

# JEW'S DON'T DRINK – IT'S OFFICIAL

Jewish social history in British Parliamentary Papers

By Jonathan Fishburn

British Parliamentary Papers of the early 1900s are replete with references to the experience of Jewish refugees and their presumed characteristics. It was a time of rampant anti-semitism in Eastern Europe and mass migration of Jews to America, England and a few other countries that welcomed them. These official British documents are a rich source for this period of Anglo-Jewish history: the poverty of East End Jews, the immigration of Russian Jews, the impact of Sunday Trading Laws on Orthodox bakers and butchers, and even a psycho-social analysis of why Jews enter the clothes trade.

No doubt serious historians have made good use of these papers, but for the interested layperson this article is a brief foray into the densely filled pages of the British Parliamentary Papers to explore what they reveal about the multifarious layers of Anglo-Jewish life.

May I suggest that the first official British mention of 'Schnorrers', the affectionate term for Jewish beggars, was on 7 July 1902, when Dr Theodor Herzl gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration? As part of a wider discussion on the nature of Jewish nationalism and the ability of charitable organizations to help Jewish immigrants settle into their new community, Major Evans-Gordon asked Herzl, 'You consider that the efforts of the Jewish Board of Guardians and the Russian Jewish community here have broken down?'

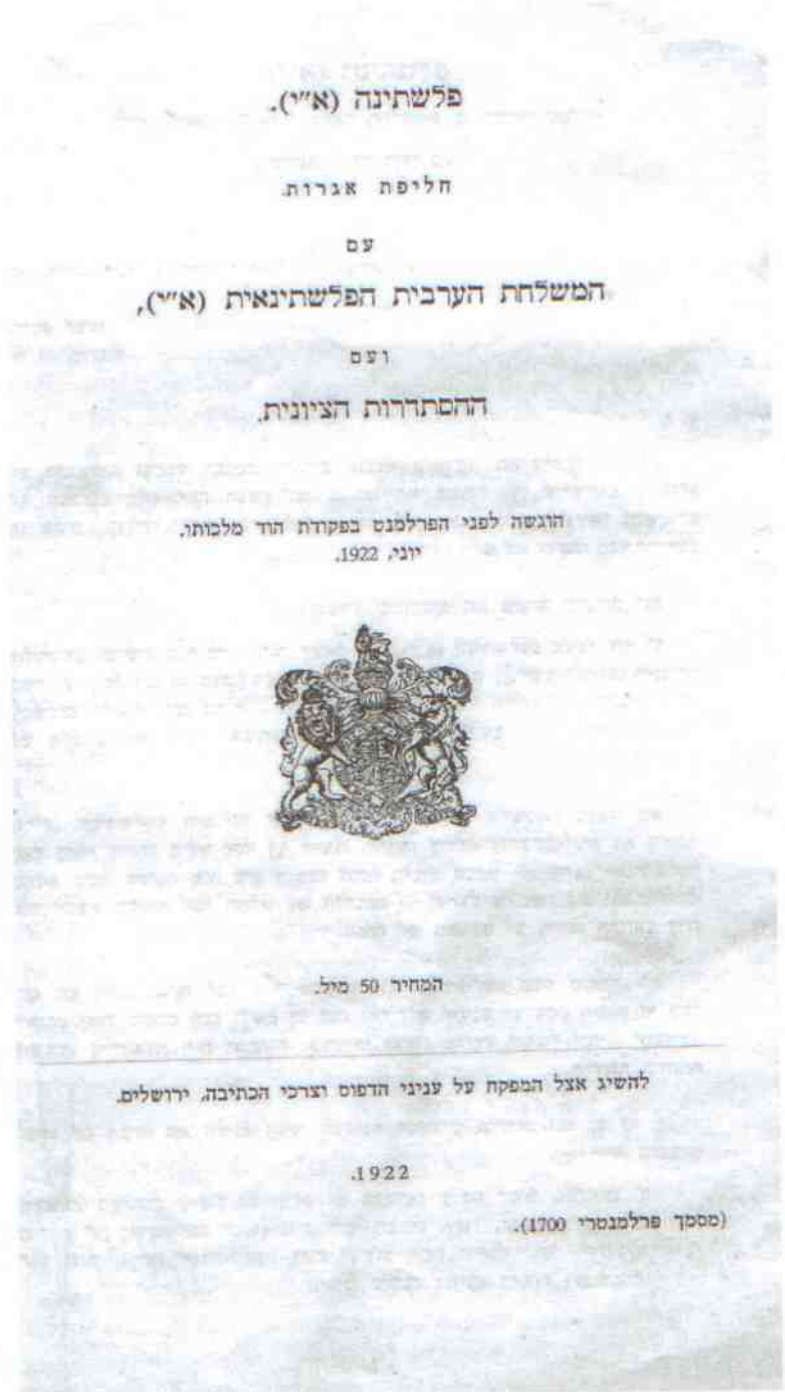
Herzl replied, 'In this sense – I think that they are not able to supply the need.' The dialogue continued:

EG: They cannot deal with the number of people who come here?

H: They cannot.

EG: Baron Hirsch left large benefactions for the Jewish people.

Command 1700: 'Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organisation'



H: Yes.

EG: Have those benefactions increased or diminished the evil?

H: I think they were rather ineffective one way or the other.

EG: They did not have any effect one way or the other?

H: No effect.

EG: With regard to the enormous question, they were nothing?

H: No.

EG: A drop in the ocean?

H: I really think they did not do more than provide for schools, and for several small agricultural stations.

