. See
Tribuna, no. 18 (1928); “El’kind,” no. 13 (1929); no. 17 (1929); no. 16 (1930); nos. 5–6 (1932); and “Brigada,” nos. 29–30 (1932). The OGPU was the successor to the GPU.

32. Pines, “Larin,” Davar, February 9, 1932, p. 2. Larin (and apparently other high Soviet officials) saw industrious, relatively harmless young people working toward emigration to Palestine; the Evsektsiia, dangerous nationalists who contradicted assimilation into the Soviet body politic. See also GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 831, l. 13 (materials connected with the liquidation of Hehalutz, March 1928).

33. Hehalutz had five thousand organized members in 1927 in the USSR, with only two hundred to three hundred in the Crimean communes; see AJA, WP, Box 233/10 (Pines to Warburg, June 23, 1927). As late as mid-1926, Smidovich (chairman of Komzet) was unaware of Hehalutz activities; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 35, l. 35 (Smidovich to Hehalutz, June 17, 1926); M. Mintz, “Problems of Agricultural Resettlement,” 138.

34. Merkaz Lavon, III-38-47-10 (Tel Chai to Dzhankoi Soiuz, May 5, 1924); YIVO, RG 358/237, pp. 2–3 (Tel Chai to Dzhankoi Selsoiuz, April 20, 1927); “Memoir from Mishmar,” 9 (Lavon Institute); Feldman interview, 37; Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-haklait, 51. Until the start of the Evsektsiia campaign in 1926, the local authorities greatly assisted Mishmar; see Vest and Shtrarkman, Hehalutz be-Rusyah, 78.

35. Gitelman, Century of Ambivalence, 147; Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 140, 140n, no. 2, 146. He quoted an article by Arthur Ruppin, printed in Germany. As can be seen in Chapter 3, the Joint invoked similar formulas.

36. Bytovoi, Dorogi, 49.

37. Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 173. He apparently did not know that most Jewish settlers in Mandatory Palestine were more secular than their Soviet counterparts. See also Bytovoi, K bolshoi zemle, 43; and Fink, Evrei na zemle, 16–17, 136–43.

38. Gerr, “Golos evreiskoi bednoty,” 126; Reitanovskii, Na kolkhoznoi zemle, 8, 10; Korsunov, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 24. This type of domestic anti-Zionist propaganda fluctuated according to international tensions.

39. Merezhin’s article in Der Emes (May 6, 1925) quoted in Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-haklait, 49–51. Merezhin referred to Sultan Galiev’s conspiracy and the currency of pan-Islamic ideas among Tatar intellectuals.

40. A different interpretation of the liquidation of Mishmar came from two former colonists. They suggested that many members wanted to leave the commune after changes in British policy had dashed their hopes for emigration to Palestine. Hence, pressure from the Evsektsiia was only one reason for the liquidation; see Shachewitz and Gur-Avi interview, 17–18. Joseph Rosen accepted Komzet’s claim that the regime had no a priori opposition to Hehalutz communes; rather, it responded to perceived incitement. An example of such alleged provocation occurred during a visit to Tel Chai by a ranking member of the obkom; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 462, l. 148 (report of the obkom bureau, June 29, 1926).

41. The majority of Palestinian émigrés left Vojo Nova by 1934. Most could not countenance a shift from the commune to the kolkhoz format; I. Mintz, “Pegishot im Menachem Elkind,” 279.

42. YIVO, RG 358/246, p. 3 (Zaichik to Liubarskii, July 26, 1926).

43. When drafting the article “Response to Comrade Ovchinnikov” for publication in
Krest'ianskoi gazety (and reissued in Izvestia a week later), President Kalinin relied on material from an internal Agro-Joint memo. This was indicative of the information available to the Kremlin and the degree of intimacy with Agro-Joint. See RGASPI, f.78, op. 1, d. 217 (Belov-Shcheglov’s report on Jewish settlement, September 4, 1926).

44. YIVO RG 358/192, p. 22 (Berger’s inspection of the Jewish settlements, May 25 to June 4, 1924); YIVO, RG 358/193, pp. 2, 17, 21 (report on Agro-Joint work in Crimea, 1923); YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 1 (minutes of Agro-Joint staff meeting, January 1926); JDC Archive 468 (Hyman to Rosen, July 8, 1927); JDC Archive 474, p. 2 (Hyman to Adler, September 16, 1927); Levine interview, 11; JDC Archive 457a, p. 9 (luncheon for Kahn and Rosen, November 12, 1931).

45. The Sevastopol city council devoured a nearby Jewish artel to create a large dairy enterprise. Agro-Joint previously denied aid to this artel because it sat on rented land. See GAARK, f.1-515, op. 1, d. 123, ll. 158-59 (Novyi Byt’ to Komzet, August 1929), ll. 146-47 (report on the social conditions of Novyi Byt’, autumn 1929), l. 153 (Sevastopol city council resolutions, October 12, 1929), ll. 150-51 (Novyi Byt’ to Komzet, October 18, 1929), ll. 137-38 (Turkov to Komzet, November 8, 1929). In addition, the colonies of the Evpatoria region never fully recovered from the administrative neglect under Ozet, even after they transferred to Agro-Joint.

46. For general discussions of Soviet propaganda, see Kenez, Birth of the Propaganda State, 254-60; Von Geldern and Stites, Mass Culture in Soviet Russia, xv-xviii; and Brooks, “Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press,” 17.

47. YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 9 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925); RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 37-41 (Belov-Shcheglov’s report on questions raised about Jewish settlement following Kalinin’s article, September 4, 1926). Soviet officials in Ukraine reinforced this concern; see Kagedan, Soviet Zion, 78.

48. For example, Fink, Evrei v pole; Vasilenko, Pochemu nado podderzhivat’ zemleustremlenie evreiskoi bednosti?: Chto takoe Ozet?, 7; Frukt, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 3.

49. Semashko, Kto i pochemu travit evreev, 4, 10-12, 16; Zaslavskii, Evrei v SSSR, 36; Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 149; Korshunov, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 19, 38, 53. Kalinin first publicized the regime’s rationale with “Response to Comrade Ovchinnikov.” See NARA, Decimal File, 1910-1929, 861.52/64 (Coleman to the secretary of state, July 23, 1926). Kalinin explained that the Soviet state was the first to grant equal rights to Jewish workers and farmers. He insisted that indigenous Crimeans preferred migration to Siberia to remaining on the poor, dry Crimean land colonized by Jews; only foreign aid allowed Jews to settle such barren tracts. Kalinin assured readers that Jews would occupy only 2.5 percent of the available government land in Crimea. Herein, Kalinin distorted reality, consciously or otherwise: by 1938, eighty-six Jewish settlements occupied more than 17 percent of the northern steppe and more than 10 percent of all Crimean land; see details in Chapter 6. Many subsequent publications replicated this article in some form. See for example Semashko, Kto i pochemu travit evreev, 17-29; Sudarskii, Ekonomicheskoe polozenie evreiskogo mestcheka; and “Antisemity—vragi trudiashchikhsia,” Maiak kommuny, June 6, 1929.

50. Lunacharskii, Ob antisemitizme, 44; Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 149-50; Evreiskii krest’ianin 2 (1926), 128, 130, 132, 134, 249; Fink, Evrei na zemle, 18; Semashko, Kto i pochemu travit evreev, 17-29; Vasilenko, Pochemu nado podderzhivat’ zemleustremlenie
evreiskoi bednoty?, passim. Semashko (p. 3) dismissed “counter-revolutionary lies” about the control Jews exercised over the Sovnarkom.

51. The flow of pamphlets began in 1924 with Bragin and Kol’tsov’s, Sud’ba evreiskikh mas v Sovetskom Soiuze. Shortly thereafter, a number of high officials authored booklets. See Kalinin and Smidovich, O zemel’nom ustroîstve trudiaushchikhsia evreev v SSSR; Semashko, Kto i pochemu travit evreev; Lunacharskii, Ob antisemitizme; Larin, Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR. An assortment of Yiddish pamphlets appeared from the mid-1920s, which, of course, had no impact on non-Jews.

52. Shmeruk, Pirsumim yehudim be-Brit ha-Moatsot, lxxviii–lxxxii, 311–22. From 1925 until 1938, the American Jewish Yearbook regularly used material from Soviet sources to compile its review on the colonies.


54. For example, see Staryi, “Trudiaushchiesia evrei na zemle,” Maiak kommunity, April 27, 1929; Veitkov and Polishuk, Evrei na zemle, 26–29. Dispatch of delegations, composed mainly of urban workers, began around 1927 and continued at least into the early 1930s.

55. Unfortunately, no posters survived. A list of posters for sale appeared on the back cover of Sudarskii, Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie evreiskogo mestechka. Recent studies explore (but do not fully concur on) the role of posters in the early state. See S. White, The Bolshevik Poster, 120–30; Bonnell, Iconography of Power, 7.

56. Abram Room, Evrei na zemle (20 feet, 35 mm, Kiev: All-Ukrainian Board of Film and Photography, 1927). The film portrayed colonization in heroic form, from the crumbling shtetl to the Crimean steppe.

57. Maiakovskii’s Jewish lover (Lilia Brik), an Ozet employee, drew him into the project; see Vaksberg, Lilia Brik, 175. The author thanks Dr. Alexander Gribanov of the Andrei Sakharov Archive at Brandeis University for pointing out this connection. The film targeted urban audiences but also appeared in more provincial settings; see YIVO, RG 358/190, p. 3 (Surdutovich’s report on the All-Crimean Jubilee Exhibition in Simferopol, November 6–20, 1930).


59. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 557, l. 7 (Lobovkii’s report on Evsektsiia work, October 1, 1926). Evsektsiia reports usually accused antisemitic kulaks of attacks, thereby reinforcing class-based predisposition in Moscow; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 917, l. 1 (Evsektsiia agitpropoddel’s report on antisemitism in Crimea, 1929). In Soviet law, antisemitism was an antistate crime.

60. This may have been successful. For example, the American Jewish Yearbook (vol. 31 [1929]: 67) reported “antisemitic” peasant riots against colonies in Ukraine, though no reference to these crimes appears in the archives.

61. Administrators in the last decades of tsarist rule came to appreciate the effect and cost-efficiency of these events. See JDC Archive 483 (Rosenberg to Hoover, September 7, 1922); YIVO, RG 358/163, p. 95 (Liasko’s report, April 25, 1929); Yitzhak Ludan, “Yaffa Nahar,” Maariv, April 14, 1977, p. 17.
62. YIVO, RG 358/193, p. 21 (report on Agro-Joint work in Crimea, 1923); YIVO, RG 358/190, pp. 1–2 (Ginzburg’s report on the exhibition in Snigirev, September 27–28, 1923); YIVO, RG 358/190, pp. 1–3 (Surdutovich’s account on the exhibition in Simferopol, November 6–20, 1930); Bregman, “Puti evreiskim koloniiam,” 208; Korshunov, Evreiskoe pereiselenie v Krymu, 33; Pines, Hehalutz, 243. Participation in and the success of local events depended on the involvement of Agro-Joint agronomists. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 5, d. 32, ll. 4–21 (information on Jewish settlers’ participation in agricultural exhibitions, 1928); YIVO, RG 358/190, p. 1 (Moscow Agro-Joint to Raskin, September 30, 1929).

63. GAARK, f. p-121, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 28–36 (work of the Dzhankoi Evsektsiia, late 1923); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 477, l. 1 (Gromov to Petropavlovskii, December 31, 1925), d. 559, ll. 33–34 (report of the commission for the checking of voters’ credentials [mandatnaia komissiia], April 7–11, 1926), d. 830, l. 6 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928); GAARK, f. r-315, op. 1, d. 14, l. 194 (Lobovskii’s report on the elections in Ratendorf, February 23, 1926). Jewish participation in the elections far outdistanced that of local Germans. The Agro-Joint administrator Zaichik noted some grassroots sprouting of social organizations in the colonies (selsovets, committees for mutual aid, and Komsomol cells), all of which exposed colonists to ideals of self-sufficiency; see YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 5 (Agro-Joint staff meeting, February 1928). While a welcome factor for Agro-Joint agronomists, Moscow did not promote self-sufficiency, rather, dependence on the center.

64. These reports also noted that party activists among the colonists worked on a voluntary basis until collectivization. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 739, l. 214 (Sofu’s report on Evsektsiia work, October 10, 1928), d. 830, l. 16 (Kovner’s supplementary report, May 26, 1928). According to Korshunov (in Evreiskoe pereiselenie v Krymu, 44), the party could take heart from relatively successful spread of the Komsomol; it had twenty-three cells among approximately sixty Crimean settlements in the late 1920s. Linar addressed such issues with the Central Committee; see GARF, f. r-5546, op. 55, d. 1955, ll. 112, 115 (a note on the Crimean tracts, circa 1930).


66. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 5, d. 53, ll. 10–11 (Itkin’s report on Shevchenko, circa 1928); YIVO, RG 358/172, pp. 1–4 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria MTS, August 26, 1930); YIVO, RG 358/224, pp. 3, 26 (statistical report on the Jewish collectives, January 1, 1926).

67. For example, see AJA, WP, Box 222/1, p. 6 (Hyman’s memorandum to Warburg et al., May 13, 1923), Box 228/6 (Rosen to Brown, January 27, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/206, p. 1 (plan for organization of the Crimean settlements, 1929). Soviet officials and Jewish observers misconstrued Agro-Joint’s position on cooperativism. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, l. 16 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 81–82 (Rabinovich to Voronin, December 3, 1930), l. 142 (report of the Crimean GPU, December 27, 1930), l. 106 (Kantor to obkom, December 6, 1930); Gol’de, “Opyt goda pereiselencheskoj raboty,” 63; Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 138; Livne, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Rusyah, 138.

68. For quantitative data on rural consumer and credit cooperatives, see Wieczynski, Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History, 56–57. Conflicts erupted over the distribu-
tion of communal benefits in relation to membership shares, demands by artisans for supplementary work outside the artels, parents’ insistence on the immediate rectification of the education crisis, tension over the economic effect of intercolony marriages, and other issues. See YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 102 (protocol of the conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925); YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 29 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925). In contrast to the surrounding villages, equity in the original allotments eliminated land tenure conflict. See Gitman, “Khoziaistvo pereselentsev Kalinindorfskogo raiona,” 13–14. See also YIVO, RG 358/238, p. 1 (Lapirov’s report, December 1925 to February 1926); and YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 1 (report of the staff meeting, January 1926).

69. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 101, l. 30 (resolutions of the general meeting of land associations, circa 1928); YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 102 (protocol of the conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925); Ruppin, Ha-hityashvat ha-haklalit, 29. Reconstitution of artels occasionally occurred more rapidly; see AJA, WP, Box 222/5, p. 41 (Rosen’s report to JDC executive committee, August 25, 1925).

70. YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 34 (meeting of Agro-Joint personnel, January 31 to February 7, 1927); AJA, WP, Box 228/6 (Rosen to Brown, January 27, 1926); GARP, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 100, l. 4 (protocol of the Komzet meeting with the foreign delegation, May 25, 1926); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 462, l. 148 (report of the Crimean Obkom bureau, June 29, 1926); GARP, f. r-7746, op. 5, d. 16, l. 1 (Ezerskii’s report on the Mikhailov region, April 1926), op. 1, d. 172, ll. 3, 5 (Crimean Agro-Joint to Moscow Agro-Joint, February 23, 1927); YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 19 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931).

71. Gol’den, “Opyt goda pereselencheskoi raboty,” 63. For more on cooperativism, see GARP, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, l. 16 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928); YIVO, RG 358/159, p. 2 (report of the Agro-Joint sector agronomists in Crimea, 1928); YIVO, RG 358/152, p. 29 (Bruk’s prospective plan, 1927–1936); Ts. Astaskovich interview, 4.

72. Wood, Jews Return to the Soil, 6–8. Oral histories relay the same images. For example, see Vul’f interview. The most common forms of associations were land, tractor, consumer, or sheep-raising cooperatives. A spillover of cooperativism from Jewish to German colonies may have also occurred in mid-1926. See GARP, f. r-1235, op. 140, d. 523, ll. 2–9 (correspondence on the organization of societies by German colonists, April–November 1926).

73. Only 10 percent of the Kalinindorf (Kherson) region was organized as cooperatives in late 1928; see GARP, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 17 (visit from the Timiriazev Academy, 1929). This figure may be artificially low; the delegation apparently counted only large kolkhozes. Expanded farm branches gradually absorbed initial overpopulation in the Kherson settlements. In the meantime, up to 30 percent of the labor overflow went to otkhod (seasonal or temporary departure for off-farm wage work), and other colonists rented land from neighbors. See GARP, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 283 (Krivoi Rog Agro-Joint to Moscow office, December 30, 1929), d. 278, l. 21 (visit from the Timiriazev Academy, 1929). Proximity to the Donbass, an area of massive industrial development from the late 1920s, also contributed to the high level of otkhod in the Kherson region. See YIVO, RG 358/104, p. 8 (Komzet to Sovnarkom, 1925); GARP, f. r-7746, op. 3, d. 40, ll. 5–8 (Pikman’s report on Kherson, 1928), op. 1, d. 201, l. 21 (report of the Pioneer dele-
74. Though there were qualitative differences between the three types of cooperative units, the figures appear here for purposes of comparison. Technical data on cooperative associations in the Kherson area appear in GARF, f. r-7746, op. 3, d. 15, 20, 24. See also Kantor, *Evreiskoe zemleustroenie na Ukrainе*, 16; Bregman, “Puti evreiskogo zemledeniia,” 199. A relatively rare example of a NEP-era association in the old Kherson colonies is found in Yitzhak Ludan, “Yaffе Nahar,” *Maarit*, April 14, 1977. According to Shmeruk (*Ha-kibutz ha-yehudi*, 125), the Belorussian Jewish settlements were almost always collective.

75. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 16 (Kovner’s supplementary report, May 26, 1928). The Party Congress, held in October 1927, endorsed total collectivization to modernize agriculture. The party recognized three types of kolkhoz: the TOZ (a farm with collectivized land and major equipment) or SOZ (a cooperative land association), the artel (a cooperative association with small-scale private animal husbandry and farming plots), and the commune (complete collectivization of all productive and consumer elements).

76. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 31 (secretary of Krymkolkhozsektsi’s yearly report on Yungvald, circa 1928), d. 477, l. 70 (Gulov to Guliaeva, circa 1926); Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 170–77; Male, *Russian Peasant Organization before Collectivization*, 4. Until 1927, the selsoviet often remained subordinate to the land commune throughout Russia. See Danilov, “The Commune in the Life of the Soviet Countryside,” 298.

77. Moscow issued internal passports in December 1932 to inhibit the mobility of Soviet citizens, particularly in the countryside. From at least mid-1927, there was deep concern in Moscow about peasant flight to the cities. See *Pravda*, June 7, 1927.

78. YIVO, RG 358/238, p. 1 (Lapirov’s report, December 1925 to February 1926); YIVO, RG 358/239, p. 12 (Berger’s report on a visit to Ekaterinoslav, November 24 to December 3, 1924); YIVO, RG 358/225, p. 27 (Frishberg’s report on Dzhurchinsk, 1929). Frishberg was the sole observer who thought the “tourists” [*gastrolerami*] would not be missed. He preferred that fewer, but harder, settlers remain. See also GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 108, l. 168 (Temkin to Evpatoria RKI, April 23, 1929), f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 24 (material for obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930).

79. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 102, ll. 21, 23 (Pikman’s report, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 12 (Fabrikant’s comments at the conference, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/119 (Raskin’s report to Agro-Joint Moscow, mid-1927); YIVO, RG 358/87, p. 1 (Levintan’s report on shetel Jews, June 2, 1926); Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziaisstvenniaia kolonizatsiia,” 58.


81. YIVO, RG 358/161, p. 1 (Bizer’s analysis of the Mil’man farm in Sholom Aleichem, circa 1929). On its face, this behavior might seem counterintuitive. In the context of the time, however, it was rational. Occupancy was the primary factor in legal cases on land tenure in Soviet courts during the NEP.
82. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 257 (correspondence from the Crimean Komzet on Jewish colonists’ participation in elections, May 1928). It appears that this was a very limited phenomenon. From the Soviet perspective, voting rights symbolized full citizenship, whereas they held limited utility for settlers. A Politburo decision from January 1927 extended voting rights to settlers in Crimea and Birobidzhan; see Gol’d, Evrei—zemledel’tsy v Krymu, 30.


84. YIVO, RG 358/119, p. 4 (Raskin’s report to Agro-Joint Moscow, mid-1927). Shira Gorshman, a former settler in the Vojo Nova commune, was most caustic. In her opinion, they knew little about agriculture and overemphasized American techniques, which were mostly incompatible with conditions in Vojo Nova. She recalled mocking them as nonlaborers; see Gorshman interview. Elsewhere in the USSR, non-Jewish peasants held similar views about state agronomists; see Heinzen, “Professional Identity,” 14–15.

85. Dobrushin, “U Krymskikh pereselentsev,” 5–8. The debt question was a pivotal issue in relations between the United States and USSR after the October Revolution.

86. AJA, WP, Box 234/6, p. 3 (Moskowitz’s press release, December 21, 1927).

87. JDC Archive 530, p. 17 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928). According to Hyman, Agro-Joint’s intensive work ceased once a settlement produced a decent crop and had communal buildings, a school, and a cooperative store. Embittered women lashed out at the JDC but had only vague conceptions about the organization; see Fink, Evrei na zemle, 92–94.

88. YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 6 (Fabrikant’s concluding remarks, January 1926). Some of Agro-Joint’s staff had previously worked for the JCA. This accustomed them to a sluggish hierarchical structure in which the Paris office had directed the daily operations of the JCA in Russia.

89. Aleksandr Levitan was foremost among them. Samuil Liubarskii was well-known in the Kherson area as former director of the Novo Poltavka agricultural school and former agronomist for the JCA. See YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 33 (report of the meeting of Agro-Joint personnel, January 31 to February 7, 1927); Rashba interview, 15; Abe Cahan, “Jewish Colonization in Soviet Russia a Success,” Forward, November 6, 1927, p. E2.

90. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 19 (visit from Timiriazev Academy, 1929); YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 19 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–31). Early Soviet agricultural schools inherited a tsarist-era aversion to hands-on training; see AJA, WP, Box 234/3 (bulletin of Russian Reconstruction Farms, July 27, 1927). Liubarskii stated that twenty-six of Agro-Joint’s agronomists had academic education, most of whom were his former students at Novo Poltavka. Each sector employed four farm instructors under the supervision of an agronomist, along with an assortment of traveling crop experts, doctors, and veterinarians; see Abe Cahan, “Jewish Colonization in Soviet Russia a Success,” Forward, November 6, 1927, p. E2. Zaichik reported that availability of doctors mirrored the situation in non-Jewish villages; see YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 36 (report of the meeting of Agro-Joint personnel, January 31 to February 7, 1927).
91. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 2, d. 161, l. 3 (director of the tractor squad, Levitan, 1926–1930), d. 223, ll. 2–7 (S. E. Raskin), d. 165 (I. M. Levitan), d. 255, ll. 1–2 (S. I. Usach). Most of these had no practical experience before Agro-Joint service, and none whatsoever in settlement or intensive agriculture. For other examples of the limited experience and training of the Agro-Joint staff, see GARF, f. r-7746, op. 3, d. 15, ll. 20, 24 (questionnaire no. 4 on the Nai-Geim agro-sector, 1927), op. 5, d. 33 (questionnaire on the Novaia Zaria agro-sector, 1928), d. 36, ll. 2–3 (questionnaire on the Novo Podolsk agro-sector, 1928).

92. Consensus jelled on limitation of their unilateral power in early 1928. See YIVO, RG 358/158, pp. 5–7 (Agro-Joint staff meeting, February 1928). By this time, agronomists believed that colonists accepted the basic logic of cooperative forms. Henceforth, they opted for gentle espousal of cooperativism. Agronomists defused mounting tensions by stepping down from directorships of land settlement and consumer associations. Some thought that Jews would never accept a command structure; see YIVO, RG 358/150, pp. 9, 12–13 (report from the staff meeting, January 1926).

93. YIVO, RG 358/201, p. 32 (Redkin’s report on Jewish resettlement tracts in Crimea, January 1, 1928). He noted that the workload lessened and refocused on agricultural service in the second and third years of settlement. In the fourth and fifth years, agropunkty (government agricultural service centers) began supplementary service to the colonies.

94. YIVO 358/151, p. 1 (Surdutovich’s account, October 30, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/151, p. 1 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, December 1, 1926).

95. Some colonists worried that Agro-Joint might suddenly leave Russia or recall its credit; see Opatosha, “Moi vpechatleniia,” 12. With no clear picture of Agro-Joint’s role in the early years, the priorities of settlers and Agro-Joint agronomists could conflict. For example, the agronomist Levine reported that every household in Crimea owned a single-blade plow, but settlers clamored for two-blade plows to increase efficiency. Believing that other implements were more urgent, he argued that Agro-Joint must do what was right, not just comply with the settlers’ wishes; see YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 3 (report of the staff meeting, January 1926).

96. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 5, d. 16, l. 4 (Ezerskii’s report, April 5–23, 1926), op. 3, d. 5, l. 3 (protocol of Komzet–Agro-Joint meeting, March 10, 1925), op. 1, d. 278, l. 19 (visit from Timiriazev Academy, 1929). Agronomists fulfilled more advisory roles when dealing with established colonies; see YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 34 (report of the meeting of Agro-Joint personnel, January 31 to February 7, 1927). Outside the Jewish colonies, approximately nineteen thousand frustrated Soviet agricultural specialists—endowed with very little institutional legitimacy and even lower wages—laboried among 100 million peasants; see Heinzen, “Professional Identity,” 11–14.

97. The style and size of homes ignited repeated debate between settlers and the service organizations. In the end, Agro-Joint submitted to the settlers’ desires; see YIVO, RG 358/198 (Friedman’s report on activities in Crimea, January 1 to October 1, 1926).

98. YIVO, RG 358/119, p. 7 (Raskin’s report to Agro-Joint Moscow, mid-1927); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 211, l. 39 (Fridman to Komzet Moscow, April 4, 1928), d. 331, ll. 2–10 (Zaichik’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, November 28, 1929), ll. 11–12 (Komzet Evpatoria to Komzet Moscow, January 4, 1930); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 256, ll. 1–8 (instructions for checking the status of settlers, 1929); GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 108, l. 20
(Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, September 3, 1929), l. 19 (Aizenberg to Crimean Komzet, September 5, 1929), l. 18 (Temkin to Komzet Dzhankoi, October 5, 1929), ll. 12–14, 20, 49, 99; GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 121, ll. 8–9 (Temkin to Komzet, September 5, 1929), d. 133, ll. 41–42 (protocol of Evpatoria Komzet, September 12–22, 1929). Agro-Joint officials also unilaterally disciplined “reckless” colonists; see JDC Archive 530, pp. 7, 12 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928).

99. YIVO, RG 358/227, pp. 92, 95–96 (protocol of conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925). Settlers also criticized the building materials provided by Agro-Joint, the inaccessibility of agronomists, and the excessive authority granted to old colonists in Agro-Joint warehouses. This same protocol noted that new settlers felt their position akin to “a beggar who is given a good dinner and on top of that 10 kopecks to keep quiet.”

100. YIVO, RG 358/227, pp. 93–94 (protocol of conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925). The pud was an old measure of weight equaling 36.11 pounds.

101. For examples of unsolicited local veneration of Liubarskii and Rosen, see Abe Cahan, “Jewish Colonization in Soviet Russia a Success,” Forward, November 6, 1927; and Shmugliakova interview. For a discussion of peasants’ appeals to the center, see Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 231; Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 44; and Lewin, Russian Peasants, 35–36.

102. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 119, l. 1 (register of debts in Rosenvald, October 1, 1926). Household debt averaged from 1,050 to 1,900 rubles. After Agro-Joint, the colonists’ largest debts were to the other foreign philanthropies, private lenders in Russia, and Ozet. Most colonists owed at least several hundred rubles for their homes, equipment, and livestock. These were sizable sums, considering that the average monthly income hovered around 50 rubles. Repayment to Agro-Joint usually began four years after receipt of the loan; see YIVO, RG 358/180, p. 36 (general principles of agricultural development, 1925–1932).

103. Spontaneous colonists hoped or expected that aid would eventually arrive from the JDC or JCA; see YIVO, RG 358/239, p. 12 (Berger’s report on Ekaterinoslav and the surrounding colonies, November 24 to December 3, 1924). See also Kleinman, “Sredi evreev-zemledel’cev Kryma,” 211; Epshtein, Novymi putiami, 18.

104. YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 91 (protocol of second conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 33 (visit from Timiriazev Academy, 1929); Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 64; Opatosha, “Moi vpechatleniia,” 11. Ozet declared that the initial desire among colonists for the patronage of “the American uncle” wore off because of the “high” Agro-Joint interest rates. See Mikhailov, “Tri nedeli po evreiskim poliam,” 6; Merezhin, Osplushnoi kollektivizatsii, 14. Initial Agro-Joint interest rates (5 percent) were indeed higher than government loans (3 percent). Agro-Joint cut its rates to 3 percent in the late 1920s.

105. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 20 (visit from Timiriazev Academy, 1929). In class-conscious Soviet Russia of the late 1920s, criticism of Agro-Joint “favoritism” took on class-warfare overtones. The delegation assumed, or at least claimed, that Agro-Joint set its priorities according to the proportion of bourgeois colonists in each settlement.

106. Kopelenko and Senchenko, “Ukrainskie pisateli ob evreiskikh kolonialakh,” 10. As former merchants and traders, Jews in the Pale did not find the countryside entirely for-
eign. Therefore, many colonists mediated ignorance of daily farm work with prior knowledge of rural jargon and basic rules; see YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 26 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925).

107. Ruppin, Ha-bitiyashvat ha-haklait, 24–29. In 1927, the average Jewish farm had a yearly deficit of 217 rubles in Ukraine and 153 rubles in Crimea. Hauling was the most common winter employment, sometimes paid by Agro-Joint. See YIVO, RG 358/227, pp. 90, 99 (protocol of the conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925). See also YIVO, RG 358/239, p. 12 (Berger’s report on Ekaterinoslav, November–December 1924); Evreinova interview; Fradkina interview; Schreibshtein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection).

108. AJA, WP, Box 222/5, p. 43 (Rosen’s report to JDC executive committee, August 25, 1925); YIVO, RG 358/200 (report of the Crimean group, 1926–1927), p. 3 of the attached conclusion; and “Shalom Ash o evreiskikh koloniakh v Krymu i na Ukraine,” 11.

109. YIVO, RG 358/152, pp. 27–28 (Bruk’s prospective plan, 1927–1936); YIVO, RG 358/225, p. 28 (Frisheberg’s report on Dzhurchinsk agro-sector, 1929); Kleinman, “Sredi evreev-zemledel’tsev Kryma,” 207; Vendrov, “Po evreiskim koloniiam,” 217; “Rasskaz kolonista,” 247; Kagan, Stalindorf, 15; Fink, Evrei na zemle, 101; Gorev, Protiv antisemitya, 157; Kalen, Frontiers of Hope, 430; Fal’ko, “V gostiakh u evreev-krest’ian,” 10–11. The old Kherson colonies apparently rebounded quickly after the civil war. With a preexisting infrastructure and greater experience, they took advantage of commercial opportunities available under the NEP; see Livne, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Rusyah, 328. The general impression remained, however, that they failed to modernize.

110. YIVO, RG 358/152, p. 30 (Bruk’s prospective plan, 1927–1936); Lewin, Russian Peasants, 29. The same phenomenon held true in other areas of Soviet-Jewish colonization. Thus, the Siberian Jewish kolkhoz evidently surpassed its neighbors’ yields in autumn 1928 and introduced new farm branches to the region, even without Agro-Joint; see Lifshitz, Istoriia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri, 23–26. During the relatively brief Belorussian experiment, Jewish farmers also earned praise; see Fink, Evrei na zemle, 212. Fink was not equally complimentary toward all experiments in Jewish colonization; conditions in Birobizhan appalled him. See Shneer, “The Weakness of the Birobidzhan Idea,” 22.

111. YIVO, RG 358/152, pp. 27–28 (Bruk’s prospective plan, 1927–1936); Vendrov, “Po evreiskim koloniiam,” 216–17; Kleinman, “Sredi evreev-zemledel’tsev Kryma,” 208; Gorev, Protiv antisemitya, 159. Jewish kolkhozes had market relationships with nearby cities and resorts, before and after collectivization. See for example Berezhanskaya, “Evreiskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 84–85; and Fradkina interview. Colonists requested intensive crops from Agro-Joint personnel shortly after arrival. See YIVO, RG 358/151, p. 3 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, December 1, 1926). The negative side of this ambitiousness was impatience. This caused a mild panic after poor harvests in 1926–1927; a lack of healthy restraint in the application of new, untested crops; and the overconfident pursuit of government premiums. See YIVO, RG 358/195, p. 4 (Fabrikant’s inspection of Crimean collectives, February 18, 1929); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 211, l. 89 (Fridman to Komzet, May 26, 1928).

112. JDC Archive 530, p. 10 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928). Generally, such veterans had worked in local estates before 1917 or grew up in the old Kherson colonies.
most, agronomists and instructors visited the colonies twice per week, whereas veteran agriculturalists lived permanently in the tracts, multiplying the effect of their applied agricultural knowledge. For example, a local Jew whose family lived on a prerevolution farm managed, de facto, the Pervomaisk commune (considered among the best in Crimea). See Berezhanskaia, “Evreiskie kolhozy v Krymu,” 82.

113. Keren, Ha-bityashvat ha-haklait, 160; Rashba interview, 16; Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 49. Analogous events occurred in a Jewish colony in Bessarabia and a kolkhoz in Siberia. See Maryasin, Ha-moshavah Ungrovkah, 21; Lifshitz, Istoriia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri, 26.

114. GARF, f. r.-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 39 (visit from the Timiriazev Academy, 1929); Mikhailov, “Tri nedeli po evreiskim poliam,” 6; Kamenshtein, “Prichiny otseva pereselentsov,” 11–12. Although it was an Ozet publication, Tribuna gave fairly accurate reports from the settlements in the late 1920s. For more on the formation of settler artels, see Chapter 2 of this book.

115. YIVO, RG 358/195, pp. 1–3 (Fabrikant’s inspection of Crimean collectives, February 18, 1925). The Osnova colony was an extreme case. Here, economic stratification separated colonists who had managed to acquire a degree of wealth. Among other ills, its bloated accounting office was a haven for those avoiding manual labor while they needlessly hired Russians as skilled agricultural laborers.

116. According to the Crimean Komzet chair, artels appointed the most prosperous and loudest settlers. Such people, according to the Komzet official, were accustomed to controlling social matters in the shtetl, while exploiting the poor (bednota) and its religious mood; see GARF, f. r.-7541, op. 1, d. 211, l. 91 (Fridman to Komzet, May 26, 1928). In other cases, association chairs conspired for enhanced personal credit from Agro-Joint at the expense of other artel members. See YIVO, RG 358/119, p. 1 (Raskin’s report to Agro-Joint Moscow, mid-1927).

117. GAARK, f. r.-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 30 (Aronchik to Dzhankoi regional prosecutor, March 15, 1928); Lazman, Fun Sedemenucha biz Kalinindorf; 20–21. Such a conflict arose on Tract 75 (Evpatoria region) and necessitated the cooperative efforts of Agro-Joint, Komzet, and the regional prosecutor to move three troublesome families to Dzhankoi. See GAARK, f. r.-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 14 (statement of fourteen members of Tract 75, October 22, 1927), l. 9 (Levintan to Crimean Agro-Joint, October 27, 1927), l. 10 (Fridman to Evpatoria regional prosecutor, late 1927), ll. 11–12 (Magid to Crimean Komzet, November 11, 1927), l. 13 (Gal’perin to Fridman, March 1, 1928), l. 17 (Fridman to Komzet Moscow, March 22, 1928), l. 27 (Shein to Tract 75, June 18, 1928).

118. YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 102 (protocol of conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925); YIVO, RG 358/249, pp. 26–27 (Zaichik’s report on Agro-Joint work in Kherson region, 1925–1928); Fink, Evrei na zemle, 24; Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 65, 166.

119. JDC Archive 530, pp. 7, 15 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928).

120. GARF, f. r.-7746, op. 4, d. 7, l. 3 (Pikman’s report on the Odessa district, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/151 (Raskin’s report on Kolai agro-sector, December 1926 to January 1, 1927). Insistent newcomers often expected full realization of promises made by recruiters in the shtetl. Others harbored exaggerated notions shaped by newspapers or stories told by relatives who already had settled in the colonies.
Jews from Azerbaijan provided a short, but instructive, lesson in ethnicity. Fifty families from Baku settled in the Malii colony (near Evpatoria) in 1927. Soviet commentators considered the Azeris fundamentally different and incompatible with their “European” brethren. See GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 390, ll. 1–5 (on the migration of mountain Jews to Crimea, 1930), l. 15 (Temkin to Komzet, September 14, 1930). The Azeris complained that local Ozet officers provided them less aid than “European” settlers and segregated their children from other young colonists. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, l. 5 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928); JDC Archive 528, p. 4 (notes of Frank Horowitz, 1928). Komzet endorsed the Azeris’ request for repatriation, citing inadaptability to the Crimean environment; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 390, ll. 22–23 (Moscow Komzet to Crimean Komzet, March 1931). Komzet sent them home in 1931, convinced that ethnicity, even among Jews, determined acclimatization to life on the steppe. The experience of Krymchaks as colonists suggests that practical concerns outweighed ethnic or religious loyalty. Unlike the Azeris, Krymchaks were not part of mainstream Judaism but were natives of Crimea. Tatar communists, Agro-Joint, and neighboring colonists welcomed Krymchak settlers who seemed well-adapted to farming life in the region. See Levavi, Ha-Ibrahimoscheina, 37; GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 14, l. 181 (Dubovskii to Crimean Komzet, 1926); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 172, l. 2 (Crimean Agro-Joint to Moscow Agro-Joint, February 23, 1927). Though considered “our” Jews by American benefactors and Tatar party bosses, the Krymchaks zealously guarded their ethnic uniqueness. They openly resisted Tatarization (the local variant of korenizatsiia) and protested attempts by the Education Commission to Latinize their ancient script. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, ll. 6–7 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928).

Ts. Astaskovich interview, 6. She equated “culture” with the daily use of Russian, not Yiddish. See also Rashba interview, 25; Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 13, p. 14.

Schreibstein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection). Shmulakes and Shmilakes referred to differences between the Lithuanian and Galician dialects of Yiddish.

Until the late 1920s, school construction was low on government priorities and the service organizations were unable to keep up with demand. For a detailed description of this process, see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 7 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928). The Evsektsiia identified the Frankfurt rabbinate and Agro-Joint as the sources of funds for the heder, distributed locally through the “Leningrad rabbinate” (a reference to Rabbi Schneersohn’s network in Russia).

The agricultural school at Chebotarsk was typical of higher education facilitated by Agro-Joint. After construction, it was a state-operated school, but Agro-Joint provided most instructors and stipends.

GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, l. 29 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928); JDC Archive 530, p. 10 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928). Lack of literature embittered young colonists; see Mikhailov, “Tri nedeli po evreiskim poliam,” 6. Colonists pleaded directly to Agro-Joint for cultural activity and education. Old colonies had libraries, clubs, and primary schools, but new settlements were cultural vacuums. Neighboring villages fared no better.

YIVO, RG 358/159 (Volson’s report on film screening, October–November 1928). This
mobile film unit (sent by Ozet) was the first screening for most settlements. Colonists responded appreciatively but complained of high ticket prices. Some requested “more lively films,” popular science, or newsreels.

Edelhertz, *The Russian Paradox*, 137–38. Kallen (in *Frontiers of Hope*, 406) observed dimming of the intellect in the old Kherson colonies—the only Jews who could be considered hereditary peasants.

Unlike spontaneous and Hehalutz settlers (who usually inhabited former estates or homes), the first organized settlers lived in dugouts, physically isolated from other Jewish colonies. Each settlement tract contained between two thousand and five thousand acres, subdivided into household parcels of forty-four acres in Ukraine and seventy-six acres in Crimea. Each settlement season (from 1924–1925 until 1929–1930) clustered in a distinct geographic area. Lack of transport, however, meant that each colony felt isolated from Jewish neighbors.

JDC Archive 530, pp. 9, 11 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928). Local sources confirmed this; see A. A. Superfin interview. Agro-Joint supplied building materials (together with labor for those who needed it) from central, systematized warehouses in Kherson, Dzhankoi, Kolai, Krivoi Rog, and Evpatoria. Formal occupancy brought obligations; families had to abandon homes in the shtetl and relocate to the tracts. Therefore, some avoided or postponed occupancy in order to preserve links with the shtetl; see Ruppin, *Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait*, 18.

Silkina interview; GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 102, l. 23 (Pikman’s report, 1926), d. 278, l. 7 (visit from the Timiriazev Academy, 1929); YIVO, RG 358/195, pp. 1, 5 (Fabrikant’s inspection of Crimean collectives, February 18, 1925). Traditional urban prejudices made women’s burdens particularly heavy. Shtetl society had taught them beforehand to “consider the peasant as a low human species.” See M. Fischer, *My Lives in Russia*, 25.

Images of the recently arrived, shocked woman also found expression in children’s literature; see Neiman, *Deti evreiskoi kommunity*, 26.

YIVO, RG 358/151 (Raskin’s report on Kolai, December 1926 to January 1, 1927).

YIVO, RG 358/195, p. 1 (Fabrikant’s inspection of Crimean collectives, February 18, 1925). See also *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 34 (1932): 77. Similar worry is apparent in the Soviet pamphlets. See Fink, *Evrei na zemle*, 45–47, 92–94, 97. Fink called the women he encountered “expert complainers” but sympathized with their frustration; their families invested up to 400 rubles toward colonization, yet lived in poverty for two years. He found males more accommodating toward temporary hardships.


AJA, WP, Box 234/6, p. 3 (Moskowitz’s press release, December 21, 1927); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, l. 31 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928). According to Fitzpatrick (in *Stalin’s Peasants*, 12, 99), the easiest route to higher education in the USSR was as tractor drivers, with teachers and accountants close behind. Jewish colonies conformed to, if not exceeded, this model.

YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 22 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931). Before collectivization, an average settler in Crimea earned 50 rubles per month, and an
experienced greater tractor driver triple that amount. By late 1934, tractor drivers received 240 percent greater labor-day credits (trudodnia, the basis for payment-in-kind under collectivization) than an average kolkhoz member, or six times that of a young member, according to Edwin Embree (p. 13). On the formation of a tractor-driver class, see YIVO, RG 358/193, pp. 17–18 (report on Agro-Joint work in Crimea, 1925); Pines, Hehalutz, 218; Rashba interview, 21; and Veinshtein interview, ICJ, 15.

138. YIVO, RG 358/158, pp. 8–9 (Zhachik’s supplementary comments, January–February 1927); Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 13, p. 14. Among Jewish colonists, those with prior farming knowledge were most likely to remain, followed closely by merchants, who had little professional recourse in the towns. Arthur Ruppin (in Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 27) found 15 percent attrition normal for any new settlement movement.

139. YIVO, RG 358/200, pp. 5–6 (report of the Crimean group, 1926–1927); YIVO, RG 358/151, p. 26 (Raskin’s report on the Kolai agro-sector, December 1926 to January 1, 1927). Data on settler flight varied wildly and are often extremely vague. From 1924 to 1928, some sources estimated yearly flight from the Crimean colonies at approximately 8 percent; others claimed rates as high as 25 percent in specific settlements. See YIVO, RG 358/202, pp. 11–12 (Friedman’s report on Agro-Joint work, January 1, 1928); YIVO, RG 358/224, p. 28 (statistical report on Jewish collectives, January 1, 1926); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 60 (Komzet leadership of resettlement, circa 1930); Kamenstein, “Prichiny otseva pereselentsev,” 11–12; Ruppin, Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait, 27. For a secondary analysis of this issue, see Levavi, “Ha-mityashvim ha-haklaim,” 55–61. Similar confusion exists concerning flight from the Ukrainian colonies.

140. YIVO, RG 358/227, pp. 89–102, passim (protocol of second conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925); YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 35 (report of the meeting of Agro-Joint personnel, January–February 1927). Colonists most often sought enlarged credits. See GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 211, ll. 93–94 (Fridman to Komzet, May 26, 1928); YIVO, RG 358/151, p. 3 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, December 1, 1926). According to Opatoshu (“Moi vpechatleniia,” 12), the most vehement demands on Agro-Joint officials often came from settlers who still owned property in the Pale.

141. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 108, l. 70 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, May 30, 1929). This incident took place in Tract 28 of the Dzhankoi region. The case on Tract 22 was qualitatively different; it involved non-Jewish members of an association, whereas Sholom Aleichem was entirely Jewish; see GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 49 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, July 18, 1928). RKI was the acronym for the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate, 1920–1934.

142. YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 6 (Agro-Joint staff meeting, February 1928); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 22 (visit from Timiriazev Academy, 1929); Fink, Evrei na zemle, 97.

143. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 211, l. 10 (Fridman to Komzet Moscow, March 13, 1928), l. 39 (Fridman to Komzet Moscow, April 4, 1928); GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 49 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, July 18, 1928), d. 108, l. 168 (Temkin to Evpatoria RKI, April 23, 1929); YIVO, RG 358/225, p. 28 (Frischeig’s report on Dzhurchinsk, 1929); YIVO, RG 358/88 (A. Shlikhter, “Pravda o evreiskom pereselennii,” Bolshhevik Ukrainy, no. 9, September 1927); Narinskii, “Itoji goda raboty Sovkhoza im. Shevchenko,” 14.
144. YIVO, RG 358/119, p. 5 (Raskin’s report to Agro-Joint Moscow, mid-1927); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 201, ll. 6–7 (report of the Pioneer delegation, June 22, 1928). Kallen wrote (in *Frontiers of Hope*, 430) that colonists showered him with complaints until they learned that he was merely a tourist and thereafter ignored him.

145. For instance, see the complaint from *Staryi* [an elderly man] about lack of cultural activities in “*Trudiashchiesia evrei na zemle*,” *Maiak kommuny*, April 27, 1929; and, GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 74, l. 95 (letter to the editor of *Der Emes*, November 1925).

146. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 12 (Magid to Crimean Komzet, November 11, 1927). The Evpatoria OGPU “invited” this local Komzet man to discuss accusations made against him by a local troublemaker concerning alleged anti-Soviet remarks. A similar case involved the Agro-Joint agronomist Raskin; see YIVO, RG 358/119 (Agro-Joint to Komzet on the challenge to Raskin, June 15, 1927). A variant of this tactic was denunciation of association leaders as stooges of Agro-Joint agronomists; see GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 108, l. 15 (Dashkovskii to Crimean Agro-Joint, mid-September 1929).

147. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 254 (Malkov to Kalinin, February 20, 1928). Written appeals to Kalinin were common among Soviet peasants. See Viola, *Peasant Rebels*, 236; Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 299.

148. YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 90 (protocol of the conference at Sde Menucha, December 1925). Leaders of the Oktiabr’ commune tried a similar tactic to manipulate Komzet into advocacy for larger Agro-Joint loans; see GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 123, l. 15 (Reznichenko to Crimean Komzet, March 31, 1929). Settlers also condemned overzealous Agro-Joint workers or its shortcomings to Komzet officials. See GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 108, l. 49 (Fridman to Crimean Komzet, August 26, 1929).


150. Even without the threat of harsh punishment, settlements tried to oblige government requests for grain at submarket prices. The Ikor colony did so because “they may again need the assistance of the government”; see JDC Archive 528, p. 2 (notes by Frank Horowitz, 1928). The colonists generally did not resist grain procurements, which began in 1928; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 21 (material for the obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930).

151. For discussion of tactics ranging from accommodation to active resistance against antireligious policy, see Husband, *Godless Communists*, 140–58; Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia*, 276.

152. In the German colonies of southern Russia, active antireligious pressure from the regime was far more prevalent. See Beznosov, “Religioznaia zhizn’ nemetskogo naseleniia,” 329–42.

153. JDC Archive 473 (Moscow Rabbinical Committee to Warburg, May 1927).

155. Wood, “Jews Return to the Soil,” 7; Munitz, “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 52. Munitz identified greater religious repression in the Ukrainian settlement regions than in other parts of the USSR by comparing the closure of synagogues and the outlawing of ritual slaughter in the colonies with the conditions in Kiev. This is not the place to argue the state of religious observance in the interwar cities of the USSR; but it appears that Munitz missed the long-term implications of private religious observance in the old Kherson colonies.

156. JDC Archive 62a, p. 10 (Billikopf’s statements at press conference, August 30, 1926). Charles Hoffman (in *Red Shtetl*, 70–71) suggested that similar arrangements existed in some shtetls. According to Hyman, “there is no such thing as religious interference by the government. The question of religious observance is one for the colonists themselves to determine. The only real matter of concern is many of the young people inside and outside of colonies have communist views on religion and everything else.” See JDC Archive 530 (notes of an interview of Hyman by Levine, December 15, 1928).

157. Gorev, *Protiv antisemitov*, 175–76; Epshtein, *Po evreiskim poselkam*, 227: “Rasskaz kolonista,” 248; Kublanovskaia interview; Kopeleva interview; Al’tman interview; Vul’f interview; Furman interview; Sharaga interview; Z. Iampol’skii interview; and Evreinova interview. Of all the interviewees, only one advanced to a regional post in the youth organizations. A limited number of others had siblings in high posts. Twenty-three colonists were Komsomol members in the mid-1920s. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 559, ll. 33–34 (report of the commission of the First All-Crimean Conference of Jewish Toilers, April 7–11, 1926). Rosy reports of popular Komsomol, Pioneer, MOPR, and Osoaviakhim cells in the settlements abound in the archives and primary literature. The qualitative effect of these organizations cannot properly be judged because they habitually inflated data.

158. On participation in holiday celebrations, see Fink, *Evrei na zemle*, 56; Bytovoi, *K bol’soi zemle*, 43; and Kabakova interview.

159. Fal’ko (“V gostiakh u evreev-krest’ian,” 10–11) suggested that intermarriage occurred. Other sources contradicted this notion, for example JDC Archive 516, p. 7 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937).

160. The testimonies about “American” settlers are found, respectively, in Y. Y. Zinger, *Nei-Rusland*, 154; Fink, *Evrei na zemle*, 158–59; Evreinova interview; M. Fischer, *My Lives in Russia*, 25–30; Kallen, *Frontiers of Hope*, 404; and correspondence between Zaichik and Liubarskii in mid-1930, while the former toured America, contained in YIVO, RG 358/91. Approximately twenty-five American visitors (in addition to Europeans) traveled through the colonies in the 1920s, residing for varying time periods. See Levavi, *Haklaɪm yehudim b’aravot Krim*, Appendix 6. The naming of farm animals is discussed in Lifshitz, *Istorizh evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri*, 31; and Fink, *Evrei na zemle*, 43–44. For the general Soviet fascination with America during the interwar period, see Ball, *Imagining America*.

161. Crimean Tatar historians have not yet reconstructed their interwar, rural history. The

162. JDC Archive 531, p. 2 (Hyman to Waldman, December 11, 1929). As discussed above, Tatars constituted approximately one-quarter of the population. Most Crimeans were ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. Rosen posited few claimants to Crimea’s land after the civil war because hired, seasonal labor from distant parts of Ukraine estates (not indigenous laborers) worked prerevolutionary estates; see JDC Archive 516, p. 8 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937).

163. YIVO, RG 358/104, p. 3 (Komzet to Sovnarkom RSFSR, 1925); AJA, WP, Box 242/7 (Rosen to Agro-Joint board, May 31, 1928). Rosen assured JDC leaders that vacant land in Crimea and southern Ukraine was all under control of the state. In reality, at the moment of transfer, peasants occupied 11,500 of the 55,200 desiatins of government land allotted to Komzet before 1927; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 609, l. 105 (protocol no. 10a: closed meeting of the obkom bureau, March 17, 1927).


165. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 14, l. 23 (Martens to Gashek, October 17, 1927). A German land association protested to the Crimean TsIK against a new Jewish colony that refused to rent excess land. This colony sat on land previously cultivated, under rent, by farmers in the German association. The Crimean Narkomzem allocated eight thousand desiatins to Komzet in January 1925, all taken from excess holdings of German colonists. See YIVO, RG 358/224, p. 3 (statistical report on the Jewish collectives on rented land, January 1, 1926).

166. NARA, Decimal File, 1910–1929, 861.5017, Living Conditions/109, pp. 2, 5 (Coleman to the State Department, November 13, 1929); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 477, l. 58 (Loit to Petropavlovskii, May 31, 1926), d. 830, l. 6 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928), d. 917, l. 2 (Evsektsiia agitpropotdel report on antisemitism, 1929).

167. For a report on relations between German and Tatar settlers, see YIVO, RG 358/9 (response of the technical subcommittee, 1926). It concluded that the average income for non-Jewish settlers was 35–40 rubles. Jewish colonists earned 50 rubles per month during this period; see YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 22 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria agro-

168. Heavy German and Estonian flight followed the revolution; see Ahlborn, “People from Heilbronn,” 38. The U.S. legation in Riga reported efforts by large numbers of German and Estonian colonists to leave the Soviet Union in 1929; see NARA, Decimal File, 1910–1929. This intensified after collectivization; see GAARK, f. p-145, op. 3, d. 26, ll. 4–5 (Fritlinskii to Iakovlev, April 2, 1935). New scholarship confirms this phenomenon; see German and Sergienko, *Nemtsy Rossii i SSSR*, 294.

169. When Jewish communists from the Yungvald and Achdut colonies presented Soviet propaganda to German villages, it did not endear colonization to the neighbors, who were already uneasy about Moscow’s policies. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 7 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928).


171. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 61 (Grinshtein to Fridman, May 21, 1928). *Zhid* is a Russian pejorative applied to Jews.

172. Fal’ko, “V gostiakh u evreev-krest’ian,” 10–11. While new, spacious homes sprouted in Jewish colonies, most indigenous villagers could construct, at best, one-room huts; see NARA, Decimal File, 1910–1929, 861.52/92, p. 9 (Carlson to the secretary of state, October 1928). Similar disparities arose in agriculture. By partially insulating Jewish farmers from famines in 1927–1928 and 1932–1933, modernization exacerbated tensions at moments of crisis; see Munitz, “Haklaim yehudim be-Ukraina,” 69. Thanks to tractors and agricultural instruction, Jewish colonies around Kherson harvested 125–135 pud per desiatin in 1926, their neighbors only 65–70. See JDC Archive 62a, p. 15 (Billikopf’s statements at press conference, August 30, 1926). Lewin (in *Russian Peasants*, 30) found that 2.1 of the 5.3 million peasant households in Ukraine in 1929 owned neither a horse nor an ox. Such cases were rare among Jewish colonists after one or two years.

173. Fal’ko, “V gostiakh u evreev-krest’ian,” 10–11; Ts. Astaskovich interview, 4. Most notable in this regard was the well-recorded contempt demonstrated by a German village, Berlin; see Feigin, “Direktor MTS,” 281. Silkina noted in her interview that Germans denied early colonists water, obstructed travel, and refused to allow them to sell matches. In another incident, Levavi cited an article in *Der Emes* in 1936 that described fights between a Berlin village and Jewish newcomers over water rights in 1925; see Levavi, *Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim*, Chapter 4, p. 1. See also GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 61 (Grinshtein to Fridman, May 21, 1928); GAARK, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 144 (GPU report, December 27, 1930); YIVO, RG 358/249, p. 26 (Zaichik’s report on Agro-Joint work in Kherson, 1925–1928).

174. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 557, l. 7 (Lobovokii’s report on Evsektsiia, October 1, 1926). JDC officials attributed reports on attacks against colonists to the intrigues of anti-So-
viet, émigré newspapers; see JDC Archive 534, p. 10 (notes on Hyman’s visit, December 17, 1928).

175. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 24 (visit from the Timiriazev Academy, 1929). For other examples of adjustment to Jews, see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 557, l. 8 (Lobovokii’s report on Evsektsiia work, October 1, 1926); JDC Archive 530, p. 16 (Hyman’s impressions, December 8, 1928); and Hirschbein, Shvartzbrukh, 112. According to a U.S. State Department report, some of the surrounding villagers expected Jewish settlements to fail once the regime withdrew special privileges—a development the neighbors believed imminent; see NARA, Decimal File, 1910–1929, 861.52/92, p. 9 (Carlson to the secretary of state, October 1928). Similar processes transpired among the neighbors of Jewish colonists elsewhere in the Soviet Union: in Bessarabia, see Maryasin, Ha-moshavah Ungrovkah, 26, 42, 48; in Siberia, see Lifshitz, Istoriia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri, 23–24.

176. Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 161–62; YIVO, RG 358/195, p. 4 (Fabricant’s inspection of Crimean collectives, February 18, 1925). Hostility may have had other roots. As Fink overheard while touring with Ozet agronomists, who generally respected the colonists (Evrei na zemle, 68): “[Jews are] unbelievably trying people. A mentality of ‘chosen people’ is cultivated over the generations, in which they even complain about their own god.”

177. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 917, l. 2 (Evsektsiia agitpropotdel report on antisemitism, 1929); Smolar, Tokhelet ve-shivra, 294. Similar rumors also surfaced in Belorussia and Ukraine. See Izmozik, “Perepiska cherez GPU,” 81; and Gitelman, Century of Ambivalence, 151.

178. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 65 (Fridman to GPU Crimea, September 28, 1928). Komzet requested that Tract 17 (Evpatoria region) be allowed three revolvers for self-defense after attacks. In a separate case, the GPU reported that Jews had armed themselves in response to assaults by their neighbors; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 144 (GPU report, December 27, 1930). See also Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziastvennaiia kolonizatsiia,” 54; Fink, Evrei na zemle, 56; and Kabakova interview. The Haklai colony positioned barking dogs around the courtyard. It also “took a series of measures, of a repressive character, against malicious attackers.” See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 3, d. 46, ll. 22–23 (questionnaire on relations with neighboring farmers, 1928).

179. Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziastvennaiia kolonizatsiia,” 54. He also documented legal proceedings to evict non-Jewish squatters from Jewish lands in Ukraine (p. 58).

180. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 94 (Dashkovskii to Agro-Joint, June 5, 1928), l. 91 (Korchivin and Schur to Dzhankoi Raizo, September 5, 1928), l. 49 (Dashkovskii to Agro-Joint, July 18, 1928); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 557, l. 7 (Lobovokii’s report on Evsektsiia work, October 1, 1926), d. 477, l. 70 (Gulov to Guliaeva, circa 1926). Gulov reported on judicial-demonstrative trials in the Ratendorf selsoviet and in the Kolai district to punish hooliganism against Jews. See also GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 78, l. 61 (Grinshtein to Fridman, May 21, 1928); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 917, l. 8 (Evsektsiia agitpropotdel report on antisemitism in Crimea, 1929). A Ukrainian militia commander reported 278 recent (nonviolent) agricultural felonies, almost all committed against Jews. The mili-
tia took “massive” steps to combat the phenomenon; see Epshtein, Po evreiskim poselkam: puteye zametki, 39–40.

181. Early colonist-envoys (khodoki) and land associations often lived in German villages and colonies adjacent to settlement tracts. In many instances, although Jewish colonists occupied some of their land, Germans also provided water and fodder. See YIVO, RG 358/150, p. 3 (report on the staff meeting, January 1926); Bregman, “Puti evreiskogo zemledeniia,” 204; GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 557, l. 7 (Lobovokii’s report on Evsektsiia work, October 1, 1926); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 3, d. 46, ll. 23–24 (questionnaire on relations with neighboring farmers, 1928).

182. AJA, WP, Box 222/4, pp. 7, 12 (Kahn’s report from Russia, 1925); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 557, l. 8 (Lobovokii’s report on Evsektsiia work, October 1, 1926). Anticolonization rhetoric from the Tatar communists had the heaviest effect among the mountain Tatars—those promised steppe tracts allotted to Jewish colonists. Steppe Tatars (neighbors of the Jewish colonists) showed the lowest rates of antisemitism of all Crimean ethnicities; see Fatuev, “K probleme natsional’no-gosudarstvennogo stroitel’stva,” 209–10.

183. JDC Archive 530 (notes of an interview of Hyman by Levine, December 15, 1928); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 590, l. 144 (GPU report, December 27, 1930); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, l. 44 (Shapiro’s report on agriculture in the Fridorf region, May 2, 1934); Vest and Shtarkman, Hehalutz be-Rusyah, 69; “Memoir from Mishmar,” 8 (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection); Vul’f interview; Gendina interview.

184. During the 1920s, and in some cases well into the 1930s, Agro-Joint delivered to non-Jewish villages supplies and services unavailable from any other source, or at much greater expense; see Wood, “Jews Return to the Soil,” 6. For commentary on the sharing of farm equipment, see Furman interview. Hehalutz dissemination of Sudanese hay drew thanks from the indigenous neighbors, even before the arrival of Agro-Joint; see “Memoir from Mishmar,” 8 (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection).

185. YIVO, RG 358/19, p. 11 (Fischer, “To the Soil Movement,” 1925); Pines, Hehalutz, 211; Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-haklai, 25. When the JDC inaugurated aid to the Hehalutz communes, it sent a special envoy to placate local Tatars and Russians.

186. According to Keren (Ha-bityashvut ha-haklai, 50, 88), Agro-Joint and Ozet supplied three hundred Tatar households with construction and farming materials. Agro-Joint also gave them bulls, auto parts, school buildings, and drilled wells. Thirty-three percent of its total expenditure in Crimea went to Tatars during 1926; see “Pomoshch’ Tatarskomu naseleniuiu,” in Evreiskii krest’ianin 2 (1926), 249. In return, Tatars openly thanked Agro-Joint; see AJA, WP, Box 222/4, p. 8 (Kahn’s report from Russia, 1925). The JDC helped more than fifteen thousand non-Jewish, peasant households before 1929 and eighty thousand families by 1937. See JDC Archive 483 (Rosen to Rosenberg, January 25, 1928); JDC Archive 516, p. 8 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937).

187. JDC Archive 455, pp. 8, 16 (memorandum of meeting with Belenky, January 6, 1925). As early as 1925, non-Jews comprised one-third of all children in Agro-Joint schools. By 1929, their enrollment ranged from 20 to 64 percent. See Berezhanskaia, “Evreiskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 76; Kabakova interview; GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 29 (visit from the Timiriazev Academy, 1929). Agro-Joint donated nine of its ninety-five tractors in Crimea to local Tatars; see Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 16, p. 2.
188. YIVO, RG 358/151, p. 2 (Surdutovich’s account, October 30, 1926); YIVO, RG 358/200, p. 5 (report of the Crimean group, 1926–1927). Hired labor peaked in the summer of 1928, with the arrival of flocks of unemployed Ukrainians in Crimea. All but the communes and old colonies yielded to the temptation. Hired labor proved unprofitable, however, since the workers’ draught animals had to be fed. See Levavi, _Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim_, Chapter 16, p. 8. See also Y. Y. Zinger, _Nei-Rusland_, 158–59; Epshtein, _Novymi putiami_, 14.

189. Fink, _Evrei na zemle_, 142–43. The supply of inexpensive items from Agro-Joint and ORT workshops to neighboring settlements was a typical example of indirect aid; see JDC Archive 541, p. 1 (Rosenberg to Warburg, Baerwald, October 29, 1931). See also Merezhin, _O sploshnoi kollektivizatsii_, 42.

CHAPTER 5. COLLECTIVIZATION AND ITS LIMITS, 1929–1934

1. The USSR returned to 1914 levels of production only in 1927. Grain production, however, remained problematic; 1929 exports were only 16 percent of the 1914 level. See Davies, _Soviet Economic Development_, 2, 25, 27; Wheatcroft, “A Re-evaluation of Soviet Agricultural Production,” 13–14. Between 1926 and 1939, approximately 23 million peasants migrated to the cities. From 1928 to 1932, the population of Moscow increased by 60 percent. See Hoffmann, “Moving to Moscow,” 847. See also Young, _Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia_, 276–80.

2. Lih, _Stalin’s Letters to Molotov_, 3–4, 16. These disputes were at the heart of the conflict with the Left and Right Oppositions. For the classic analysis, see Erlich, _The Soviet Industrialization Debate_. For more recent studies, see some essays in Fitzpatrick, _Russia in the Era of NEP_. Planners in Moscow discussed the blueprint for rapid industrialization, funded by large farm surpluses, from 1925.

3. Robert C. Allen has reassessed the necessity of collectivization for the increase of peasant marketing; see “Agricultural Marketing and the Possibilities for Industrialization in the Soviet Union.” Crimea was typical in grain procurements and growing rural (mainly kulak) agitation; see Danilov, _Tragediia_ 1: 134, 217, 476, 733. Roberta Manning has studied the early measures to extract grain; see “The Rise and Fall of the Extraordinary Measures.”

4. Hughes, _Stalin, Siberia and the Crisis of the NEP_. The OGPU in Crimea began the arrest of “grain speculators” in December. State procurements from Crimea dropped in 1928–1929 but were still proportionately higher than in other parts of the USSR.

5. Lewin, _Making of the Soviet System_, 24, 92; Lih, _Stalin’s Letters to Molotov_, 39–40. See Davies’s account of the experiment in Khoper, _Socialist Offensive_, 130–72. For a description of the 25,000ers, see Viola, _The Best Sons of the Fatherland_. The XVI Party Conference in April 1929 determined that almost all the peasants enter kolkhozes. In November, Stalin announced that the middle peasant (seredniak) had already entered the collective and a Party Plenum chose the artel as the preferred form of kolkhoz. Eight Politburo subcommissions created the operative blueprint for collectivization in December 1929; see Viola, “Role of the OGPU,” 2–3, 8. Late that month, Stalin announced “liquidation of the kulaks as a class,” in effect, launching total collectivization.
6. Viola, “Role of the OGPU,” 4. Dekulakization by the political police achieved its “best” results, from the party’s perspective, in Crimea (3,564 households); see Danilov, Tragediiia 2: 224, 656, 698, 745–46. Nationwide dekulakization exiled more than 2 million people; see Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 48. A recent study shows that heavy repressive measures began in 1928 and continued until at least 1933; see Ivnitskii, Represivnaya politika sovetskoi vlasti v derevne.

7. Nationwide collectivization was to take ten years; more rapid collectivization was ordered only for the main grain-surplus areas. As a result of Moscow’s vague orders, particularly after January 5, 1930, when Stalin removed the prohibition against the confiscation of personal property, nothing expressly prevented the 25,000ers from forcing peasants to surrender their livestock to the new kolkhozes. The artel form mandated by collectivization allowed private ownership of livestock and small parcels. Crimea was second only to the Lower Volga’s tempo, in part buoyed by extraordinarily high levels of collectivization among Jewish colonies. For example, the colonies in the Evpatoria region reported 100 percent collectivization on January 1, 1931, except for some livestock; see YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 23 (Levintan’s report on Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931). For general rates, see Danilov, Tragediiia, 2: 44, 52–53, 364–65; and Simon, Nationalism and Policy, 94.


9. Millar, “Two Views on Soviet Collectivization of Agriculture,” 6; Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain; Scott, Behind the Urals; Kas’ianov, Krymskaia ASSR, 9. Jews left the shtetls at similar rates. See Gitelman, Century of Ambivalence, 156; JDC Archives 546, p. 3 (minutes of the ASJFSR board meeting, October 15, 1931).

10. Approximately thirty-one hundred lethal incidents of armed rural resistance occurred between January and March 1930 in the USSR, with thousands of casualties among government officials. See Viola, Peasant Rebels, 101–30; Simon, Nationalism and Policy, 96. The state indicted 12,420 citizens in Crimea, among nearly 2.5 million nationwide, for rebellion in 1930; see Danilov, Tragediiia, 2: Appendix 3. By some accounts, open peasant resistance continued into 1933; see Penner, “The Agrarian ‘Strike’ of 1932–33,” 7, 17–18, 34. There is some debate on the frequency and factors that may have deterred peasant revolt; see McDonald, “A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin’s Russia,” 134, 140. By March 1930, nearly 60 percent of peasants were already collectivized. Within a few weeks, only 23 percent remained in collectives; see Lewin, Russian Peasants, 315. Fines and other repressive measures forced peasants back into the collectives; by mid-1932, more than 61 percent of all peasant households were in the kolkhoz system.

11. For example, Moscow agreed that kolkhozes should be organized according to nationality. See Simon, Nationalism and Policy, 97; Miral, “Ispriavit’ oshibki i peregiby,” 17. See also AJA, WP, Box 276/2 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, June 26, 1931).

12. Lewin, Russian Peasants, 99; Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 4–6, 14; Davies, Socialist Offensive, 412. Output in livestock was worse than in cereals; see Zelenin, “Krest’ianstvo i vlast’ v SSSR,” 18–19; Nove, An Economic History, 242, 261–62.

13. At least part of this cultural revolution came from below, among those who felt betrayed
by NEP-era prosperity, See Fitzpatrick, The Cultural Front, 6–7, 18, 116–18, 130–33. For other sources of suspicion among Bolsheviks, see Stone, Hammer and Rifle, 5.


16. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 952a, ll. 91–93 (protocol no. 88 of the obkom bureau, March 21, 1930), d. 917, ll. 1, 8 (report of Evesktsiia agitpropotdel on antisemitism, 1929). Obkom authorities were particularly disturbed by poor local reception of new settlers. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1058, ll. 155–59 (resolution of obkom secretariat, March 16, 1931), l. 199 (protocol no. 41 of obkom secretariat, April 6–7, 1931). Crimea had particularly high rates of collectivization and communal sowing and ownership of horses before the winter of 1929–1930; see Danilov, Tragediia 1: 747. Instead, the political police used large-scale sweeps to fight crime and maintain social order. See Shearer, “Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s,” 509–11, 518–19.

17. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 21 (material for obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930); Slezberg, “Sostoianie polit-prosvetitel’noi i shkol’noi raboty,” 13.

18. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 133, l. 21 (Smidovich to Komzet chairs, September 25, 1929); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 311, ll. 2–5 (Korshunov and Lunev’s plan for land reform in Crimea, December 15, 1929), d. 411, ll. 1–6 (plan for the total collectivization of Jewish settlements in the Odessa region, January 15, 1930). There is no substantiation for Gol’des’s claim (in “Kollektivizatsiia v Krymu,” 11) that factory workers descended onto the colonies in 1930.

19. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 89 (Vasilenko’s findings, November 26, 1930); GAARK, f. p-76, op. 1, d. 93, ll. 34–35 (protocol no. 1 of the meeting of Evpatoria 25,000ers, June 4, 1930); Berezhanskaiia, “Evreiskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 82. In general, the 25,000ers felt unwelcome and neglected by raikoms and kolkhozes throughout Crimea. Judging from the available data, party membership among Jewish colonists was lower than the national average among Jews. In 1930, there were 61 communists in the Stalindorf district in an overall population of 29,900. Despite a growth in population, there were only 226 party members in 1935. See Kagan, Stalindorf, 46; Munitz, “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 50. Fraidorf counted 175 party members and 53 candidates in 1934 among a general population of approximately 15,000, but almost half its kolkhoz chairs were party members. See Nevelshtein, Fraidorfskii evreiskii natsional’nyi raion, 24; Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Table 30. The evidence suggests that the ousting or demotion from the government of the Jewish luminaries identified with the Left Opposition (Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and others) during the late 1920s did not deter the professional ambitions of a young generation of Jewish rural administrators. During these years, general Jewish representation in the party declined slightly to 4.3 percent but remained relatively high in proportion to the total size of the Jewish population (1.8 percent). Overall rural
party membership grew from 1922 to 1927 but was still very low compared with the size of the peasantry. See Tsentral’nyi Komitet VKP(b) Statisticheski Ordel, Sotsial’nyi i nacional’nyi sostav VKP, 36, 114; Katz, Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities, 368; Altshuler, Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust, 221.

21. Sovetskому Kryму двадцать лет, 270–71, 279; Broshevan, Natsional’nye raiony v Krymu, 123; Eveinova interview; Gendina interview; Kublanovskiaia interview. The Crimean government employed 1,463 Jews in 1930 as specialists and work leaders and in other capacities; see Gertsen, Evrei v Krymu, 38. The compact settlement blocs are discussed in Chapter 2. A relatively high proportion of Jewish kolkhoz chairs were party members. See GAARK, f. p-1, d. 990, ll. 81–82 (Rabinovich to Voronin, December 3, 1930).

22. Munitz argued that Jewish regions enjoyed superior administration after the arrival of recently unemployed Evsektsiia activists; see “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 51, n. 27. Kagedan does not concur on this point; see Soviet Zion, 102. Similar concentrations of a religious minority relocated to the geographic periphery were not without precedent in Russia; see Breyfogle, “Building Doukhoboriia,” 40.

23. Dekulakization occurred among Jewish colonists only in the old Kherson colonies; see NARA, 861.5017, Living Conditions/294, p. 5 (Coleman, July 10, 1931). Some studies suggest that severe retribution against non-Jewish villages came primarily in response to resistance, however small; see Neufeldt, The Fate of Mennonites, 81–82. Craftier peasants chose more passive forms of resistance; see Ohr, “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” passim. For data on “kulak” resistance in Crimea and the regime’s response, see Danilov, Tragediia 3: 335, 352.

24. Levavi came to a similar conclusion; see “Atudat ha-karka,” 66.

25. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 9 (material for the obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930), d. 1034, ll. 5–7 (protocol of the obkom’s Evsektsiia bureau, January 18, 1930). After the liquidation of the Hehalutz colonies, Agro-Joint refused to service the successor settlements. See GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 123, ll. 17–18 (Pliner’s report on Oktiabr’, March 27, 1929), l. 15 (Reznichenko and Tyshkovokii to Komzet chair, March 31, 1929). Agro-Joint openly criticized parts of the collectivization campaign; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 11–12 (Komzet Evpatoria to Komzet Moscow, January 4, 1930). See also GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 133, l. 41 (protocol of meeting of Evpatoria Komzet, September 21–22, 1929), d. 414, l. 67 (Zaichik to Mandel’shtam, May 22, 1934); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 147–48 (OGPU report, December 27, 1930).

26. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1034, ll. 5–7 (protocol of the Evsektsiia Obkom bureau, January 18, 1930); GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 414, l. 23 (Redkin to Komzet, October 9, 1934); Merezhin, Pervota vesna, 5. Moscow’s tacit recognition of Agro-Joint’s local role translated into an unusual concession during final negotiations of the ASJFSR agreement in 1929. Rosen successfully conditioned signature of the agreement on the release and emigration to Palestine of 150 Hehalutz members. See Malkhov interview, 30; Meizlin interview, 23.

27. YIVO, RG 358/119 (material for Komzet on reorganization of the settlements, August 13, 1929); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1034, ll. 5–7 (protocol of the obkom’s Evsektsiia bureau, January 18, 1930), d. 990, ll. 7–8, 24 (material for obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930), l. 59 (Komzet leadership and its staff, circa 1930); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, ll.
53–89 (Kliachko-Gurvich’s visit to the Crimean kolkhozes, August 2, 1934). Komzet also piggybacked on Agro-Joint’s farm and industrial initiatives. For the state of Soviet information-gathering, see Kuromiya, Freedom and Terror in the Donbas, 7, 150.

28. JDC Archive 531, p. 1 (excerpt from Smolar’s report, March 29, 1930); AJA, WP, Box 265/1 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, May 27, 1930). Ozet became most caustic toward Agro-Joint. As the state sapped it of practical roles, Ozet indulged in anti-Western, antikulak polemics. It also radicalized as its membership shifted from Jewish communal activists to party members. Its invective prompted an Agro-Joint threat to withdraw from the USSR in early 1931, countered quickly by assurances from Smidovich; see JDC Archive 541 (Agro-Joint to Komzet, January 30, 1931). (Smidovich to Agro-Joint, February 16, 1931).

29. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 159 (Veger to VTsIK, late 1930), ll. 7–8, 24, 27, 29–30 (material for obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930), ll. 58–59 (Komzet leaders and the characteristics of its apparatus, circa 1930), l. 106 (Kantor to obkom, December 6, 1930), d. 1034, ll. 5–7 (protocol of the Evesektsiya Obkom bureau, January 18, 1930); Merezhin, Pervaia vesna, 6; Korshunov, Evreiskoe pereселение v Krymu, 44.

30. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 120 (Sologub to obkom, December 20, 1930). This secretary of the Fraidorf district deplored the use of the informal ry between Agro-Joint and Komzet workers. Cooler relations would have called for the use of the more formal form of address, vy. Merezhin preferred to absorb, not liquidate, Agro-Joint; see Pervaia vesna, 14.

31. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 6 (Gurevich to Takser, January 1, 1928), d. 990, ll. 81–82 (Rabinovich to Voronin, December 3, 1930), d. 990, l. 92 (Voronin to Veger, December 4, 1930); Merezhin, Pervaia vesna, 31. Settler loyalty to Agro-Joint was most pronounced in Evpatoria, evidently out of gratitude that Rosen’s organization had assumed responsibility from the inept Ozet.

32. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 159–60 (Veger to VTsIK, late 1930), l. 147 (OGPU report, December 27, 1930), ll. 161–62 (protocol of the TsIK commission on Jewish settlement, January 28, 1931), d. 1059, l. 46 (protocol no. 43 of meeting of the obkom secretariat, April 26, 1931), d. 1208, ll. 209–13 (report on Fraidorf MTS, December 16, 1933). An earlier report from the Fraidorf raikom stated that the OGPU removed some anti-Soviet Agro-Joint workers. No corroboration was found for this claim; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 119 (Sologub to obkom, December 20, 1930). Sporadic arrests occurred against settlers or agronomists tied to Helahutz; see Livne, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Rusyah, 386.

33. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 952a, ll. 91–93 (protocol no. 88 of obkom bureau, March 21, 1930), d. 1058, ll. 155–59 (obkom secretariat resolution, March 16, 1931), l. 199 (protocol no. 41 of obkom secretariat, April 6–7, 1931); GARF, f. 1-9498, op. 1, d. 383, l. 33 (notice to the district Land Department, Kolkhoz Department, and Komzet, early 1932); GAARK, f. 1-145, op. 1, d. 19, l. 5 (Gutman to Semenov, early 1933).

34. JDC Archive 542 (Hyman to Rosenberg, Warburg, and Baerwald, July 22, 1932); Smolar interview, ICJ, 19, 22–23; GAARK, f. p-1, d. 990, l. 81–82 (Rabinovich to Voronin, December 3, 1930), l. 93 (Voronin to Veger, December 4, 1930), ll. 159–60 (Veger to TsIK, late 1930), ll. 161–62 (protocol of the TsIK commission on Jewish settlement, January 28, 1931).
35. The most significant personnel move was the replacement of Merezhin in 1931.

36. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 414, l. 68 (Mandel'shtam to Zaichik, May 16, 1934), l. 67 (Zaichik to Mandel'shtam, May 22, 1934); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1208, l. 203 (report on the Jewish kolkhozes, December 16, 1933), d. 1397, l. 229 (protocol no. 62 of the obkom bureau, August 5, 1933); Aktivist, “K ovetu,” 14; Reitanovskii, *Na kolkhoznoi zemle*, 54–59. Significant disproportion in rural salaries may have added to Agro-Joint’s status. Selsoviet chairs earned 100 to 200 rubles per month in the 1930s, a raikom official, 60 to 180 rubles; see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 175. Agro-Joint wages were severalfold higher. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 2, d. 161, l. 6 (Levitan’s file); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 2, d. 85, ll. 42, 56 (Ginzburg’s file), d. 157, ll. 32, 51, 105 (Liubarskii’s file), d. 77, ll. 38–39, 76, 89, 105, 113, 127 (Grower’s file).

37. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 7–8, 24–30 (material for the obkom on Jewish settlements, late 1930); JDC Archive 532, p. 4 (translation of Chaikin article in *Der Tog*, June 29, 1936). Agro-Joint’s status allowed it to ignore the selsoviets and other local Soviet power structures. See also Zeltsr, “Ozet and the Soviet Self-Criticism Campaign of 1937,” 81–82.

38. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 416, ll. 113–17 (Mandel’shtam to *Der Eme*, late May 1934), (Trotskii to Mandel’shtam, May 17, 1934), d. 488, l. 43 (Gel’man to Komzet Moscow, October 1935), l. 42 (Trotskii to Crimean Komzet, October 16, 1935). Settlers appealed for adjustments to land allocations whenever they sensed inequity; see GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 181–82 (Dubovskii, Finkel’shtein, and Plagov to Crimean Komzet, 1926).

39. Although Rosen was at first concerned over the ramifications of the waning fortunes of the Right Opposition, his fears proved mostly unjustified. See JDC Archive 541, p. 1 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); AJA, WP, Box 265/1 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, May 27, 1930); RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 80 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934). For a description of the Right Opposition, see Chapter 1, note 26.

40. JDC Archive 531, p. 1 (Hyman to Waldman, December 11, 1929); JDC Archive 509 (Warburg, Baerwald, and Rosenberg to Rosen, December 31, 1929); YIVO, RG 358/30, pp. 5–8 (Rosenberg’s notes on collectivization, January 1930), p. 6 (Rosenberg, “The Jewish Situation in the Soviet Union Today,” January 1930); JDC Archive 509, pp. 1–3 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, January 24, 1930); JDC Archive 541 (Warburg to Vogelstein, October 14, 1931); JDC Archive 541, p. 4 (notes from meeting of the ASJFSR board, October 15, 1931).

41. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 159 (Veger to VTsIK, late 1930), ll. 161–62 (protocol of TsIK commission on Jewish settlement, January 28, 1931). Even at the raikom level, class-warfare language entered talk about Agro-Joint; see GAARK, f. p-145, op. 3, d. 3, l. 4 (Fraidorf raikom report, December 5, 1930). Unlike in the 1920s, a government inspector was now willing to blame Agro-Joint agronomists for conflicts with settlers; see GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 152, ll. 96–97 (Gelman to Temkin, May 1930). Liubarskii was arrested and released in mid-1931. During the NEP, Agro-Joint personnel had been practically immune from such treatment. For an earlier indication of change in the environment, see M. Fischer, *My Lives in Russia*, 29–30.

42. For an example of the criticism against Agro-Joint personnel, see Merezhin, *Pervaia vesna*, 14–15. In 1930–1931, the JDC’s public approach focused on the relative similarity of the existing arrangements in the colonies to the new kolkhozes. The Joint also thought
it inadvisable to seek separate legal standards for Jewish farmers. See for example JDC Archive 457a, p. 2 (Rosen’s statement for the press, February 19, 1930); JDC Archive 541, p. 1 (Hyman to Adler, October 20, 1931); JDC Archive 541, p. 4 (notes from meeting of the ASJFSR board, October 15, 1931).

43. JDC Archive 509, p. 3 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, January 24, 1930); AJA, WP, Box 265/1 (Warburg, Rosenberg, and Baerwald to Rosenwald, February 10, 1930). The state met and surpassed all of its obligations to the Jewish Kolkozes under the 1929 ASJFSR agreement. See JDC Archive 541, pp. 5–6 (informal luncheon, October 8, 1931); JDC Archive 457a, pp. 1–2 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932). Ozet received orders to direct Jewish youth toward industry after 1927; see Levavi, “Ozet—Gezerd,” 127.

44. JDC Archive 541, pp. 2–3 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); JDC Archive 510 (memorandum for discussion at Baerwald’s house, October 28, 1931); JDC Archive 457a, p. 3 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932); JDC Archive 543, p. 6 (meeting of the ASJFSR board, July 2, 1934). In December 1934, the state write-off of kolkhoz debts included approximately $5.5 million among Jewish collectives. See AJA, WP, Box 314/12 (Rosen to JDC, January 18, 1935). This decision reflected the Politburo’s concern in the mid-1930s about the persistent debt of non-Jewish and Jewish kolkhozes; see Danilov, Tragedia 4: 486–87.

45. JDC Archive 540 (Baerwald to Rosenwald, November 14, 1929); AJA, WP, Box 264/7 (Rosenberg to Kahn, April 24, 1930), Box 264/6 (Baerwald to Warburg, August 14, 1930), Box 283/1, pp. 1–3 (Bressler’s report, December 14, 1932). Bonds had already been purchased for existing colonization work, whereas fresh funds were needed for new projects. Agro-Joint “lost” some settlements to the MTS because of liquidity problems around this time. A Soviet banking law reform in 1931 made Agro-Joint’s borrowing practices more difficult. See YIVO, RG 358/94, p. 1 (Rosen’s memorandum on next year’s plan, late 1931); JDC Archive 457a, pp. 1–4 (Grower’s report, March 16, 1932). The dollar’s decline against the gold standard, together with the pressures of the “Roosevelt experiment,” precluded the new construction of dairy enterprises; see GARF, f. r-26, d. 411, l. 30 (Rosen to Liubarskii, September 20, 1933). See also AJA, WP, Box 264/6 (series of Rosen’s cables to JDC, May 1930); YIVO, RG 358/165, p. 58 (Surdutovich’s report on Kerch, February 1932).

46. AJA, WP, Box 276/2 (Agro-Joint to Rosen, May 13, 1931), Box 276/3 (Marshall to Hyman, May 15, 1931), Box 276/4 (memorandum, November 3, 1931), Box 283/2 (Rosenberg to Rosen, November 9, 1931), Box 277/7 (Rosenberg to Warburg, December 4 and 11, 1931); AJA, Hexter Papers, MS Coll 338, Box 1/2 (Hyman to Hexter, December 8, 1931); JDC Archive 541, pp. 6–7 (informal luncheon, October 8, 1931); JDC Archive 469, pp. 16, 26 (Mirkin memorandum, February 12, 1930); JDC Archive 542 (Adler to Hyman, April 23, 1932), (Morrissey’s draft letter to delinquents, April 26, 1932), (minutes of ASJFSR meeting, July 18, 1932). It should also be remembered that many of the JDC officers were bondholders in the ASJFSR.

47. AJA, WP, Box 276/3 (Agro-Joint to Rosen, May 19, 1931); JDC Archive 510 (Lehman to Hyman, May 13, 1931); JDC Archive 510 (Marshall to Hyman, May 15, 1931); JDC Archive 542 (memorandum of discussions on cablegram from Schweitzer, June 14, 1932).
The Soviets agreed to postpone bond payments after October 1932. See JDC Archive 542 (memorandum on cablegram from Schweitzer, June 14, 1932); AJA, WP, Box 283/1 (Warburg to Rosen, June 20, 1932). The Society ceased bond payments with a balance due of $3 million. Under terms of the revised agreement, signed in April 1933, Agro-Joint left its assets permanently in the Soviet Union for colonization work in return for the cancellation of future cash payments. See JDC Archive 542 (Rosenberg to Warburg, July 13, 1932); JDC Archive 543 (draft memorandum, March 9, 1933); AJA, WP, Box 291/5 (Hyman to Warburg, April 28, 1935).

48. Rosenwald’s estate (mired in questions of liquidity) held approximately half the outstanding bonds of the ASJFSR. See JDC Archive 542, p. 2 (Baerwald to Kahn, April 22, 1932), (Warburg and Baerwald to Kahn, May 6, 1932), (Warburg to Jointfund, June 20, 1932).

49. AJA, WP, Box 228/6 (Rosenberg to Hyman, November 22, 1926); JDC Archive 457a, pp. 2–3 (Becker’s “Russia,” 1927); JDC Archive 539, p. 3 (Hyman to Warburg et al., December 14, 1928). This position emerged no later than 1930; see JDC Archive 457a, p. 4 (Rosen’s report to the executive committee, December 4, 1930). See also JDC Archive 543, pp. 4–5, 7 (meeting of the ASJFSR board, July 2, 1934).

50. JDC Archive 510 (memorandum of discussion at Baerwald’s house, October 28, 1931), (Rosen to ASJFSR, February 18, 1932), (Baerwald to Rosenberg, August 22, 1933); JDC Archive 541, p. 2 (Hyman’s memorandum, November 16, 1931); JDC Archive 542 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, February 25, 1932); AJA, WP (ASJFSR to Kahn and Schweitzer, June 17, 1932). The Soviet Commissariat of Finance directed the Amtorg chair to investigate the Society’s financial status in America.

51. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 300, l. 72 (Sanin to Alek and Arav, January 2, 1932). Agro-Joint operated some independent tractor teams until 1932; it introduced cotton into Crimea in the late 1920s. Throughout 1934, Agro-Joint agronomists maintained close contact with kolkhoz boards in agricultural and business affairs. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 434, l. 46 (Grower to Rosen, May 4, 1934).

52. Lewin, Russian Peasants, 101.

53. See Dalrymple, “The American Tractor,” 191; GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 290, l. 66 (Liubarskii to Arons, February 11, 1929). Riazan is an important agricultural region near Moscow. For specific information, see Viola, Riazanskaia derevnia, xxix–xxx. The first large Soviet tractor factory entered production in 1928–1929.

54. The Soviets could (and did) buy farm implements from Western sources; they imported tens of thousands of International Harvester and Fordson tractors during the 1920s and 1930s. Although impressive at first glance, these were of relatively minor significance considering the size of the country, the dispersal of these tractors over such a large area, and the primitive nature of Soviet agriculture. Conditions improved as domestic tractor production increased in the early 1930s. The diversion of national priorities elsewhere, however, kept Soviet agriculture chronically backward until the Union’s disintegration. The Soviets were largely unaware that many of the advanced mechanization methods used by Rosen were still largely untested in the United States; see Fitzgerald, “Blinded by Technology,” 462, 485. Most American farms were still small and privately owned in the late 1920s. Until then, animals provided the majority of draught power, and most large
farm machines produced in the United States were exported. By comparison, combines harvested 94 percent of grain in Crimea’s Jewish colonies in 1938; see Levavi, *Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim*, Chapter 16, p. 4.

55. Siegel, *Loans and Legitimacy*, 3, 104–5. Between 1925 and 1929, one-quarter of America’s tractor exports went to the USSR (twenty thousand units; Agro-Joint imported eight hundred of these). By 1931, Moscow purchased more than 25 percent of America’s industrial equipment exports. In power-driven metalworking equipment and farm implements, it consumed two-thirds of America’s exports.


57. YIVO, RG 358/152, p. 68 (Bruck’s prospective plan, 1927–1936).

58. For a discussion of Narkomzem’s failed attempt to absorb large numbers of peasants into its apparatus, see Heinzen, “‘Peasants from the Plow,’” 131–35, 151–53.


60. JDC Archive 454, pp. 3–5 (Rosen’s report on JDC reconstructive work, 1923). He added that the government supplied free transportation for colonists and livestock, as well as veterinary services.

61. JDC Archive 483 (translation of “Discussion on Tractors,” *Izvestiia*, no. 120, June 2, 1923); JDC Archive 455 (extract of Kamienieva article, February 1924).

62. *What Does Russian Jewry Think of Russian Jewish Agricultural Colonization?*, 4–5; YIVO, RG 358/246, p. 2 (Zaichik to Liubarskii, July 26, 1926); JDC Archive 516, p. 12 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937); JDC Archive 509 (interview of Boris Smolar by M. Kaufman and L. Deutsch, United Jewish Appeal Oral History, June 22, 1977); Veinshtein interview, ICJ, 18. One former colonist recalled that Aleksei Rykov (chairman of Sovnarkom and member of the Politburo) visited in the early 1920s. No other source confirmed this; see Malkhov interview, 25. As late as 1934, the secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk Obkom requested from Komzet that Agro-Joint deepen its involvement in his region; see RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 79 (Khataevich to Smidovich, September 10, 1934). See also YIVO, RG 358/235, p. 3 (Urison’s report on the greenhouse at Molotov kolkhoz, 1934).

63. A propensity for cooperative agricultural arrangements was not confined solely to this geographic region. According to memoirs, similar arrangements partially insulated the Jewish colonies in Siberia and Bessarabia from collectivization. See Lifshitz, *Istoriiia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri*, 43, 51; Maryasin, *Ha-moshavah Ungrovkah*, 30–32. President Kalinin, a strong proponent of Jewish colonization, promoted a plan for nationwide collectivism at the XVI Party Conference in April 1929; see Male, *Russian Peasant Organization before Collectivization*, 199–200. This proposal resembled in many respects the organizational practices of Agro-Joint.
64. YIVO, RG 358/193, pp. 15–18 (report on Agro-Joint work in Crimea, 1925); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 5, d. 22, ll. 4, 8 (Itkin’s report on Krivoi Rog tractor teams, 1927); d. 53, ll. 2, 8–11 (Itkin’s report on the Shevchenko sovkhoz, circa 1928); YIVO, RG 358/119, pp. 1–2, 4–5, 8, 13–15 (material for Komzet meeting on the reorganization of the settlers’ farms, August 13, 1929). Agro-Joint agronomists concurred with Komzet, and later Soviet economic planners, that only large-scale tractor work, intensive crops, and large-scale animal husbandry could compensate for shortages in the workforce and draught animals. They disagreed only on the scale.

65. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 5, d. 22, ll. 11–13 (Itkin’s report on Krivoi Rog tractor teams, 1927); YIVO, RG 358/158, p. 6 (Shukhman’s report at Agro-Joint staff meeting, February 1928); YIVO, RG 358/172, pp. 1–4 (Levintan’s report on the MTS in Evpatoria, August 26, 1930); YIVO, RG 358/227, pp. 20, 23 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1058, l. 159 (resolution of the obkom secretariat, March 16, 1931). The state used the same rationale for the MTS as did Agro-Joint with its tractor teams: peasants could not afford, nor be trusted to manage, the equipment. For the Soviet rationale, see Lewin, Making of the Soviet System, 182. Agro-Joint sold most of its tractors and all grain combines to the state from late 1930 to 1932, in accordance with a national ordinance. Agro-Joint kept other machinery connected to intensive crops; see Levavi, Hakhaim yehudit im aravot Krim, Chapter 16, pp. 3–4.

66. JDC Archive 516, p. 3 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937). The state, then local government, ended gigantomania in Crimean collectives in late March 1930. Evidently, this started the nationwide dissolution of the kolkhoz-giganty; see Miral, “Ispavit oshibki,” 17.

67. Krasnyi Krym issued multiple articles in 1930 and 1931 with this tone; see Berezhanskaia, “Evreiskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 79. The old Kherson colonies validated the importance of Agro-Joint’s mechanization work after 1924. These colonists had surpassed only episodically the professional achievements of their neighbors, and little changed in daily Jewish life before the civil war. See Yehudit Simhoni interview; Simhoni, Derekh zu balakhti bah, 11–16.

68. Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 156–59. He also noted awareness of market forces and profitable winter employment. See also Zaslavskii, Evrei v SSSR, 37; Merezhin, Pervaja vesna, 11; and, Bregman, “Puti evreiskogo zemledeniia,” 199. According to Rosen, “The heads of the government [saw] in the colonization work an illustration of the practicability of their industrialization plan in the use of tractors and other farming machinery by groups.” See JDC Archive 531 (protocol of informal discussion between Rosen and New York Yiddish newspapers, February 13, 1930). See also YIVO, RG 358/225, p. 28 (Frishberg’s report on Dzhurchinsk, 1929); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, ll. 43–44 (Shapiro’s report on Fraidorf, May 2, 1934).

69. The secretary of Komzet expressed an appreciation for the seeming conformity to total collectivization in the Jewish colonies; see Merezhin, O sploshnoi kollektivizatsii, 43.

70. JDC Archive 541, p. 5 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930). See also GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 125 (material on Jewish settlers in the Dzhankoi region, late 1930); JDC Archive 541, pp. 6, 8 (informal luncheon, October 8, 1931). Many oral histories recalled dekulakization and other forceful measures in nearby non-Jewish vil-
lages. Rosen lamented the “loss” of Agro-Joint’s smaller settlements to MTS and hoped to retain Agro-Joint’s independent tractor work in the remainder of the settlements; see YIVO, RG 358/94, p. 1 (Rosen’s memorandum on next year’s plan, late 1931). It appears that disputes arose in Komzet about the wisdom of collectivization for Jewish colonies. In the end, the central officers prevailed over the doubts of local officials; see Merezhin, “Kollektivizatsiia evreiskikh zemledeľch’eshchikh khoziaistv,” 5.

71. In late 1929, Agro-Joint turned its attention and resources to industrial training, the establishment of factories (based on industrial crops) adjacent to settlement areas, and cooperative ventures with state factories to employ urban or shtetl Jews. See JDC Archive 457a, p. 4 (Rosen’s report, September 20, 1929); JDC Archive 457a (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932); JDC Archive 510 (Morrissey to Harris, July 17, 1930), (minutes of meetings in Moscow, August 16–20, 1930); JDC Archive 543, p. 7 (meeting of ASJFSR board, July 2, 1934).

72. Joint officials, Soviet institutions, and the American-Jewish press noted the increased centrality of ORT. The American Jewish Yearbook (published by the American Jewish Committee) noticed its increased role with the start of the First Five-Year Plan; it had barely mentioned ORT in the 1926 and 1927 articles on colonization (vol. 28, p. 81, and vol. 29, p. 66, respectively). The 1929 yearbook (vol. 31, pp. 63–64) listed ORT as Agro-Joint’s partner in the reconstruction of a metallurgical factory in Crimea. The 1932 yearbook (vol. 34, p. 78) credited ORT with full winter employment for the Crimean colonists. The 1933 volume (vol. 37, pp. 209–10) equated the status of ORT officials with Joseph Rosen. See also JDC Archive 543 (meeting of ASJFSR board, July 2, 1934); and Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 78, 85. ORT signed a five-year agreement with Komzet in 1928, which was renewed in May 1933.

73. In 1929, they imported yarn for Jewish cooperatives. High, fixed government prices brought unexpected windfalls that Agro-Joint then reinvested into the cooperatives. Such progress did not entirely eradicate institutional and personal disputes; see AJA, WP, Box 277/7 (Hyman to Rosenberg, August 26, 1931).

74. Iurii Larin chaired the commission that outlined collectivization for the XV Party Congress in October 1927. See Danilov, Tragediia 1: 95–97. Three members of the Politburo subcommission that set the tempo of collectivization were either members of Komzet or otherwise familiar with colonization. See Davies, Socialist Offensive, 185; and Viola, “The Role of the OGPU,” 8. M. M. Vol’f (the chief agricultural expert in Gosplan and Rosen’s friend) participated in the planning of collectivization (Davies, Socialist Offensive, 185, 393). A. G. Shlikhter (Ukrainian Commissar of Agriculture) authored a pamphlet on Komzet activity (O blizhaishikh zadachakh Komzet, 1929) and a detailed article on colonization (“Pravda o evreiskom pereselenii,” Bolshevik Ukrainy, no. 9, September 1927). He was also a central figure in collectivization; see Davies, Socialist Offensive, 136, 165, 182–83, 194, 227, 388.

75. Between 1924 and 1928, total pamphlets dedicated to Crimean and Ukrainian colonization numbered 155,000. Between 1929 and 1931, publication jumped to 670,000 copies. In the following period (1932–1936), the press runs declined to 77,000 copies. Of the eighty-four pamphlets published by the state or Ozet presses between 1924 and 1936 on Crimean or southern Ukrainian colonization, sixty-six appeared in 1929–1931. The over-
all totals are artificially low because some pamphlets did not provide publication figures. Of the approximately 2,758,500 copies of Tribuna published in 1927–1937, roughly 1,615,500 appeared from 1929 to 1931. Tribuna vacillated between monthly and bi-monthly format over the years.

76. Between 1927 and 1928, Tribuna published 108,000 copies; between 1929 and 1932, this increased to 1.9 million, but in 1933–1936 declined to 740,000 copies. Authors of Ozet materials came from within Ozet and Komzet ranks. For statistics on general Soviet mass publications, see Brooks, “Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press,” 29. While publication figures for general daily newspapers such as Bednota or Krest’ianskaia gazeta dwarfed those of Tribuna, the resources committed to the latter are still impressive considering the total scope of Jewish colonization. According to Shmeruk (Pirsumim yehudim be-Brit ha-Motsot, lxiv), Yiddish language publications peaked between 1930 and 1932.

77. Conventional Soviet-Jewish authors insisted on publishing their work in standard government presses, not through Ozet or Komzet, to avoid affiliation with bodies so closely identified with the regime. Thanks to Professor Maxim Shrayrer of Boston College for enlightening me on this topic (conversation with the author, October 15, 1999).

78. Examples of the different forms of literature on colonization: Gleb Alekseev, ed. Protiv antsemitizma; Veitsblit, Derazhnia, 119; Bytovoi, Dorogi; Nevelshein, Fraidorskii evreiskii natsional’nyi raion; Frukht, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu; and Kagan, Stalindorf.

79. Kazovskii, “Evreiskoe izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo v Rossii,” 301; Iris Milner, “Zichronot mi-beit ha-yeladim be-kibutz be-Krim,” Haaretz, November 13, 1998; “Meir Axelrod, ‘Paradise Lost?’” (Ramat Gan, Israel: Ha-muzeon le-omanut rusit, 1998); Mikhail Yekhilevich (Axelrod’s grandson) (conversation with the author, August 20, 2000). Yekhilevich stated that the paintings from Vojo Nova were first displayed in public at the “15 Years of October” celebration in Moscow, 1932.

80. While Kotkin (in “Modern Times,” 121–23, 131–32) discussed the dramatic proliferation of cinemas, radios, and newspapers during the 1920s and 1930s, their relative effect on the countryside requires further study.

81. For example, E. Gordon, Tak vozrozhdaetsia step'; Sokolov, V poiskakh luchshego puti: Gorev, Protiv antsemitov, 173–76; and Korshunov, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 3–5. Emmanuil Feigin wrote (in Chernyi par, 2): “The surrounding farmers—Tatars, Russians, Jews, and Germans—all flow to the [Dzhankoi] MTS. They go there with one thought, the same in all languages, ‘tractor.’” See also Chto takoe Ozet? (1931), 11–12; Bregman, “Puti evreiskogo zemledeniia,” 210; Frukht, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 9; and Miral, “Takov put’ Oktiabria,” 21. Homogenization of the Jewish farming experience into the Soviet mainstream affected propaganda and children’s literature. See Volkovoi, Kakoi dolzhna byt’ Krymskaia step’, 24; Neiman, Kletchatyi. For discussions of mobilization campaigns on the national scale, see Bonnell, Iconography of Power; Kenez, Birth of the Propaganda State; and Stites, Revolutionary Dreams.


83. Bonnell, Iconography of Power, 7. In light of severe conflicts in the Soviet countryside sparked by religious repression, passages such as “Jewish laborers gave up the Sabbath quite easily, just like non-Jews gave up Sunday” may not have been welcomed; see Za-

84. For example, see GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 416, ll. 113–17 (Mandel’shtam to Der Emes, May 1934); GARF, f. 7541, op. 1, d. 575, l. 37 (Barshchevskii to Novo Zlatopol district executive committee directorate [RIKU], May 31, 1932); Lazman, *Fun Sedemenucha*, 20–21; and JDC Archive 532 (Hyman’s memorandum to Agro-Joint board, December 23, 1936).

85. This follows Alec Nove’s argument in *An Economic History of the USSR*, 133. See also Levavi, “Ozet—Gezerd,” 128.

86. Soviet publications uncharacteristically ignored the forced liquidation of the Hehalutz communes after 1929. It seems that the potential political dividends from the resurrection of these episodes did not justify the risk of angering Agro-Joint. See also Merezhin, *O sploshnoi kollektivizatsii*, 4; Merezhin, *Pervaia vesna*, 8, 13–16; Vasilenko, *Pochemu nado podderzhivat’ zemleustremlenie evreiskoi bednoty?*, 7; *Chto takoe Ozet?* (1931), 10.

87. Reitanovskii, *Na kolkhoznoi zemle*, passim. Neither did Stalin have need to beg for capitalist industry; he terminated a huge deal with the Ford Motor Company in 1934; see Ficene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, 125.

88. These included budding European fascism and traditional capitalist bogeys. See Kagan, *Stalindorf*, 7; Godiner and Lipshits, *Vstrecha v Tsymle*, passim; Barshchevskii, “15 let Oktiabria i evreiskoe zemleustroistvo,” 8. Evidently these campaigns had domestic effect, as the membership of Ozet rebounded, comprising more Jews than non-Jews for the first time since the early 1930s; see Beizer, “LenOzet,” 117.

89. RGAE, f. 7486, op. 19, d. 102, l. 38 (material on settlement, 1931). Parallel to Jewish colonization, Narkomzem and Gosplan managed settlement projects for non-Jews in western Siberia, Karelia, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Kamchatka, Sakhalin, and Murmansk. Jewish settlement received approximately 11 percent of the total settlement budget of 60 million rubles. According to these documents, the relevant commissariats did not give priority to Jewish settlement in Crimea, Ukraine, Birobidzhan, or Uzbekistan.

90. Rutberg and Pidevich, *Evrei i evreiskii vopros v literature sovetskogo perioda*, passim. Promotional literature on Birobidzhan never repudiated Crimea or southern Ukraine. Rather, it referred to the earlier colonization projects as initial stages in a larger Soviet program. Yiddish-language materials preserved Crimea’s stature; see Dimanshtein, *Yidn in FSSR*. High government offices demanded the efficient handling of new colonists in Crimea even after policy priorities shifted to Birobidzhan; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1302, ll. 38–39 (protocol no. 2 of obkom bureau, February 27, 1934). In mid-1932, the Kremlin instructed Komzet and Ozet to concentrate on Birobidzhan; see Levavi, “Ozet—Gezerd,” 128.

91. Godiner and Lipshits, *Vstrecha v Tsymle*, 22; Merezhin, *Pervaia vesna*, 11. Socialist competition was a motivational tool of the era.

92. High rates of Jewish participation in agricultural exhibitions continued until 1941, unaffected by collectivization or later events. See YIVO, RG 358/190, pp. 1–2 (Surduтович’s account of the exhibition in Simferopol, November 6–20, 1930); YIVO, RG 358/190, p. 1 (Agro-Joint to Raskin, September 30, 1929); Meksin, *Sel’skoe khoziaistvo Kryma*, passim; GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 41 (Rabinovich and Klemper’s report,

93. Keren, *Ha-hityashvat ha-haklait*, 73–75. Komzet and Ozet widely publicized the importance to the Soviet Union of encouraging further support from abroad for Jewish colonization. JDC leaders thought that “the government [is] anxious to prove that the land settlement work can and must be successfully prosecuted under collectivization.” See JDC Archive 542 (Hyman to Rosenwald, March 16, 1932).

94. The regional authorities had just over half the personnel needed to achieve 80 percent collectivization in 1930. See GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 311, ll. 2–5 (Korshunov and Lunev’s report, December 15, 1929). See also GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 11–12 (Komzet Evpatoria to Komzet Moscow, January 4, 1930); YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 22 (Levantin’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931); Glubochanskii interview. Kolkhoz-gigants were formed in the Evpatoria and Dzhankoi districts of Crimea. Jewish councils governed the colonies inside the giganty. The state dissolved all of the gigants in March 1930.

95. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 931, l. 117 (Novikov and Nemkov’s report, 1929); Ts. Astaskovich interview, 7; Livne, *Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Rusyah*, 372–73; Bregman, “Puti evreiskogo zemledeniia,” 190. The state paid peasants for grain at prices above the world market value. The high cost of manufactured goods negated the purchasing power of this money, however. In another move to calm the local mood, the government returned part of the 1929 and 1930 procurements to particularly needy peasants in January 1930. See JDC Archive 541, p. 3 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); AJA, WP, Box 276/2 (Rosen to JDC, May 8, 1931). State officials found disproportionate numbers of colonists unfit for work; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 39–40, 43 (Narkomzem’s conclusions and proposals, late 1930).

96. YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 22 (Levantin’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931); JDC Archive 510 (Bressler and Baerwald to Rosen, March 1, 1930); JDC Archive 541, p. 4 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); JDC Archive 536, p. 6 (résumé of Agro-Joint from 1924 to December 1929, March 6, 1930); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 6, 10 (Zaichik’s report on the Kadyshskii MTS, November 28, 1929); Merezhin, *Pervuiia vesna*, 9. From the Soviet point of view, these cooperatives did not qualify as kolkhozes before 1929 because of their relatively small scale and limited collectivism. See GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 133, l. 232 (Temkin to Kolkhozesektsiia, March 26, 1929). The first MTS began operation in 1929. For general conditions, see Levin, *Russian Peasants*, 99.

97. YIVO, RG 358/180, p. 36 (general principles of agricultural development, 1925–1932); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1208, l. 212 (report on Jewish kolkhozes, December 16, 1933). In general, each family retained three acres for a vegetable garden and orchard, a cow, swine, chickens, and perhaps a horse; see JDC Archive 543, p. 8 (verbatim notes of ASJFSR meeting, July 2, 1934). These conditions were generally better than those in non-Jewish kolkhozes.

98. For instance, the Ikor colony had three land associations (SOZ), each with twenty households. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1034, l. 9 (Redkin to board of Evpatoria Credit Association, January 10, 1930), l. 8 (Temkin’s report, January 31, 1930). Soviet authors minimized precollectivization associations; see Korshunov, *Evreiskoe perselenie v Krymu*, 41. The term “kolkhoz” was not new in the winter of 1929–1930. The national collec-
tivization policy, however, called for all village members to enter the kolkhozes under state supervision.

99. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 248, ll. 7–14 (Crimean Agro-Joint to Moscow Agro-Joint, December 27, 1939); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 411, ll. 1–6 (total collectivization plan for the Jewish settlements in the Odessa region, January 15, 1930). Three of the five artels were in the Simferopol district. It may be presumed that the proximity to the oblast capital influenced this decision. Another artel was Zavet Lenina, a successor settlement of the Hehalutz communes. The Yungvald and Oktiabr’ communes retained their prior status. Two other artels formed for dairy and stocking production.

100. Krasnogvardeiskoe interviews; Merezhin, O sploshnoi kollektivizatsii, 43. Splits into “dwarfs” evidently occurred among a majority of the kolkhozes in the Fraidorf district; see GAARK, f. p–1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 118 (Sologub to obkom, December 20, 1930).

101. GAARK, f. p–1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 118–19 (Sologub to obkom, December 20, 1930), ll. 143–45 (OGPU report, December 27, 1930); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 575, l. 46 (secretary of BelKomzet to secretary of Fraidorf raikom, July 13, 1932); l. 2 (Kesselman to Crimea Komzet, January 4, 1932), l. 49 (deputy chair of Komzet to Crimea Komzet, March 11, 1932), l. 62 (Khaikin to Komzet, November 3, 1932); GAARK, f. p–1, op. 1, d. 1208, ll. 210–211 (on the work of the Fraidorf MTS, December 16, 1933); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 29, l. 5 (report on Agro-Joint work, 1936); Reitanovskii, Na kolkhoznoi zemle, 25. Semen Bytovoi remarked (in K bol’shoi zemle, 37) on persistent jealousy between old and new colonists, most often associated with job assignments or the benefits Komzet awarded to newcomers. He found that the settlers of 1927–1928 neither complained about the kolkhoz leaders nor felt alienated; such emotions were common among the newcomers, however. See also Livne, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Rusyah, 374. Non-Jewish kolkhozes in the Smolensk region experienced similar feuds after collectivization; see Ohr, “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” 8.

102. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, l. 36 (Shapiro’s report on the Fraidorf region, May 2, 1934); GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 488, l. 43 (Gel’man to Komzet, October 1935); Reitanovskii, Na kolkhoznoi zemle, 33–36; Fink, Evreii na zemle, 150–52; Epshtein, Novymi putiami, 18.

103. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 575, l. 49 (Trotskii to Komzet, March 11, 1932), ll. 62–63 (Khaikin to Komzet, November 3, 1932), l. 46 (secretary of BelKomzet to Fraidorf raikom, July 13, 1932). Soviet ideology interpreted such conflict as the machinations of colonists who still worked as merchants; see Merezhin, O sploshnoi kollektivizatsii, 38.

104. L. G. Zinger, Evreiskoe naselenie v SSSR, 96.

105. For discussion of the inequities in the distribution of supplies in non-Jewish kolkhozes, see Osokina, Our Daily Bread, 83–85.

106. GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 178–82 (results of ORT work in Crimea for 1936–1937 and plans for 1937–1938). After reduction of its settlement activities in Odessa in the early 1930s, ORT began intensive industrial activity in Crimea. In Crimea, ORT operated four workshops in the winter of 1931–1932, thirty-one in the winter of 1936–1937, and planned to open another forty-three in 1937–1938. A government agronomist identified a total of fifty-seven factories in Crimean kolkhozes, employing 1,643 people in 1933; see Reitanovskii, Na kolkhoznoi zemle, 17. Additional sources confirmed the im-
portance of cottage industries. See GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, ll. 53–89 (Kliachko-
Gurvich’s visit to the Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea, August 2, 1934); JDC Archive 532, p. 3 (translation of Jewish Morning Journal, October 19, 1932); Vul’f interview; Evreinova interview.

107. JDC Archive 541, p. 2 (Rosenberg to Warburg and Baerwald, October 29, 1931). Agro-
Joint sources counted sixty-five workshops in eighty-six colonies in 1932. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 41, t. 3 (Liubarskii to Rosen, July 19, 1933); JDC Archive 457a, p. 9 (Grower’s report, March 16, 1932); Schreibshtein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection).

108. Under collectivization, the government assigned specific quotas for grain to each 
kolkhoz and, at times, for other goods. Farm produce above these levels could be sold 
on the private market. Eighty of Agro-Joint’s eighty-six colonies in Crimea had veg-
table gardens by 1933; see GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 411, l. 1 (Liubarskii to Rosen, July 
19, 1933). Denunciation became particularly acute in the countryside starting in 
1931; see Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 15–16, 249, 254, 260.

109. Fradkina interview; Gorshman interview; Furman interview; Vul’f interview; GARF, f. 
r-7541, op. 1, d. 755, l. 62 (Khaikin to Komzet, November 3, 1932); Osokina, Our Daily 
Bread, xiii–xiv, 50, 111–12. Private marketing of produce continued after collectiviza-
tion; see Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 52–53. For the development of the na-
tional collectivization policy, see Nove, An Economic History of the USSR, 162; Fitz-
patrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 7

110. Fitzpatrick and Slezkin, In the Shadow of Revolution, 12.

111. Edgar, “Emancipation of the Unveiled,” passim; Keller, To Moscow, Not Mecca, 254–55; 

112. For instance, in the fifty-one (Jewish and other) kolkhozes in the Fraidorf district in 
1933, there were 3,225 households, but only 118 party members, 21 candidate mem-
bers, and 451 Komsomol members; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1208, l. 209 (report on 
Jewish kolkhozes, December 16, 1933). Party and Komsomol membership rolls fared 
no better in other Jewish districts; see Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chap-
ter 13, pp. 15–16. For the general situation, see Siegelbaum, “Dear Comrade, You Ask 
What We Need,” 231–56. Peasant women in particular remained the object of party 
campaigns until the late 1930s. See Fitzpatrick and Slezkin, In the Shadow of Revolu-
tion, 29.

113. GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 10, l. 44 (Taran to secretariat of the party cells, summer 
1933). Women’s brigades were charged with ensuring proper function of school facili-
ties, weeding campaigns, and tractor-driving courses; see GAARK, f. p-145, op. 1, d. 23, 
l. 1 (lanishskia to obkom, April 1934).

114. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 830, l. 17 (Kovner’s supplement to the report on the Evsektiia, 
May 26, 1928). Gol’den noted (in “Kollektivizatsiia v Krymu,” 11) that the party later cor-
corrected these “distortions,” but did not elaborate. See also Livne, Haklaim yehudim b’ar-
avot Rusyah, 373. On the general reaction of peasant women to total collectivization, see 
Osokina, Our Daily Bread, 55; McDonald, “A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin’s Russia,” 
125–32, 135; Viola, Peasant Rebels, 5, 237; and Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 65, 141. All
concurred that female defiance derived from a sense of greater political immunity than that enjoyed by men.

115. Levavi, *Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim*, Chapter 19, pp. 9–10. He noted that complaints about the underemployment of women continued after collectivization. No archival material supports this argument. The establishment of daycare facilities became a feature of national collectivization policies. Women deposited their children in nurseries at 4–5 a.m. and collected them at 8 p.m.

116. GAARK, f. p-145, op. 1, d. 23, l. 1 (Ianishshaia to obkom, April 1934). One can only speculate as to what degree the wives of former merchants welcomed the opportunity to engage in manual labor.

117. A children’s book portrayed work by women in the dairy farm or market garden as inferior to skilled jobs; see Neiman, *Deti evreiskoi kommuny*, 36–37. Y. Y. Zinger observed (in *Nei-Rusland*, 169) that women in Mishmar did household chores for the men. This contradicted the imagery of Zionism, where gender equality was both preached and practiced. All other sources applauded female integration in the Hehalutz colonies. See “Memoir from Mishmar” (Lavon Institute), 5; Rivka Veinshtein interview, Lavon Institute, 13. Most literature noted that women worked as much, if not more than, men; see for example Epshtein, *Novymi putiami*, 17. Recent studies suggest that traditional gender roles persisted even in the kibbutzim in Mandatory Palestine. See note 8 in the Conclusion.

118. YIVO, 358/152, p. 28 (Bruk’s prospective plan, 1927–1936); Katsnel’son, “V kolkhozakh Kryma,” 29; Mikhailov, “Tri nedeli po evreiskim poliam,” 6; Gorshman interview. Women reduced work in other farm branches to “protect” their predominance in the vineyards of the old Kherson colonies; see Epshtein, *Po evreiskim poselkam: putevye zamerki*, 45. According to Kagan (*Stalindorf, 60*), women led the livestock farms in the Stalindorf region.

119. Dubrovskii interview; Kopeleva interview; Vul’f interview; Evreinova interview. The equalizing effect of productive work in the kolkhoz was apparently a national phenomenon; see Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 10–11.

120. AJA, Brown Papers, MS Coll 18, Box 1/8, p. 1 (notes, late 1932); GAARK, f. p-145, op. 1, d. 23, l. 1 (Ianishshaia to obkom, April 1934); GARD, f. r-7746, op. 2, d. 255, ll. 1–2 (agronomist Usach); Epshtein, “Po evreiskim poselkam,” 220; Katsnel’son, “V kolkhozakh Kryma,” 29; Bytovoi, *K bol’shoi zemle*, 97. Kagan (*Stalindorf, 60*) gave multiple examples of female brigade leaders, kolkhoz chairs, selsoviet chairs, and party activists in the Stalindorf region. Agro-Joint was, in principle, not averse to allowing women into supervisory jobs but tended toward conservatism in practice; see GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 11, l. 145 (Redkin to Komzet, October 27, 1936). For general conditions in rural Russia, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 12.

121. See for example, Sokolov, *V poiskakh luchshego puti*; Nevelshtein, *Fraydorfskii evreiskii natsional’nyi raion*, 9; and, Dimanshtein, *Yiden in FSSR*. The emerging prominence of women in farm branches also found expression in children’s literature; see Neiman, *Kletchatyi*, 7–14.

122. Relatively rare archival sources suggested that female Jewish colonists worked less than males; see GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 589–90 (Maifeld’s yearly report, 1931). Ohr
(in “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” 406) found only limited female upward mobility in the non-Jewish kolkhozes of Smolensk.


124. Bytovoi, *K bol’shoi zemle*, 21. Women on the Dobrushino kolkhoz complained of a disproportionate workload; see Bytovoi, *Dorogi*, 42. A female colonist wished only that her husband take another wife so he would leave her alone in bed; she did not mind household chores, however. See Kallen, *Frontiers of Hope*, 407.

125. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 121, ll. 24–25 (Beit Lechem to Komzet, May 10, 1929). An anonymous author requested Komzet aid to evict an absentee colonist who worked for Agro-Joint. See also YIVO, RG 338/237, p. 2 (Tel Chai to Dzhankoi Selsouiz, April 20, 1927); GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 108, l. 160 (Kolos association to Feodosia Raizo, March 24, 1929); GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 27, l. 125 (Galitsyna to Maifeld, March 4, 1933), l. 126 (Khaikin to *Krasnyi Krym*, March 1935); Embree, “Jews on the Steppes,” 13; Reitansovskii, *Na kolkhoznoi zemle*, 50–52; Kagan, *Stalindorf*, 18.

126. For example GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 488, l. 184 (Mandel’shtam and Shein to Kanterman, February 27, 1933), l. 185 (Mandel’shtam and Berezanskii to Romanovskii, February 18, 1935). In the former example, Komzet supported women’s claims against a regional factory. In the latter, it reprimanded a male settler for excessive monetary demands.


131. The closure of synagogues throughout the USSR began in 1921 but reached significant
numbers only in 1927; from late 1929 through 1930, the Soviets closed more than during the previous decade. From 1917 until early 1930, 646 synagogues closed, 99 of them in the first eight months of 1929. The Soviets converted most into public buildings. Such closures were greater in number than those of churches in the late 1920s, whereas the reverse was true earlier in the decade. In 1914, there were 1,400 synagogues in Ukraine; in 1929, only 934. Munitz could not ascertain whether private worship replaced the closed urban synagogues. See Munitz, “Shtei teudot,” 106; Yodfat, “Maamad ha-dat ha-yehudit be-Brit ha-Moatsot,” 36–37. According to Rosen’s reports to the JDC, the rate of church closures exceeded synagogue closures; see JDC Archive 476, p. 1 (Hyman to Adler, October 7, 1929). Rosen fueled confidence in New York with reports that religion thrived more in the colonies (at least among elders) than in Soviet cities; see JDC Archive 541, p. 2 (Hyman to Adler, October 20, 1931). See also JDC Archive 544, p. 13 (meeting of JDC, Agro-Joint, and ASJFSR, July 1, 1935).

132. AJA, Brown Papers, MS Coll 18, Box 1/8, p. 1 (notes, late 1932). Many sources confirmed persistent ritual practices. In October 1931, Der Emes complained that colonists frequented ritual slaughterers (shohtim, singular shohet), opened new synagogues, obeyed Jewish wedding rituals, performed circumcisions, and employed private religious teachers for their children. See Keren, Ha-Hityashvut ha-haklait, 135; American Jewish Yearbook, 5693, vol. 34 (1932): 79. Oral histories have corroborated Der Emes’s suspicions, and in some cases, exceeded them. Almost every interviewee recalled daily religious observance in the settlements, at least until their evacuation in 1941. A large proportion of their homes kept kosher, and many settlements had a shohet. There were also cases of open Jewish rituals (weddings, burials, and holidays), eruvim (ritual Sabbath borders around settlements), and religious celebrations that included neighboring settlements. See Fink, Evrei na zemle, 33–38; Smolar interview, ICJ, 14; Reitanovskii, Na kolkhoznoi zemle, 28; Altman interview; Z. M. Iampol’skii interview; Sharaga interview; Furman interview; Frodkina interview; Vul’f interview; Kabakova interview; Ts. Astaskovich interview, 6; Levitan interview.

133. Williams, “A Homeland Lost,” 547. Islam came under ruthless attacks between 1931 and 1936; hundreds of mosques were closed and mullahs deported. For general conditions of postcollectivization Jewish observance, see Yodfat, “Maamad ha-dat ha-yehudit be-Brit ha-Moatsot,” 47–46; and Fainsod, Smolensk under Soviet Rule, 445.

134. Sharaga interview; Epshtein, Po evreiskim poselkam, 228. Local authorities staged a Chekhov play in Yiddish on Rosh Hashanah to help colonists forget the holiday. An exception in the primary literature concerning Jewish interest in the “Soviet” holidays is Neiman, Deti evreiskoi kommunity, 62–66.


136. GAARK, f. p-145, op. 1, d. 23, ll. 2–5 (Gutman to obkom, May 30, 1934). All of the “Yad Ezra” oral histories lauded the school system in the Telman region. This may be il-
Illustrative of fact or, perhaps, local nostalgia. Also, there may have been significant vari-
ance between the regions.

137. Altshuler, Ha-teatron, 32, 68; Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapters 17, 22, 23; Berezhanskaia, “Evreiskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 79. Films were shown in central settle-
ments; members of surrounding colonies came by wagon; see Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-haklaiit, 128. The popularity and activity of the Jewish Kolkhoz Theatre increased to-
ward the end of the 1930s. They performed works in Yiddish and Russian at least until mid-1939. Although it is unclear to what extent the famed Moscow State Yiddish The-
ater (GOSET) visited the colonies, there is no doubt that the core members of the Jewish State Kolkhoz Theatre of Crimea had been trained in the acting school of the distin-
guished Moscow theater. See Radomyskii, “Pervyi evreiskii kolkhoznyi teatr,” 16–17; Al’tman, “Krymskii evreiskii kolkhoznyi teatr,” 29–30; Schreibshtein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection); Furman interview; Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 23, pp. 1–3; Veidlinger, The Moscow State Yiddish Theater, 125; Gertsen, Evrei v Krymu, 38. In addition, Agro-Joint agronomists o-
ffered well-attended lectures at cul-
tural clubs.

138. According to a report by visitors from the Crimean Education Commissariat; see GAARK, f. r-663, op. 1, d. 1845, ll. 10–11 (Asanov and Lobovskii to Sovnarkom, Sep-
tember 10, 1930). The persistence of Yiddish drama clubs until 1941 in individual settle-
ments and at the regional level reinforced this conclusion; see Schreibshtein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection). Strong growth of Yiddish schools occurred in Be-
lorussia and Ukraine from 1923 to 1933, even before korenizatsiia reached its height; see Pinkus, Jews of the Soviet Union, 108. A renaissance may have been necessary after de-
cline in the daily use of Yiddish among Russia’s Jews from approximately 1897 onward; see Baron, The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets, 191.

139. Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 173. No other sources confirmed Zinger’s observation. Archival records of correspondence between colonists and Agro-Joint feature both Rus-
ian and Yiddish. Use of Russian among Agro-Joint agronomists probably resulted from their professional training in urban institutes.

140. For example, the schools in Pervomaisk and Kalininsk taught in Russian from the early 1930s; see JDC Archive 532, p. 2 (translation of Jewish Morning Journal, October 19, 1932).

141. Schreibshtein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection); Keren, Ha-bityashvut ha-hak-
laat, 135. According to Zinger and Belenkaia (“Stages in the Formation of Policy on the Jewish Question,” 143), Yiddish waned in the school system throughout the country in the 1920s, mainly because young Jews preferred to study in Russian—they did not want a Yiddish education to pigeonhole them. This matched attitudes toward Yiddish in the Jewish population centers; see Gitelman, “Formirovanie evreiskoi kul’tury,” 23.

142. Munitz, “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 51, n. 29. Other reports attributed the persistence of Yiddish to poor political education among adults and inadequate education for chil-
dren. See GAARK, f. r-663, op. 1, d. 1845, ll. 10–11 (Asanov and Lobovskii to Sov-
narkom, September 10, 1930); Slezberg, “Sostoianie polit-prosvetitel’noi i shkol’noi raboty,” 12–14. The national daily, Der Emes, helped produce local Yiddish newspapers. For discussion of Yiddish-Soviet newspapers in the Ukrainian settlement regions, see
Munitz, “Ha-napot ha-leumion,” 52. Keren (in Ha-bityashvut ha-haklait, 135, 137) concurred with my conclusion on the reception of Yiddish-language newspapers by the Crimean colonists. See also Berezhanskaia, “Eveireskie kolkhozy v Krymu,” 81; Z. M. Iampol’skii interview; Vul’f interview; Al’tman interview; A. Iampol’skaia interview. No data were found for reception among the Ukrainian colonists.

143. For the conventional categorization of kulaks, see Broshevan, Raskulachivanie v Krymu, 7–8.

144. YIVO, RG 358/30, pp. 4–5 (Rosenberg, “The Jewish Situation in the Soviet Union,” January 1930); Vul’f interview; Fradkina interview; Merezhin, Pervuia vesna, 18, 22. A variety of problems remained particularly acute in the Evpatoria region. See GARF, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 383, ll. 10–11 (Evpatoria Komzet to Komzet, August 1, 1932); GAARK, f. p-116, op. 1, d. 4, l. 19 (Razin to Leikin, circa 1935); Broshevan, Raskulachivanie, 82.

145. GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 10, l. 51 (Kobelianskii to chair of Maifeld, July 16, 1933), l. 281 (Karchenko to all kolkhoz chairs, March 1934), l. 555 (Karasev to chair of Maifeld, late 1933); JDC Archive 457a, p. 8 (luncheon for Rosen and Kahn, November 12, 1931); Kagan, Stalindorf, 47; Reitanovskii, Na kolkozhnoi zemle, 25–26.

146. Gol’d, “Kolkovizatsiiia v Krymu,” 11; Gol’d, “Ispaviv oshibki i kolkhoznom stroitel’sve,” 4–5; Kagan, Stalindorf; 10; Bytovoi, Dorogi, 8; Reitanovskii, Na kolkozhnoi zemle, 24. Cries of “we have no kulaks here” were commonly invoked by non-Jewish peasants throughout the USSR; see Viola, Peasant Rebels, 236.

147. This was apparently the case in the JCA’s colonies; see JDC Archive 469, p. 16 (Mirkin memorandum, February 12, 1930).

148. Bytovoi, Dorogi, 8; Levai, “Tsionei derekh,” 31; Aronson, Russian Jewry, 179. A far greater problem was the fate of urban Jews, deprived of bread cards by renewed antishentsy laws. Close to 40 percent of Soviet Jews still came under this classification. Agro-Joint pressure probably helped bring about partial removal of this law. See JDC Archive 509, p. 1 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, January 24, 1930); JDC Archive 541, p. 2 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930). Later in 1930, Agro-Joint created urban mutual aid societies that enlisted many remaining lishentsy, thereby reestablishing their privileges; see JDC Archive 457a, p. 5 (Rosen’s report, December 4, 1930).


150. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 248, ll. 1–4 (Krivoi Rog Agro-Joint to Moscow Agro-Joint, October 30, 1929). Agro-Joint and Komzet called for the collectivization of 69 percent of the region’s colonies before 1931. They stated in October 1929 that 34 percent were already collectivized. Agro-Joint then denied the construction of communal structures and agricultural instruction to total collectives in the winter of 1929–1930. See GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 119 (Sologub to obkom, December 20, 1930), ll. 81–82 (Rabinovich to Voronin, December 3, 1930), l. 93 (Voronin to Veger, December 4, 1930).

151. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 283, l. 3 (Shul’ to Itkin, late October 1929). Affluent Soviet peasants often practiced self-dekulakization (or spontaneous dekulakization) in reaction to grain procurements from 1928 onward. Such peasants sold all their property and moved to the cities or distant regions; see Davies, Socialist Offensive, 85. Self-dekulakization brought the sale of up to 40 percent of land and 50 percent of equipment, and
the liquidation of 70 percent of the country's livestock by early 1930; see Viola, “The Role of the OGPU,” 5.

152. The only case comparable to the Jewish colonists was periodic intervention by diplomatic officers on behalf of registered citizens of their nations accused as kulaks in Crimea. German Mennonites in southern Ukraine and Crimea—no longer German citizens—had a comparable population (seventy-nine thousand). A large number tried to emigrate in 1929 and then returned to private cultivation. Many Mennonite “kulaks” endured disenfranchisement and special taxation from early 1929. Simultaneously, Mennonite preachers were heavily persecuted. The state targeted only those Jewish colonists identified as landowners before the revolution (byshie pomeschiki). See JDC Archive 541, pp. 3–4 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); Neufeldt, The Fate of Mennonites, 81–82, 605; Pinkus, “The Extra-Territorial National Minorities,” 86; Broshevan, Raskulachivanie, 26, 76, 85–106.

153. An example of this was continued development of new intensive farm branches; see YIVO, RG 358/235, pp. 1–3 (Urison’s report on the greenhouse at Molotov kolkhoz, 1934).

154. Sporadic exceptions to this rule evidently occurred. According to the journalist L. S. Baily, the Yiddisher Poyer colony delivered its entire tomato and eggplant harvest to the state. See JDC Archive 532, p. 3 (translation of Jewish Morning Journal, October 19, 1932).

155. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 569, ll. 1–3 (codex and ratios, December 1932), l. 9 (the obligatory supply of wool to the state and the procurement plan for 1933). Rapid mechanization in the early 1930s proved disastrous; the imbalance between low storage capacities, the high output of new machines, and the enormous quantities of forcibly procured grain caused huge losses of harvested crops. By contrast, Agro-Joint quickly set up such facilities, thereby ensuring that the colonies fulfilled their quotas; see JDC Archive 457a, p. 2 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932). Agro-Joint planted corn in 1933–1934 to compensate for deficient grain supplies; see GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 411, l. 4 (Liubarskii to Rosen, July 19, 1933).

156. GAARK, f. p-145, op. 3, d. 26, l. 5 (Fritlinskii to Iakovlev, April 2, 1933); RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 82 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934). NEP-era “diversification” in the non-Jewish village usually went no farther than the distillation of samogon (hooch); see Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 216. In 1934, fifty-one of eighty-six Crimean kolkhozes possessed vineyards, seventy-seven of eighty-six possessed collective vegetable gardens; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, l. 102 (individual indexes [otdel’nye pokazeteli]). From 1932 to 1935, the workday wages in Jewish kolkhozes remained relatively low compared with the Crimean average. See GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 597–98 (Maifeld’s yearly report, 1932), d. 27, l. 62 (Narkomzem USSR’s statistical department, 1934); GAARK, f. p-145, op. 3, d. 26, ll. 4–5 (Fritlinskii to Iakovlev, April 2, 1933); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1208, l. 209 (report on the Jewish kolkhozes, December 16, 1933); RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 81 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934).

157. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 106 (Kantor to obkom, December 6, 1930), l. 126 (material on the Jewish settlers in Dzhankoi region, late 1930). Elsewhere in the Soviet Union, collectivizers used tractorization (and the centralization of horsepower) as a
propaganda platform. According to the consensus in Western historiography, tractorization was a precondition of collectivization; see Dalrymple, “The American Tractor,” 191.

158. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1034, l. 9 (Redkin to board of Evpatoria Credit Association, January 10, 1930); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 326, l. 78 (Arav to Agro-Joint, April 12, 1930). Agro-Joint conditioned importation of three hundred tractors on allocation of a large tract near Simferopol. See RGAE, f. 7486, op. 19, d. 126, l. 32 (Agro-Joint to Komzet, May 10, 1930), l. 25 (Smidovich to Grin’ko, May 19, 1930), l. 27 (Grin’ko’s decision on Komzet land, June 22, 1930), ll. 30–31 (Komzet to Narkomzem, August 20, 1930). See also GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 554, l. 6 (Liubarskii to Komzet, December 4, 1932), l. 11 (Traktortsentr [the administrative authority for all MTS] to Agro-Joint, December 29, 1932), ll. 15–16 (Liubarskii to directorate of Zernotraktortsentr [traktortser
center for grain production], February 13, 1933); RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 80 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934).

159. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 130 (material on the Jewish settlers in Dzhankoi region, late 1930). The director of the Dzhankoi tractor repair shop refused vehicles to teams sent for dekulakization.

160. JDC Archive 541, p. 5 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 142 (OGPU report, December 27, 1930). The All-Union Narkomzem reported that 65 percent of Jewish households collectivized in late 1930, compared with a norm of 55 percent in Crimea. The data on Jewish collectivization emanated, of course, from Agro-Joint. Tribuna reported 85–90 percent collectivization of Jewish colonies compared with 56 percent in other villages; see Katz, “Bespardonnyaia kleveta,” 8–9. See also Merezhin, Pervaia vesna, 5, 18, 22; and Frukht, Evreiskoe pereselenie v Krymu, 4.

161. Ohr, “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” 4; GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 255, l. 14 (Komzet to chair of the Ukrainian supreme court, November 19, 1931); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 87, 89 (Vasilenko’s findings, November 26, 1930); RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 84–86 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 286, l. 21 (Smidovich and Kantor to Narkomsnab, January 19, 1931), l. 25 (Narkomsnab to Komzet, March 16, 1931), d. 575, l. 32 (Barshchevskii to Novo Zlatopol RIKU, May 31, 1932), l. 55 (Smidovich to RKI, September 13, 1932), d. 569, l. 12 (Sanin and Frukht to Crimean Sovnarkom, April 16, 1933), l. 15 (Crimean Sovnarkom to Komzet, April 19, 1933), l. 17 (protocol of the Evpatoria crop inspection team [posevtroki], May 7, 1933), l. 14 (Sanin to Smidovich, May 9, 1933). Even Merezhin (the Komzet secretary who supported total collectivization and greater dekulakization in the colonies) campaigned for reduced procurement quotas; see his Pervaia vesna, 54–55. After the nationwide exodus from the kolkhozes and the temporary respite in the collectivization campaign ignited by Stalin’s article “Dizzy with Success” (published in Pravda on March 2, 1930), the regime generally reapplied high procurement quotas that subsided only in 1934–1935.

162. The state orchestrated this first of several show trials against fifty noncommunist “specialists” from the Donets basin on charges of sabotage and conspiracy with foreign capitalists. Its purpose was to intensify class antagonisms.
163. YIVO, RG 358/28a, p. 9 (Smolar, “Collectivization,” December 1929); Merezhin, _Pervia vesna_, 3–5; Livne, _Haklaim yehudim b’aratov Rusyah_, 373–74. A full Agro-Joint staff returned to southern Ukraine in January 1933; see Levavi, _Haklaim yehudim b’aratov Krim_, Chapter 6, p. 5. Foreign businesses also afforded some protection for their Russian workers; see Penner, “The Agrarian ‘Strike’,” 31.

164. AJA, WP, Box 276/3 (Hyman to Warburg, Baerwald, and Rosenberg, September 30, 1931). The excesses are explored in Naiman, “Evreiskoe zemledelie na Ukraine,” 218–20. Coercion in Ukraine was far greater, in general, than in the Russian and Belorussian republics. See Simon, _Nationalism and Policy_, 93–95; Mattityahu Mintz (conversation with J. Dekel-Chen, Tel Aviv University, November 21, 1999). The Siberian kolkhoz, in lieu of a foreign benefactor, faced similar vulnerability; see Lifshitz, _Istoriia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri_, 27–29.

165. JDC Archive 469, p. 28 (Mirkin memorandum, February 12, 1930). See also YIVO, RG 358/28a, p. 6 (Smolar, “Collectivization,” December 1929).


167. GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 133, l. 33 (Temkin to Kertsman, October 11, 1929), l. 41 (protocol of the Komzet Evpatoria meeting, September 21–22, 1929); GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, ll. 70–72 (Bril and Druianov’s report on the Fridorf RKI troika, October 25, 1930), ll. 85–90 (Vasilenko’s findings, November 26, 1930), ll. 91–92 (Voronin to Veger, December 4, 1930), ll. 8, 11–13, 17–19 (material for the obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930).

168. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 159 (Veger to VTsIK, late 1930). Merezhin and other leaders of Komzet called for intense collectivization and dekulakization whereas local officials preferred compromise with the settlers. See Merezhin, _Pervia vesna_, 18; Merezhin, “Kollektivizatsiiia evreiskikh zemedel’cheskikh khoziaistv,” 5–6.

169. Although unnoticed by contemporary observers, the high incidence of social welfare cases among colonists (discussed in Chapter 2, passim, and note 113) probably contributed to chronic labor shortages. See also GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 411, l. 1 (Lubarskii to Rosen, July 19, 1933). By 1933, 80–90 percent of the Fridorf district had been mechanized, with proportionally higher rates among the Jewish colonies; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1208, ll. 201–2 (report on Jewish kolkhozes, December 16, 1933). See also “Fondy Kryma zhдут машин і ліудей,” _Tribuna_ 16 (1931): 1.

170. Recruitment declined in 1929–1930 because of growing expectation in the shtetls (particularly among young people) that the future lay in urban employment. See JDC Archive 531, p. 1 (excerpts from Smolar’s report, April 8, 1930); JDC Archive 541, p. 8 (informal luncheon, October 8, 1931); JDC Archive 457a, p. 5 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932). The Siberian Jewish kolkhoz faced a similar dilemma; see Lifshitz, _Istoriia evreiskogo kolkhoza v Sibiri_, 56.

171. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 24 (material for the obkom on Jewish settlement, late 1930); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 29, ll. 4–5 (short report on Agro-Joint activity, 1935). Overall flight reached 20 percent; see RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 82 (Rosen to Smi-
dovich, November 23, 1934). In some areas under JCA control, yearly flight reached 20–30 percent before collectivization; see JDC Archive 469, p. 16 (Mirkin memorandum, February 12, 1930). The OGPU suspected returnees of cynically abusing colonization simply to nullify their lishenets status, after which they scurried back to their points of origin. The OGPU evidently could not fathom more realistic links between flight and economics; see GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 990, l. 145 (OGPU report, December 27, 1930).


173. See for example Schreibstein memoir (Lavon Institute, Vest Collection). The settlement population in Crimea peaked at approximately 21,000 in 1931. It fluctuated in the coming years between 15,000 and 18,000 and may have reached as high as 20,000 in 1939. The problematic 1939 census in the Soviet Union showed a total of 396,844 rural Jews, according to which 222,000 lived in Ukraine, 102,265 in the RSFSR, another 45,697 in Belorussia, and the remainder scattered throughout the USSR. This census cited lower figures within the settlement districts than other contemporary sources. See Alshuler, *Distribution of the Jewish Population of the USSR*, 47–77; L. Zinger, *Das Baneite falk*, 89–90.

174. Mutsit, “Chuvstvo novogo,” 270; Gendina interview; Feigin, “Direktor MTS,” 282; GAARK, f. p-142, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 45–46 (Gorst’s report on the Telman raikom, December 20, 1936). Youthful chairs apparently conformed to a pattern observed in other parts of the country; see Ohr, “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” 406.

175. For example Bytovoi, *K bol'shoi zemle*, 23. He overheard young people in Freigeit kolkhoz debating their futures. Some wanted to stay precisely because they and their parents now had equal rights. Others thought the times demanded education; newspapers wrote that the country needed doctors and engineers.


177. For example see Kagedan, *Soviet Zion*, 100.

178. YIVO, RG 358/227, p. 18 (Levintan’s report on the Evpatoria agro-sector, 1927–1931); JDC Archive 457a, pp. 4, 7 (rough notes of discussion with Grower, January 20, 1932). Rural parents pushed their children to higher education in the city at least until the 1970s; see Millar, “Models of Soviet Agriculture.” Among the interviewees in Crimea, six of the eight youths of school age left the colonies for higher education before 1941. All had at least one sibling who left the colony for similar reasons. Locations of study ranged from the Crimean peninsula into the Russian heartland. Regardless of the site, study eventually detached students from the colony. Most oral histories attest to high work morale among vacationing students. Contrary opinions also exist; see Dobrushin, “V kolkhoze ‘Gorepashnik,’” 14–15.


180. Shmeruk, *Ha-kibutz ha-yehudi*, 142, 154, 168. According to a nonaligned contemporary, the state internationalized the Belorussian kolkhozes because of their small size; see
JDC Archive 469, p. 22 (Mirkin memorandum, February 12, 1930). Forced interna-
tionalization in Crimea came up only during liquidation of the Hehalutz communes. 
Nevertheless, mainly Jewish recruits repopulated them. See Levine interview, 19; 
Mikhlin interview. Non-Jewish families in the colonies usually adopted Yiddish as a 
functional language. See JDC Archive 531, p. 1 (excerpt from Smolar’s report, April 8, 
1931); JDC Archive 532, p. 3 (translation of Jewish Morning Journal, October 19, 1932); 
Edelhertz, The Russian Paradox, 141–42; Evreinova interview; Khodush interview; Kav-
natskii interview, 2.

181. Gol’de, “Kollektivizatsiia v Krymu,” 12; Gol’de, “Izpravit’ oshibki,” 4–5; GARF, f. r-
7746, op. 4, d. 29, l. 5 (report on Agro-Joint work in Ukraine, 1936).
182. RGAE, f. 7486, op. 19, d. 126, ll. 30–31 (Smidovich to Grin’ko, May 19, 1930); Levavi, 
“Atudat ha-karka,” 67; Korshunov, Ėvreiskoe pereiselenie v Krymu, 3. Repeated thefts 
from its warehouse in Evpatoria prompted Agro-Joint to the path of appeal used by set-
tlers—petitions to the regional (oblast) government when local (raion) authorities wa-
vered. See GAARK, f. r-515, op. 1, d. 414, l. 23 (Redkin to Komzet, October 9, 1934), l. 
25 (Redkin to director of Crimean militia, October 5, 1934), l. 60 (Komzet to Evpatoria 
Raikom, June 15, 1934), l. 59 (Komzet to militia, June 16, 1934). For the general picture 
of crisis, see Osokino, Our Daily Bread, 51.
183. For examples of contemporary commentary on this subject, see “Rasskaz kolonista,” 
247–48; Gorev, Protiv antisemitov, 160; and Embree, “Jews on the Steppes,” 15. See also 
Suny and Martin, A State of Nations, 11; Martin, Affirmative Action Empire, 72–74.
184. JDC Archive 541, p. 4 (minutes of informal meeting, February 13, 1930); JDC Archive 
510 (Rosen’s reply to Bressler’s cable, March 6, 1930); JDC Archive 541, pp. 1, 3 (Troper’s 
memorandum, August 29, 1930); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, l. 44 (Shapiro’s report 
on Fraidorf region, May 2, 1934); Kabakova interview; Ts. Astaskovich interview, 7; 
Furman interview. The Ukrainian colonies more closely resembled conditions in the 
neighboring villages but rebounded much more quickly; see Munitz, “Ha-haklaim ha-
yehudim,” 66, 69. Conditions in the shtetls improved somewhat with the easing of re-
strictions against lishentsy and the rising demand for labor during the First Five-Year 
Plan.

CHAPTER 6. SOVIET-JEWISH FARMERS, 1935–1941

1. Kagedan, Soviet Zion, 98–101; Barkovets, “Ob osnovnykh etapakh deiatel’nosti Agro-
Dzhoint,” 140; Levavi, “Tsionei derekh,” 31; Bauer, Out of the Ashes, 3.
2. Shearer, “Social Disorder,” 506. The purges also helped to eliminate the growth of 
anonymity in Soviet cities, a phenomenon that concerned the regime from no later 
than mid-1927.
3. A recent study reveals that the NKVD arrested 1,575,259 people during 1937–1938: 85 
percent of these people were convicted. Approximately half of them were executed, the 
other half received long prison terms. The Gulag population increased by approximately 
50 percent during these years, exceeding 2 million inmates in 1939, many of whom never emerged. See Getty and Naumov, The Road to Terror, 588–91. Older 
sources interpreted the purges as terror from above. See Nove, Stalinism and After; Con-
quest, The Great Terror. According to newer Western scholarship, a center-periphery conflict in the party, ground-up leveling, or other local factors contributed greatly to the purges. See Getty, Origins of the Great Purges; Getty and Manning, Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives; Getty, “Excesses are not permitted.” Whatever their cause, the political purges ended only with the death of Stalin in March 1953.

4. Kas’ianov, Krymskaia ASSR, 9–10. Many leaders and lay Soviet citizens took the promises of civil rights in “Stalin’s” constitution of 1936 too seriously. Their attempts to democratize elections and retake churches ended tragically.

5. Simon, Nationalism and Policy, 157–64. For example, from February to June 1936, all twelve secretaries of the administrative regions in Ukraine and most of the second secretaries were purged. In 1938, the regime replaced approximately sixteen hundred secretaries at the district and municipal levels. Cultural Russification was more gradual than the political purge of indigenous leaders because of a dearth of qualified language teachers; see Peter A. Blistein, “Nation-Building or Russification? Obligatory Russian Instruction in the Soviet Non-Russian School, 1938–1953,” in Suny and Martin, eds., A State of Nations, 253–74. The image of Russification may have been greater than its real effect; see the introduction to Suny and Martin, A State of Nations, 15.

6. Primary school education became almost universal during the First Five-Year Plan. Yet only 10 percent of rural children attended high school in 1939, compared with 33 percent in towns. During 1937–1939, average agricultural production exceeded the 1928 level by 9.5 percent at most and the 1909–1913 levels only by 25 percent. Per capita agricultural productivity during 1937–1939 was lower than in 1928 and only slightly higher than in 1909–1913. Industrial crops were the only agricultural sector to sustain consistent growth. See Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 45.


8. This shift in priorities was mainly rhetorical; it did not translate into substantially larger Soviet allocations for the development of Birobidzhan. For discussion of the goals of settlement there, see Shneer, “The Weakness of the Birobidzhan Idea,” 10–11. See also YIVO, RG 358/30, p. 6 (Rosenberg’s notes on collectivization, January 1930). The Soviets invited the JDC to participate in the development of Birobidzhan; after dispatching an expedition to investigate the territory, the latter declined. See AJA, WP, Box 303/4 (Rosen’s statement to Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 27, 1934).


10. GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 27, l. 84 (Karasev to all kolkhoz chairs, April 1935).

11. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1397, l. 229 (protocol no. 62 of the obkom bureau, August 5, 1935); GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 27, l. 237 (Raitsin-Romanovskii to kolkhoz chairs, October 1937).

12. The Berlin ORT (Farband), not the Russian ORT, supported Jewish colonization in the 1930s. In January 1938, the government notified the ORT-Farband that its contract would not be renewed. ORT-Farband continued operation in the colonies until mid-1938. The Soviet branch of ORT had been liquidated in October 1930. Dr. Jacob Tsege’nitskii (director of ORT-Farband in Russia) was arrested in mid-1938; he never emerged from custody despite the efforts of Lord Dudley Marley. See GARF, f. r-5446,


14. JDC Archive 516, p. 10 (verbatim minutes of meeting of JDC and ASJFSR, September 16, 1937); AJA, WP, Box 276/2 (Rosen to Agro-Joint, May 11, 1931), Box 345/4 (Rosen to Rosenberg, late 1937); Bein interview, 9–10; Munitz, “Ha-haklaim ha-yehudim,” 67.

Comparison of Rosen’s report to the executive committee of the JDC on November 11, 1931 (JDC Archive 457a), with his memorandum to the staff of Agro-Joint in late 1931 (YIVO, RG 358/94) reveals that he did not withhold much information. Rather, he downplayed bad news, particularly that which could not be influenced from New York. Rosen and William Bein (an accountant) were among the few American citizens employed by Agro-Joint in Russia. Several others had been employed in the early tractor teams.

15. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 907, ll. 5, 7, 9 (Komzet to the commission for the Paris exhibition, June–July 1937). For an example in Soviet literature, see Godiner and Lipshits, *Vstrecha v Tsymle*, 22–23, 30. “Cordial” meetings between Don Cossacks and Jewish kolkhozniki from southern Ukraine drew much attention in the United States; see *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 38 (1936): 303. Russian-language material also formed the core for rosy reports about the colonization to the U.S. State Department; see NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.00/11774 (Davies to the secretary of state, March 17, 1938).

16. GAARK, f. p-116, op. 1, d. 4, l. 2 (Razin to Leikin, circa 1935). The murder of the Leningrad party chief, Kirov, in December 1934 signaled a watershed in the prepurge politics. For the most recent account, see Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, 200–70.

17. GAARK, f. p-140, op. 1, d. 7, l. 9 (Beliavskii to the obkom agricultural department, October 24, 1935).

18. Munitz, “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 53. Even if, as Pinkus suggests (in *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 67–68), the Jewish districts ceased to function in 1938, the compact Jewish settlement blocs survived until the autumn of 1941. See also Broshevan, *Natsional’nye raiony*, 128.

19. As late as December 1936, Soviet newspapers openly lauded the work of Agro-Joint; see AJA, WP, Box 326/8 (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 22, 1936). For background on the mass repression, see Getty, “Excesses are not permitted,” 114–15; and Shearer, “Social Disorder,” passim.

20. For the sake of comparison, the Jews of an isolated shtetl in the province of Podolia lived in constant fear of sudden arrest during the late 1930s. See Hoffman, *Red Shtetl*, 72.

21. For example, *Der Emes* closed in late 1938, *Stalindorfer Emes* in 1940; and Munitz, “Ha-napot ha-leumiot,” 53. The decline in readership reduced the overall output of Yiddish-language materials by the state in the late 1930s. It rebounded dramatically after September 1939 as the Soviet Union absorbed approximately 2 million new Jewish citizens from annexed parts of Poland, Bessarabia, Lithuania, and Latvia; see Shmeruk, *Pirsumim yehudim be-Brit ha-Moatsot*, lxxix–xci.
22. In 1936, electrification accounted for 3.1 million rubles out of a total settlement budget of 5.69 million; see AJA, WP, Box 326/1 (Agro-Joint working plan, 1936). By 1938, the year of its exit from the USSR, Agro-Joint had electrified fifty-nine settlements. For those kolkhozes too distant from high-voltage wires, Agro-Joint supplied freestanding generators. These projects continued after 1937 through preexisting contracts. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 29, ll. 8, 25 (short report on Agro-Joint activity in Ukraine, 1935); AJA, WP, Box 326/8 (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 22, 1936); GARF, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 497, l. 79 (Ozet’s plan, 1938); Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 25, pp. 2–3.

23. Zheltova, “Elektrifikatsiia Rossii,” passim. Only 2.5 percent of all kolkhozes in the country had electricity in 1941, and only 17.5 percent in 1950; see Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 218.

24. AJA, WP, Box 326/1, p. 1 (Agro-Joint activities in 1936, January 19, 1937); AJA, WP, Box 342/8, p. 3 (Agro-Joint working plan for 1937). Investment estimates made by Agro-Joint to Komzet were lower; see GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 171–80 (Agro-Joint to Komzet, March 9, 1937). Real investment by Agro-Joint increased in its final years because (according to the renegotiated ASJFSR agreement from 1933) it could no longer remove assets from Russia. Therefore, nearly $750,000 in profits from the Dzhankoi tractor repair shop reverted annually to the colonies.

25. JDC Archive 544, pp. 3, 23, 25, 42 (minutes of informal meeting of ASJFSR board, June 15, 1935); NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.48/2481A, p. 3 (Hyman to Ropes, May 1936).

26. JDC Archive 52a (Rosen’s address to the Council of Jewish Federations, August 2, 1937). The creation of the Jewish oblast in the Far East is discussed in Chapter 2. In 1935–1936, initial plans called for the absorption of four thousand to five thousand German families. Later, the JDC authorized Rosen to arrange for the immigration of one thousand families and five hundred unmarried refugees at a cost of $1.2 million. See YIVO, RG 358/94, pp. 1–3 (Liubarskii to Rosen, January 17, 1934); AJA, WP, Box 303/3 (Rosen to Warburg, February 3, 1934), Box 315/2 (Rosenberg to Rosen, July 5, 1935).

27. AJA, WP, Box 314/12, p. 2 (memorandum of conversation between Rosen and Rosenberg, January 10, 1933); JDC Archive 544, pp. 1, 4 (minutes of informal meeting of ASJFSR board, January 25, 1933); JDC Archive 547, p. 3 (verbatim notes of ASJFSR board meeting, February 1, 1935).

28. AJA, WP, Box 303/5 (Adler to Rosenwald, June 29, 1934), Box 314/8 (Hyman to Warburg, July 8, 1935); JDC Archive 545 (Adler to Hyman, October 7, 1936). Others advised caution; they feared that overt efforts to solve the refugee issue in the Soviet Union would endanger their discussions on Palestine with officials from the League of Nations. See JDC Archive 510 (Baerwald to Rosenberg, July 5, 1934); JDC Archive 544, p. 3 (minutes of ASJFSR board, February 1, 1935).

29. RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l. 80 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934). Rosen hinted that the JDC’s decision on investment in Birobidzhan hinged on Soviet behavior toward the existing colonies in Crimea.

30. Smolar interview, ICJ, 22. By the mid-1930s, the Soviet regime already had grown accustomed to the fabrication of such cases; see Lih, Stalin’s Letters to Molotov, passim.
31. JDC Archive 451 (Rosen to Hyman, July 23, 1936); AJA, WP, Box 326/3 (Rosen to JDC, November 20, 1936); JDC Archive 52a, p. 2 (Rosen to Rosenberg, December 11, 1937); Smolar interview, ICJ, 21. Agro-Joint’s industrial department assisted in the immigration of the one hundred German-Jewish doctors; see AJA, WP, Box 342/8, p. 3 (Agro-Joint activities in 1936, January 19, 1937). At the Dzhankoi tractor repair shop, for example, the state-run union manipulated a preexisting labor dispute to accuse Agro-Joint of unfair wage practices. See GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 206–7 (excerpts from protocol no. 36 of the presidium of the metalworkers union, December 3–4, 1936); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 931, ll. 39–43 (Khoine to Ozet, December 1937).
32. AJA, WP, Box 322/4, p. 1 (Troper to Warburg, October 8, 1936). Kamenev and Zinoviev, both of whom were leaders of the revolution and members of the Politburo, were first tried in January 1935 for treason and conspiracy. In the second trial, they were accused of support for Trotsky and plotting with foreign enemies. All three were Jews.
33. NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.48/2486, p. 2 (Kirk to the secretary of state, October 12, 1938). Trotsky was exiled to Central Asia in 1927 and from the Soviet Union in 1929. See also JDC Archive 52a, p. 2 (Rosen to Rosenberg and Baerwald, December 11, 1937); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 540, ll. 7–8 (Rosen to NKVD, December 16, 1937); Beizer, “LenOzet,” 119.
34. JDC Archive 544 (draft report of Rosenberg, October 15, 1935), p. 42 (minutes of informal meeting, June 15, 1935). Rosenberg worried that “this activity for Jews in Birobidzhan will be identified in the Christian world with a group of Jews who are very much on the Left.” For more of the JDC’s criticism of Ambijan, see JDC Archive 52a (Hyman to Rabinoff, August 12, 1936); AJA, WP, Box 314/8 (Hyman to Rosenberg, Baerwald, and Warburg, April 5, 1935), and Box 314/12 (Rosen to Hyman, May 27, 1935). Ikor is discussed in Chapter 3.
35. JDC Archive 544, p. 2 (memorandum of ASJFSR meeting, June 20, 1935). Ikor members formed the core of Ambijan. In March 1936, an Ambijan dinner attracted Troianovskii and noted American Jews, thus deepening the Joint’s concern. As news spread of Stalin’s purges in the late 1930s, Ambijan lost its allure.
36. As an example of the shift in fund-raising focus, see JDC Archive 52a (Hyman to Seligman, December 2, 1936). After the creation of the ASJFSR (1928), the JDC channeled large sums not to Russia, but to Palestine, Eastern Europe, and Germany. Up to World War II, the JDC was more effective in fund-raising than Zionist organizations in most sectors of the American Jewish community. Despite gradual improvements in relations, the attacks of American Zionists (mostly from the Stephen Wise group) on colonization concerned the JDC more than possible condemnation by the U.S. government. See AJA, Brown Papers, MS Coll 18, Box 1/8 (Brown to Billikopf, March 26, 1935), Box 1/4 (Brown to Adler, May 26, 1936), WP, Box 317/4 (Adler to Rothenberg, November 20, 1935), Box 343/1 (Warburg to Baerwald, February 4, 1937), Box 342/4, pp. 4, 6 (mid-year report on the 1937 campaign, June 1937); JDC Archive 544, p. 27 (minutes of informal meeting of ASJFSR board, June 15, 1935), p. 3 (minutes of ASJFSR board, February 1, 1935), (Rosenberg’s draft report, October 15, 1935).
37. This retrospective film of the colonization project was full of adulation for American and Russian-Jewish leaders. It noted that the project succeeded “due to the active, whole-
The film portrays the colonies at the forefront of Soviet agriculture and light industry. See *Agro Joint* (black and white, 16 millimeters, 1,138 feet, 32 minutes, 1936). The first film is discussed in Chapter 3. I thank Professor Robert Szulkin of Brandeis University for drawing my attention to this film, housed at the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis and at the JDC Archive. The JDC sent Morrissey, a non-Jew, to collect material in the colonies. Details from her trip are found in JDC Archive 537.

38. JDC Archive 537 (Fainberg to Morrissey, June 28, 1936). Instead, Fainberg suggested soliciting President Roosevelt's endorsement. The JDC received Hoover's support while he was secretary of commerce, and then president.

39. AJA, Brown Papers, MS Coll 18, Box 1/8 (Brown to Billikopf, January 17, 1935), Box 1/5 (Brown to Bressler, December 23, 1935). Judging by the Warburg Papers, the quantity of correspondence among JDC officials connected to the German situation dwarfed all other issues after 1932 (in particular, letters directed to James McDonald, the League of Nations high commissioner on refugees, the U.S. government, and attempts to create a united front with European Jewish communities). See for example AJA, WP, Box 343/3 (Hyman to Warburg, June 8, 1937). Only two of the thirty-five pages in this report concerned the Agro-Joint. Jewish colonization had occupied far more space in the deliberations of the JDC before 1932.

40. JDC Archive 516, p. 4 (verbatim minutes of meeting at Rosenberg's office, January 25, 1937). Even in its last days, Agro-Joint campaigned for timely supply of resources (raw materials, fuel, construction materials) otherwise delayed for months by the unresponsive command economy; see GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 18, l. 37 (Redkin to Narkomzem, October 19, 1937). Grower's and Liubarskii's travels throughout the USSR show how they filled logistic gaps. See GARF, f. r-7746, op. 2, d. 77, ll. 98–121 (Grower, 1923–1937), d. 157, ll. 93–137 (Liubarskii, 1927–1938).

41. GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 4–5 (ORT to Komzet, December 27, 1936), ll. 178–82 (results of the work of ORT in 1936–1937 and plans for 1937–1938); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 29, l. 8 (short report on Agro-Joint activity in Ukraine, 1935); AJA, WP, Box 342/8 (Agro-Joint activities in 1936, January 19, 1937). ORT-Farband is described in Chapter 3. From 1931 to 1937, the workforce in ORT’s workshops in Crimea increased from a few dozen to sixteen hundred colonists. ORT-Farband’s work in Crimea grew in correlation to forced curtailment of its work in Ukraine. By January 1938, ORT held 1.8 million rubles of assets in Crimea and in the Odessa Oblast, among its total of 8.3 million rubles in the USSR; see Munitz, “Letter Concerning the ORT,” 209. During the 1930s, Agro-Joint added large sheep herds, vineyards, cotton, and orchards (fruit-bearing and decorative) to the mix of intensive crops; see JDC Archive 516, p. 2 (verbatim minutes of meeting of JDC trustees and AJFSR directors, September 16, 1937).

42. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 891, ll. 17–37 (Agro-Joint work, January–July 1936); GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 584, ll. 1–3 (Itkin’s report on Jewish kolkhozes, early 1938). Similarly, the Jewish colonies in the Evpatoria region of Crimea never fully recovered from Ozet’s inept supervision, even after several years of management by Agro-Joint. See Broshevan, *Raskulchivanie v Krymu*, 82. According to Itkin, the Jewish colonists in Ukraine relied more on private plots than did their counterparts in Crimea.
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44. Smolar interview, ICJ, 21; GARE, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 549, l. 3 (report on Agro-Joint work in Crimea and Ukraine, 1937); JDC Archive 516, p. 2 (verbatim minutes of meeting of Agro-Joint trustees and Society directors, January 21, 1937), p. 2 (verbatim minutes of meeting at Rosenberg’s office, January 25, 1937).

45. JDC Archive 544, p. 3 (minutes of informal meeting of ASJFSR board, June 15, 1933); AJA, WP, Box 314/12 (Rosen to ASJFSR, May 26, 1933), Box 314/12 (Rosen to Baerwald, Rosenberg, and Warburg, July 2, 1933), Box 327/2, p. 3 (Rosen’s statement to meeting of Agro-Joint and the Society, March 20, 1936).

46. *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 38 (1936): 213. This belated announcement led Bauer to argue (in *My Brother’s Keeper*, 97) that “With the failure of the Birobidzhan scheme in 1936, Rosen realized that the time had come to get out of Russia. On February 15, 1938, [Joseph] Hyman finally accepted the idea and proposed the termination of operations.” For the early debates in the JDC about departure from Russia, see Chapter 5.

47. See the correspondence between Rosen, Grower, and Liubarskii in GARE, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 540, ll. 1–5, 10 (October 22, November 13–18, November 25, and December 17, 1937). The Agro-Joint had already transferred its trade schools, medical services, support of cooperative shops, and some of the urban mutual aid societies to state agencies during the preceding years. See AJA, WP, Box 327/2, p. 2 (Rosen’s statement to meeting of Agro-Joint and the Society, March 20, 1936).

48. Under this agreement, Ozet got control of the shop until 1940. It promised to retain the existing crew, use the tractor base for its original purpose, and reinvest all profits in the colonies. Agro-Joint retained nominal veto power over any changes in the operation of the tractor base. See JDC Archive 516, passim; JDC Archive 510 (summary of agreement with Ozet on Dzhankoi shops); JDC Archive 545 (Rosen memorandum, September 9, 1937). It should be remembered that by this time Ozet was a Sovietized body whose days were numbered.

49. GARE, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 497, ll. 33–36 (information on unfinished work in Crimean kolkhozes, March 8, 1938), ll. 79–80, 92 (Ozet’s working plan for Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea, 1938); YIVO, RG 358/171 (information on unfinished works in Crimean kolkhozes, March 8, 1938). Agro-Joint deliberated at length over the fate of its warehouses and a sapling nursery at Maifeld. See GARE, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 931, ll. 26–28 (Liubarskii to Komzet, October 26, 1937); GARE, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 541, ll. 1–6 (protocol of Agro-Joint meeting, December 10–14, 1937).

50. The liquidation agreement transferred all remaining Agro-Joint assets in Russia to the Soviet government. The Sovnarkom released Agro-Joint from any future claims by groups or individuals; see JDC Archive 533. Rosen signed it with representatives of the All-Union Sovnarkom on October 1, 1938. See GARE, f. r-5446, op. 22a, d. 1490, l. 126 (Rosen to Belen’kii, July 19, 1938), d. 1491, l. 140 (Belen’kii to NKVD, September 7, 1938); YIVO, RG 358/97, pp. 1–3 (Rosen to Molotov, mid-1938); NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.48/2486, p. 5 (Kirk to the secretary of state, October 12, 1938).

51. YIVO, RG 358/97, pp. 2–3 (Rosen to Molotov, mid-1938). Exact numbers of arrestees among Agro-Joint employees are not available. The authorities generally referred
kolhozes with claims against Agro-Joint to Narkomzem; see JDC Archive 533 (report on claims, October 1, 1938). Rosen compensated his office staff by directly distributing cash, automobiles, or immovable property; see GARF, f. r-5446, op. 22a, d. 1486, l. 1 (on liquidation of Agro-Joint work, April–October 1938). The state’s penny-pinching behavior may also have been caused by the domestic cash shortage characteristic of the Second and Third Five-Year Plans.

52. The USSR agreed to issue cash installments for the outstanding $5.3 million of ASJFSR bonds by October 1940. The Society agreed to discount 55.5 percent of the face value of the bonds, thus requiring the Soviets to pay a total of $2.4 million in cash. The remaining 44.5 percent of the Society’s funds were to be expended by the state on Jewish kolhozes and other needs of Soviet Jewry. The government declared that Agro-Joint and the Society had fulfilled all commitments. At that time, Agro-Joint and the Society held another 6 million rubles in immovable assets in Russia. For details and discussion of the agreement, see JDC Archive 312a (Agro-Joint, April 15, 1952); NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.48/2486, p. 6 (Kirk to the secretary of state, October 12, 1938).

53. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 972, ll. 2–5, 25; GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1820, ll. 95–97 (Vashkevich to Shchuchkin, September 28, 1937). Merezhin perished in the Gulag in 1937; see Blum, Evreiskii vopros pod sovetskoi tsenzuroi, p. 312. The Kremlin first bypassed Komzet on settlement issues in late 1937, later stripped it of authority, and finally dissolved the commission. See GARF, f. r-5446, op. 22a, d. 1491, l. 99 (Chutskaev to Molotov, April 3, 1938).

54. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 931, ll. 39–43 (Khoin to Ozet, December 1937). Even Rosen criticized Ozet’s incompetence; see JDC Archive 516, p. 3 (verbatim minutes of meeting of JDC trustees and ASJFSR directors, September 16, 1937).

55. GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 27–30 (decision no. 328 of the Sovnarkom economic council, May 17, 1938), l. 7 (Crimean TsIK and Sovnarkom decision, June 1, 1938); GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 8, l. 32 (Rabinovich to Orlovoi, July 10, 1938), l. 12 (Klempert to Rabinovich, December 19, 1938), d. 16, ll. 40, 44 (Rabinovich and Klempert’s report, December 31, 1938); GARF, f. r-5446, op. 22a, d. 1491, l. 99 (Chutskaev to Molotov, April 3, 1938), ll. 81–82 (Chubar’ and Belen’kii to Molotov, May 23, 1938).

56. GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 2, l. 148 (Gol’man to Narkomzem, September 20, 1938), ll. 135–36 (Klempert’s report, October 20, 1938), d. 16, ll. 23, 27–28 (Klempert’s report, April 22, 1939), d. 3, l. 5 (Rabinovich to raiispolkoms, April 1939). Separate budgetary allotments made for recruitment, outside the residual funds left from the liquidation of Ozet, reflected the state’s commitment to success of the Jewish kolhozes.

57. GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 931, l. 43 (Khoin to Ozet, December 1937); GARF, f. r-9498, op. 1, d. 497, ll. 15–16 (Agro-Joint to Dzhankoi tractor repair shop, March 26, 1938); GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 28 (Klempert’s report, April 22, 1939). Narkomzem also recruited urban Tatars for non-Jewish kolhozes in southern Crimea; see GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, ll. 25–27 (Klempert’s report, April 22, 1939). The NKVD set recruitment targets for settlements in other areas of the country; see GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 27–30 (decision no. 328 of the Sovnarkom economic council, May 17, 1938).
58. JDC Archive 52a, p. 3 (Rosen to Rosenberg and Baerwald, December 11, 1937). Ol’ga Barkovets has argued (in “Ob osnovnykh etapakh deiatel’nosti Agro-Dzhoint,” 140) that mass arrests against colonists increased after 1936–1937. She provided no documentation for this thesis.


60. Ikor and Ambijan raised “hundreds of thousands of dollars” for Birobidzhan during the late 1920s and 1930s, compared with millions gathered for Agro-Joint; see Weinberg, Stalin’s Forgotten Zion, 53.

61. Levavi, Birobizhan, 98, 111, 203, 336, 338–39, 343–44. Ozet could barely sustain its own administration by 1935–1936; see Beizer, “LenOzet,” 119, 121. At the height of recruitment in 1935, Jews constituted less than 23 percent of the total population in Birobidzhan, which remained chronically underdeveloped until at least the 1960s. In 1939, 75 percent of the 17,695 Jews in the region (out of a total population of approximately 109,000) lived in Birobidzhan’s cities. See Weinberg, Stalin’s Forgotten Zion, 13, 31, 43, 69.

62. NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.61/356, p. 9 (Michael’s observations on the 1938 agricultural situation, April 1939); Tauger, “Commune to kolkhoz,” 608, 611; Viola, Peasant Rebels, 227, 230; Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism, 220; Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 11.

63. Ohr, “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” 404, 407; Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 188. The urban population increased from 26 million to 56 million between 1926 and 1939 mainly because of rural migration. See Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 47. For an assessment of the improved agricultural output in the USSR, see Sharapov, Istoriia sovetskogo krest’ianstva, 378–79.

64. The advantages of the kolkhozes included a private parcel, lower taxes, access to grazing meadows, a degree of insurance against disability, and respectability in the city. The state refused to compromise with the kolkhozes only on horse ownership. This was of less importance to the Jewish kolkhozes because of their high rates of mechanization.


66. For discussion of local motives for mass repression, see Getty, “Excesses are not permitted,” 116, 119.


68. Ezekiel Grower was arrested in November 1937 and executed in March 1938. Samuil Libubarskii was arrested in March 1938, tried in September of that year, and executed not long thereafter. Other victims from Agro-Joint’s office in Moscow included B. Chanis (head of the Health Department), A. O. Fabricant (an Agro-Joint consultant), and Berlinskii (the chief accountant). Grower was posthumously rehabilitated in 1957, Libubarskii in 1959.

69. JDC Archive 52a (Rosen to Rosenberg and Baerwald, December 11, 1937); Shmugliakova interview; Levitan interview; Z. Iampol’skii interview; A. A. Superfin interview; Bein interview, 9–10; Liverant, “Gezerd’ be-Dnepropetrovsk,” 117–18; Beizer, “S. E. Libubarskii,” 138–39. A potential factor in the variance may be the geographic origin; initial findings suggest that those who grew up in Crimea seemed more immune than those from other parts of the country. Unquestionably, the office workers in Moscow were
more vulnerable than employees in the countryside. An American expatriate, Zachs, lived in the Pervomaisk commune. She taught at the international school in Simferopol but was arrested in 1937. Rumors in the commune attributed her arrest to employment with Agro-Joint; see Evreinova interview.

70. Kublanovskaia interview; A. Iampolskii interview; A. B. Superfin interview; Z. M. Iampol’skii interview; Shmugliakova interview; Bein interview, 13; Buchsweiler, Ha-germanim ha-etnim, 208–24. Former residents of the Ichki (Sovetskoe) and Kolai (Azovskoe) districts recalled no repression in their settlements. See Kopeleva interview; Vul’f interview; Sharaga interview. Krasnogvardeiskoe is the postwar name for the Telman or Kurman district, one of the German national districts in Crimea.

71. Lestschinsky, Ha-yehudim be-Rusyah ha-sovietit, 172. This estimate, by far the most extreme of any source, is contradicted by archival material.

72. This conclusion found expression in archival material, oral histories, and contemporary literature. For example, see Goldberg, Sussman Sees it Through, 29. Though considered a sure sign of failure for Russian colonization in the existing scholarship, massive youth flight equally plagued Jewish settlement in Palestine and Argentina. See AJA, WP, Box 332/11, pp. 10–11 (Weizmann to Warburg, January 24, 1936).


74. JDC Archive 538, p. 41 (Morrissey’s unpublished diary notes, 1933); Merezhin, O sploschnoi kollektivizatsii, 42; Mikhailov, “Tri nedeli po evreiskim poliam,” 6. Evidently, non-Jewish kolkhozes in the Jewish districts of Ukraine began to recruit Jews based on their impressions from the Jewish colonies; see JDC Archive 532, p. 2 (translation from Der Tog, June 29, 1936). See also Godiner and Lipshits, Vstrecha v Tsymle, 24; Maryasin, Hamoshavah Ungrovkah, 26.

75. Katsnel’son, “V kolkhozakh Kryma.”

76. For instance, the non-Jews in Agro-Joint’s repair shop in Dzhankoi were employed mostly in blue-collar jobs; Jews held mainly managerial, specialist, and administrative posts. Cordial working relations on the floor did not prevent major labor unrest in 1936 that was resolved only after the intervention by local officials of the communist party. See Levitan interview; GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 206–7 (excerpt from protocol no. 36 of the Central Committee Presidium of the Union of Metal Factories, December 3–4, 1936.) See also JDC Archive 516, p. 8 (minutes of informal meeting, January 25, 1937).

77. Yad Ezra interviews; Krasnogvardeiskoe interviews.

78. It appears that the colonists showed more respect for the personnel of Agro-Joint than for those of ORT; see GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 19, l. 4 (ORT to Komzet, December 27, 1936).

79. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1397, l. 229 (protocol no. 62 of the obkom bureau, August 5, 1933); GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 3, l. 96 (Rabinovich and Klemptert to raiospolkoms, May 31, 1938), l. 5 (Rabinovich to raiospolkoms, April 1939).

80. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1208, l. 209 (report on the Jewish kolkhozy, December 16, 1933); GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, l. 104 (Komzet chart, 1934); RGASPI, f. 151, op. 1, d. 43, l.
81 (Rosen to Smidovich, November 23, 1934); GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 27, l. 62 (Narkomzem SSSR statistical report, 1934); GAARK, f. p-145, op. 3, d. 26, ll. 4–5 (Fritilinskii to Iakovlev, April 2, 1935); GAARK, f. p-142, op. 1, d. 9, l. 45 (Gorst’s report on Telman district, December 20, 1936); JDC Archive 516, pp. 4–5 (verbatim minutes of meeting at Rosenberg’s office, January 25, 1937); GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 22 (Klempert’s report, April 22, 1939), ll. 40–46 (Rabinovich and Klempert’s report, December 31, 1938); Levavi, Hakhkaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 25, p. 1; Baron, The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets, 406, n. 25. There is some debate on the degree to which the peasants suffered in order for the rest of the country to industrialize. Most recent studies argue that collectivization did not impoverish peasants. Instead, there were mixed results. While true that grain was transferred to the state at low prices, other crops were sold on the free market at higher cost. This made peasants’ cash income higher and their inputs to the towns lower than previously believed. See Davies, The Economic Transformation, 127; Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 55–58.

82. GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 41 (Rabinovich and Klempert’s report, December 31, 1938). In 1931, with a population of twenty-one thousand, the Jews constituted 8 percent of the population in the northern steppe; see Gol’de, Evrei—zemledel’tsy v Krymu, 6. By 1938, Jews numbered approximately eighteen thousand while the general population remained relatively stable. A recent nonscholarly publication from Crimea concurs that standards of living in the colonies improved while they fell elsewhere; see Gertsen, Evrei v Krymu, 39.

83. This conclusion is based on data contained in GAARK, f. p-121, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 2–8 (political–economic characterization of the Dzhankoi district, July 20, 1939); GAARK, f. p-140, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 2–5 (political-economic characterization of the Larindorf district, August 1, 1939); GAARK, f. p-76, op. 1, d. 180, ll. 10–16 (political-economic characterization of the Evpatoria district, July 30, 1939); GAARK, f. p-142, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 5, 45–46, 48–49 (Gorst’s report on Telman district, December 20, 1936).

84. Ts. Astaskovich interview, 7. An indirect sign of success was the dispatch of work brigades from the Jewish kolkhozes in Crimea and Ukraine to compensate for low recruitment in Birobidzhan during 1938. Upon arrival, these workers immediately received leadership tasks; see Levavi, Birobizhan, 98, 337.

85. GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 3, l. 89 (Klempert to Belobrodov, August 2, 1938). In September 1933, the VTsIK announced the cessation of recruitment after 1935. Nevertheless, 1,000 families arrived in the winter of 1935–1936; see Levavi, Hakhkaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 13, p. 8. In 1937, 350 new families arrived in the Crimean colonies. In the same year, Agro-Joint counted approximately 22,500 settlers in Crimea and 42,000 in Ukraine; see GARE, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 549, l. 2 (report on Agro-Joint work, 1937).

86. Narkomzem added important stipulations for the 1938 campaign: half the members of each household had to be of working age, and families who left the kolkhozes within three years of arrival would be required to reimburse the state for expenses incurred from resettlement. Except for these new regulations, the mechanisms of recruitment had changed little since the days of Ozet. See GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 2, ll. 180–82 (in-
structions on resettlement of Jews, August 1, 1938), d. 3, ll. 95–96 (Rabinovich and Klempert to raispolkoms, May 31, 1938). Narkomzem was responsible for the recruitment of 150 new families for Crimea in the second half of 1938. Evidently, the NKVD set the recruitment quotas for the Narkomzem. See also GAARK, f. r-2094, op. 1, d. 24, l. 27–28 (decision no. 328 of the Sovnarkom economic council, May 17, 1938).

87. GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 2, l. 25 (Klempert to Zimbovskii, February 26, 1939).

88. This is the impression gathered from a variety of sources. See for example JDC Archive 516, p. 7 (verbatim minutes of meeting at Rosenberg’s office, January 25, 1937). In 1938, 250 unplanned families arrived in Crimea compared with 138 recruited households; see GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, l. 44 (Rabinovich and Klempert’s report, December 31, 1938), d. 3, l. 95 (Rabinovich and Klempert to raispolkoms, May 31, 1938), l. 5 (Rabinovich to raispolkoms, April 1939); AJA, WP, Box 327/2, p. 1 (Rosen's statements to meeting of Agro-Joint, March 20, 1936). See also GARF, f. r-7746, op. 4, d. 29, l. 5 (report on Agro-Joint work in Ukraine, 1936). There does not appear to be a correlation between the departure of Agro-Joint and the influx of non-Jewish residents to the kolkhozes.

89. GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 3, l. 96 (Rabinovich and Klempert to raispolkoms, May 31, 1938).

90. YIVO, RG 358/171 (information on unfinished works in the Crimean kolkhozes, March 8, 1938); GAARK, f. r-1520, op. 1, d. 27, l. 237 (Raitsin-Romanovskii to chairs of kolkhozes, October 1937). For an example of the state’s tone toward the colonies, see GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 16, ll. 40–46 (Rabinovich and Klempert’s report, December 31, 1938), ll. 22–30 (Klempert’s report, April 22, 1939).

91. From GAARK, f. r-30, op. 6, d. 2, l. 15 (Rabinovich to the Narkomzem Settlement Bureau, March 15, 1939), l. 6 (Gil’man to Golevu, March 23, 1939), l. 4 (Chekmenev to Rabinovich, April 29, 1939). For comparative purposes, it can be noted that Nikita Khrushchev invested more in agricultural development during his first year of rule than did Stalin during a quarter century. For illustration of the growth in the Soviet military budget from the mid-1930s, see Stone, Hammer and Rifle, 217.


93. Specifically, the observance of Sunday as a day of rest among Russian-Orthodox kolkhozes and the practice of circumcision among Tatars persisted; see Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 21, p. 3, nn. 40, 41.

94. NARA, Decimal File 1930–1939, 861.48/2486, p. 3 (Kirk to the secretary of state, October 12, 1938). Testimony of widespread, albeit unobtrusive, religious observance in the late 1930s can also be found in the shtetls of the former Pale. See Hoffman, Red Shtetl, 72.

95. GAARK, f. p-1, op. 1, d. 1820, ll. 95–97 (Vashkevich to Shchuchkin, September 28, 1937). Vashkevich reported that, among other lamentable offenses, the celebrants chanted “Next year in Jerusalem.” Former settlers agreed that private observance continued unobstructed until the early 1950s; see “Yad Ezra” and Krasnogvardeiske interviews.


97. Kavnatskii interview, 4.
98. Levavi, “Ha-mityashvim ha-haklaim,” 60. Levavi’s only archival source was the Rosen Papers at YIVO, which is strong for the NEP era but progressively weaker thereafter.

99. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 584, ll. 1–3 (Itkin’s report, early 1938). An average household in a non-Jewish kolkhoz derived half of its cash, almost all of its animal foodstuff, and most of its vegetables from the household plots. With 6 percent of the total male and 33.5 percent of female labor, these parcels produced 71 percent of the nation’s diary and meat products and 43 percent of its wool. The result was a tough state procurement campaign and other actions against these parcels in 1939. See Lewin, Making of the Soviet System, 180; Osokina, Our Daily Bread, 167, 179.

100. Ohr, “Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society,” 410; Viola, Peasant Rebels, 230. Higher authorities usually reversed the evictions by these kolkhozes.

101. YIVO, RG 358/195, p. 4 (Fabricant’s inspection of Crimean collectives, February 18, 1925). He did not know whether this was a product of collective ownership or the residual effect of urban attitudes. See also YIVO, RG 358/119, p. 4 (Raskin’s report to Agro-Joint Moscow, mid-1927).

102. GARF, f. r-7746, op. 1, d. 278, l. 31 (visit of Timiriazev Academy, 1929).

103. These sketches can be seen on page 8, the book cover, and elsewhere in S. Birger, Deti truda.

104. Keren, Ha-Hityashvut ha-haklaim, 139. An incensed observer noted that “[The members of the Tel Chai commune] not only ate pigs, they raised pigs, but also bred them and gave them names like ‘Rivka’, ‘Rochel’, ‘Sarah’, and ‘Joseph.’ Couldn’t they find other names for the pigs? Only the names of our forefathers? They only laughed at me.” See Gorodetski interview, 5. A photograph of such a toy pig can be found in YIVO, RYevpatoyo (pig in ORT workshop).

105. AJA, WP, Box 234/6, p. 2 (Moskowitz press release, December 21, 1927). The ox taught the Jew “patience and poise, qualities which these nervous and restless Jews from the small cities needed.” For such an example in popular Yiddish literature, see Y. Y. Zinger, Nei-Rusland, 60. He noted that women often handled temperamental oxen better than men. A popular Soviet-Jewish author (Fink, Evrei na zemle, 109) observed, “The oxen shows the anxious shtetl Jew the futility of his bustling and the measured quiet of the land.” Another Soviet-Jewish author (Kleinman, “Sredi evreev-zemledelye’ev Kryma,” 211) exclaimed, “Oxen! . . . oh, those oxen! Its clear now: the Jew doesn’t educate the ox—the ox educates the Jew.”

106. Embree, “Jews on the Steppes,” 14. See also AJA, WP, Box 234/6, p. 3 (Moskowitz press release, December 21, 1927); JDC Archive 530, p. 6 (Hymans impressions, December 8, 1928); Vendrov, “Po evreiskim koloniiam,” 216–17; “Sholom Ash o evreiskikh koloniiakh v Krymu i na Ukrainie,” 9; Lunacharskii, Ob antisemitizme, 45.

107. Only two units entered service, but this invention indicated the high levels of agrotechnical expertise reached by Jewish colonists. See Miral, “Na poliakh evreiskikh kolkhozov,” 21–22; AJA, WP, Box 342/6 (Rosen to Warburg, January 21, 1937). Agro-Joint’s contribution to the development of this machine is unclear.

108. Jewish colonists were frequently recognized as Stakhanovites. See Feigin, “Direktor MTS,” 282; I. P. Rombakh interview; A. Iampolskaia interview; Dubrovskii interview; Silkina interview. See also YIVO, RG 358/193, p. 21 (report on Agro-Joint work in
Crimea, 1925; Katsnel’son, “Volkshoakh Kryma”; Godiner and Lipshits, Vstrecha v Tsymle, 21; Meksin, Sel’skoe khozaiastvo Kryma, 76. Thirty of sixty-five photographs included in the commemorative album for the exhibit of “Jews in the USSR” at the Paris World’s Fair in 1937 portrayed Jewish farmers; see GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 907, l. 9 (plan for the photo album, spring 1937).

109. GAARK, f. r-30, op. 12, d. 2; GARF, f. r-7541, op. 1, d. 626, ll. 41-43 (Shapiro’s report on the Fraidorf district, May 2, 1934); Berezhanskaia, “Evreiskie kolhozy v Krymu,” 81; Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, 46. Maifeld’s grapes and Nei Leben’s (Larindorf) sheep won special recognition at the 1940 Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow and again at the truncated national exhibition in 1941; see Levavi, Haklaim yehudim b’aravot Krim, Chapter 16, p. 6. Some Soviet authors offered the tangential argument that Jews could successfully colonize only with machines; see Kleinman, “Sredi evreev-zemledel’tsev Kryma,” 210.

110. For example, see Katsnel’son, “Znatnyi kombainer David Levit.” See also Altshuler, Ha-teatron, 40-41.

111. Adult literacy rose from 51 to 81 percent between 1926 and 1939; see Davies, Soviet Economic Development, 46. According to Gabriella Safran (in “Isaak Babel’s El’ia Isaakovich as a New Jewish Type,” 253–58), the literary image of the Jew underwent some modification during the last decades of tsarist rule.


113. AJA, Nearprint biography, p. 4 (Felix Warburg).

114. Agro-Joint agronomists agreed that colonists developed a proprietary sense in the fourth year of settlement.

115. Glubochanskii interview; A. Iampols’kaia interview.

116. Kublanovskiaia interview; A. Iampols’kaia interview. The flight from Nazi-occupied territory is described in D. Levin, The Lesser of Two Evils. Evacuation of the Jewish kolkhozes constituted part of a regional plan in which 270,000 people, including a total of 129,000 specialists, engineers, and their families, evacuated the peninsula. These people took with them 500,000 head of cattle and 175,000 tons of grain. See Broshevan, Voennaia mobilizatsiia v Krymu, 20, 83. According to another source, as many as 34,000 Jews (among them, nearly 10,000 kolkhozniki) evacuated Crimea; see Vladimir Gurkovich, “Evakuatsiia evreev i ‘lits drugikh natsional’nostei’ iz Kryma v 1941 g.,” Krymskoe vremia, December 18, 2001.

117. This appears to be consistent with the rates of evacuation of Jews from other parts of the western USSR (within its 1939 borders), particularly those areas occupied by the Nazis after August 1, 1941. See Dubson, “On the Problem of the Evacuation,” 50–55; Laqueur, The Holocaust Encyclopedia, 649.

118. JDC Archive 451 (Kahn’s memorandum, October 31, 1944); Keren, Ha-hityashvut ha-haklat, 149; Kabakova interview; Kublanovskiaia interview; Glubochanskii interview; Vul’f interview.

tered by postwar Soviet propaganda, which has accused the Tatar and German natives of Crimea of disproportionate collaboration with the Nazis. Thus, a Soviet source from 1948 (written four years after the Tatar deportation to Central Asia and at the height of Zhdanovism) formed the debatable basis for Keren’s condemnation of the Tatars and Germans of Crimea; see Ha-hityashvut ha-baklait, 145, 148. While Tatar participation in the Wehrmacht’s Ostbattaillone from the autumn of 1942 is part of the historical record, the larger issues of Crimean Tatar collaboration still require further research; see Gutman, *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. 3, 1,098–99.


122. According to A. A. Superfin and A. D. Gluchanski, former Agro-Joint colonists served as chairs in 15 percent of the kolkhozes in the northern Crimean steppe between 1945 and 1953. See also Keren, *Ha-bityashvut ha-baklait*, 150; Krasnogvardeiskoe interviews; Levitan interview. A less pleasant reception may have befallen Jewish returnees to Crimea’s cities; see Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 50–51.

123. Some members of the JAFC preferred the Volga area, recently cleared of its German inhabitants, as the site for a Jewish republic.

124. For the most recent accounts of the JAFC, see Rubinstein, *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom*, 1–47; Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 34–132, passim; and Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*.

125. In 1947, V. Molotov and L. Kaganovich (senior members of the Politburo) counseled the JAFC to make a written request to Stalin for a Jewish republic in Crimea. The Soviets later used this letter to accuse the committee’s members of conspiracy and secession. See Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 54–55; Keren, *Yehadut Krim me-kadmutah ve-ad ha-Shoa*, 271. A somewhat different sequence of events can be found in Altshuler, “Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,” 254–69. For a view of the “Crimean Plot” and “Doctor’s Plot” from inside Soviet security services, see Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks*, 285–309.

127. See for example Lestschinsky, *Ha-yehudim be-Rusyah ha-sovietit*, 167; and Stopniker, *Ha-yehudim be-Rusyah ve-Ukraina*, 35.

128. AJA, WP, Box 342/6 (Rosen to Warburg, January 21, 1937); JDC Archive 52a (Rosen to Hyman and Morrissey, February 7, 1939); JDC Archive 545 (Bressler to Rosenberg and Baerwald, May 23, 1939); JDC Archive 312a (Agro-Joint, April 15, 1952). This project was the only practical outcome of the Evian Conference, convened in July 1938. After negotiations with Rosen, the Dominican dictator (Rafael Trujillo) issued five thousand visas to Jewish refugees stranded in European ports. Trujillo’s motives were dubious, but they served the cause of rescue for the JDC. Most recipients of these visas left Europe and illegally entered other countries in the Americas. Those who went to the Dominican Republic colonized (with approximately $1 million in Agro-Joint aid) a small area around Sosua. See David Abel, “In Dominican Republic, Jewish Descendants Revise Tradition,” *Boston Globe*, December 19, 1999, pp. A25–26; Ross, “Sosua: A Colony of Hope”; A. Etinger, *Im haklaim yehudim be-tefutsot*, 272–73.

129. JDC Archive 455, passim; JDC Archive 312a (Agro-Joint, April 15, 1952).

130. The full-scale, public demonization of the Joint by the Stalinist regime waited until after the war. There were, nonetheless, isolated attacks against the JDC and/or the ARA in the Soviet press as early as 1921. See Weissman, *Herbert Hoover*, 169–71, 184–88; Patenaude, *Big Show in Bololand*, 104–5.

**CONCLUSION**

1. JDC Archive 483, p. 11 (Belenky to Rosenberg, n.d.); JDC Archive 455, pp. 19, 22 (memorandum of meeting with Belenky, January 6, 1925); JDC Archive 455, p. 5 (story by a member of the tractor squad, January 6, 1925).

2. JDC Archive 537, p. 6 (Fainberg to Morrissey, June 28, 1936). Though purely intuitive, this conclusion followed from correct analysis of the MTS’s basic contours and service to peasants. A modern Russian historian argues that Soviet collectivization experts and political leaders could not help but draw positive conclusions about the Jewish farms; see Sotnichenko, “Evreiskaia sel’skokhoziaistvennaiia kolonizatsiia,” 54. Although I do not concur with all of her argumentation, recent archival findings by Chizuko Takao reinforce my conclusions; see “The Origin of the MTS.” While similar in some senses, the MTS fundamentally departed from Agro-Joint’s tractor operations: the former was a tool to enhance the state’s political control over the countryside whereas the latter’s role was solely professional. Moreover, critical features of the settlement blocs in Crimea bore no resemblance to the rural policies imposed by the government in the late 1920s. The Jewish colonies, even with a degree of regulation from Agro-Joint and Komzet, were voluntary constructs; settlers could leave or negotiate their problems with officials from Agro-Joint. In contrast, coercion, arbitrary procurements, and compulsory immobilization characterized total collectivization under the Soviets.

3. Here I disagree with Shimon Redlich. He argues (in “Evreiskie organizatsii v SSSR,” 200–8) that the Evsektsiia was the focal point for Jewish collective consciousness during the interwar period.
4. Other, albeit very different, signs of the permissible levels for the expression of Jewish identity are discussed in Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater*, 5, 11–12, 17–18, 214–17, 276. Elsewhere the regime transformed Jews into loyal and devoted components of the new system, so-called “Soviet citizens of the Jewish nationality,” while the purges victimized urban Jewish elites and institutions of cultural continuity. See Krupnik, “Cultural and Ethnic Policies toward Jews,” 81.

5. Even into the late 1930s, the Zionists accused the JDC of “starving” Palestine of funds. See Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership*, 32.


7. Judith Elkin arrived at similar conclusions on the JCA colonies in Argentina. See “Goodnight, Sweet Gaucho,” 223. Zvi Livne conjectured on the “pull” of Soviet industry upon the young colonists; see *Ikarim yehudim be-Rusyah*, 160–61.

8. The pace and depth of integration of women into the workforce was no greater in the first kibbutzim. See Shiloni, “Gormim akraim b’yisodah shel Degania,” 421–26, 429, 436; Zamir, “Mitsuyanut shel haverot kibutz,” 6.


11. For further discussion of the historiographic silence surrounding Agro-Joint colonization, see my “Up From the ‘Ash Heap?: A Lost Chapter of Interwar Jewish History,” *Columbia Journal of Historiography* 1 (Fall 2003).

12. Ruppin, *Ha-hityashvut ha-haklait*, 40. Shmeruk argued for the evenhanded study of those movements in modern Jewish history that did not contribute to the creation of the State of Israel. He wrote in 1961 (in *Ha-kibutz ha-yehudi*, 184): “Hostility [between Zionists and non-Zionists] cast a shadow over the motives and foundations of nationalist efforts. Historical study must free itself from the consensus that Jewish settlement in the USSR failed due to malice. Historians must first examine the foundations of Jewish nationalist activities within the confines of the specific circumstances in which they were conducted. We must study those movements which strayed from the golden path of Jewish history [e.g., Zionism], even in their ugly and illegitimate forms, which may have been necessary for the activists in pursuit of the struggle on behalf of the Jewish public.” As a counterpart to his negative critique of Agro-Joint and the political judgment of its leaders, Derek Penslar observed (in *Shylock’s Children*, 252–54) that in the 1930s it was unclear whether Zionism could do much more to aid Jews in the Diaspora. See also Edelhertz, *The Russian Paradox*, 26.


14. Leaders of the JDC understood that colonization would never rescue more than a fraction of Soviet Jewry. See for example JDC Archive 62a, p. 19 (Billikopf’s statements at the press conference, August 30, 1926).

15. This does not account for the many thousands of non-Jews assisted by Agro-Joint. For example, it provided famine relief for approximately 120,000 Ukrainian villagers adjacent to the colonies from 1923 to 1932. See Galperin, “Agro-Joint,” 14.

16. For the conditions in the Bessarabian colony of Ungrovka, where the JCA continued its agricultural supervision after occupation by the Soviets under the Molotov-Ribbentrop
Pact, see Maryasin, *Ha-moshavah Ungrovka*, 50–53. For more on the general rates of intermarriage, see Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust*, 268–70.

17. Bein interview, 1; Malkhov interview, 30; JDC Archive 539, p. 7 (Hyman to Warburg et al., December 14, 1928).

18. Zośa Szajkowski admitted (in *The Mirage of American Jewish Aid*, 97–101) that distribution of money from American relatives was the greatest service rendered to Soviet Jews by any philanthropy during this period.

19. This also held true among the settlers in Birobizhan, see Shneer, “The Weakness of the Birobidzhan Idea,” 23–24, 30.
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