EG: Did it do any good, or was it in your opinion, money wasted?

H: It was rather money wasted.

EG: The money spent on sending them to Argentina, partly?

H: Yes.

EG: And partly to Palestine?

H: No.

EG: Was none spent on the Zionist movement?

H: No.

EG: But they went to Argentina. Has that attempt to settle them in a country set apart for them been a failure? [A reference to Baron Hirsch's Jewish Colonisation Association, founded in 1891 with a view to resettling Russian Jews in Argentina]

H: It has been a failure because when you want a great settlement, you must have a flag and an idea. You cannot make those things only with money. A thing must have an idea in it; and as they had not that they could not succeed.

EG: It has been suggested to me that Baron Hirsch's charity tended to increase the number of what you call 'Schnorrers'?

H: I think so.

EG: It did?

H: I think so, because so many people know there is a large bag of money, and they come.

EG: And have a go at it?

H: I think so. All that is so natural – I do not think it is merely Jewish.

## What are British Parliamentary Papers?

British Parliamentary Papers consists of four segments:

1. Hansard's Debates (Commons and Lords) present the daily record of what is said in both Houses of Parliament.

2. The Journal of the House of Commons is an enlarged account of the proceedings of the House of Commons, compiled from the minutes and papers in the possession of the Clerks of the House.

3. The House of Lords Sessional Papers present

the Bills, Reports of Committees, Reports of Commissions, and Accounts and Papers which, when combined with the House of Commons Sessional Papers, provide the history of Parliamentary actions.

4. The House of Commons Sessional Papers consist of Bills, Reports, Accounts and Papers, and Command Papers. Command Papers do not originate in Parliament but are 'presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her (or His) Majesty'. Many of the issues discussed in this article are found in Command Papers, as Royal Commission Reports and treaties are the most common Command Papers.

## Zionism

At the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration (Command 1741), Herzl's lengthy statement included the following observations:

The fact there is now for the first time since Cromwell a perceptible number of our people in England is the true cause of this Commission being called together . . . you have had witnesses before you who have explained to you the reasons which induce Jews from Eastern Europe to come to this country and to America. Permit me to say that it is not by any means chiefly material advantages that draw them hither – moral advantages play the larger part – a desire for the freedom of life and soul which the Jew in Europe cannot under present conditions know in Eastern Europe . . .

Then there is the proposal of assimilation and, of course, those who put forward assimilation as a solution of the Jewish question do not mean merely an apish assimilation or slavish and often vulgar imitation. They mean, I suppose, assimilation by intermarriage, so that the small stream of our race may be merged and lost in the broad stream of peoples amongst whom they live . . .

The Jews of Eastern Europe cannot stay where they are – where are they to go? If you find that they are not wanted here – then some place must be found to which they can migrate without by that migration raising the problems that confront them here. These problems will not arise if a home be found them which will be legally recognised as Jewish.

As we know, the Zionist movement gained strength in the early 1900s and, given the British control of Palestine until 1948, Command Papers that deal with Zionism are fascinating. In fact, Command 1700, 'Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organisation' (presented to Parliament in June 1922), was published in two versions: English and Hebrew.

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This is the third in a series of articles dealing with unusual aspects of the history of printed material relating to Jews.

Anno vicesimo septimo

# Georgii II. Regis.

An Act to repeal an Act of the Twenty sixth Year of His Majesty's Reign, intituled, *An Act to permit Persons professing the Jewish Religion to be naturalized by Parliament; and for other Purposes therein mentioned.*



WHEREAS an Act of Par-<sup>Preamble.</sup>  
liament was made and passed  
in the Twenty sixth Year of  
His Majesty's Reign, intituled,  
An Act to permit Persons  
professing the *Jewish* Religion  
to be naturalized by Parlia-  
ment; and for other Purposes  
therein mentioned: And where-  
as Occasion has been taken  
from the said Act, to raise Dis-  
contents, and to disquiet the  
Minds of many of His Majesty's Subjects; be it en-  
acted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and  
with



## Antisemitism

The 1919 government paper 'Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia, presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty' (Command 8) contains not only graphic details of the atrocities committed, but also clear references to the Jews who were considered to be behind them. The report smacks of a theory of Jewish conspiracy – and it has long been understood that, due to the government's embarrassment, the original edition was withdrawn almost immediately after publication. It was replaced by a shorter version from which essential details had been deleted. Only a very few copies of the original are believed to exist, from which the following short excerpts are taken:

In a letter by Sir M. Findlay to Mr Balfour:

if an end is not put to Bolshevism in Russia at once, the civilisation of the whole world will be threatened. . . . I consider the suppression of Bolshevism is the greatest issue now before the world, not even excluding the war which is still raging, and unless, as above stated, Bolshevism is nipped in the bud immediately, it is bound to spread in one form or another over Europe and the whole world, as it is organised and worked by Jews who have no nationality, and whose one object is to destroy for their own ends the existing order of things.

In a memorandum on conditions in Moscow by a British subject, who left Moscow on 1 December:

The economic and social conditions in Moscow are in a state of chaos. All trade and commerce – except illicit trading which is still carried on by the Jews – is at a complete standstill.

On 5 February 1919, General Knox sent a message to the War Office:

With regard to the murder of Imperial family at Ekaterinburg, there is further evidence to show that there are two parties in the local Soviet, one which was anxious to save Imperial family, and the latter, headed by five Jews, two of whom were determined to have them murdered. These two Jews, by name Vainen and Safarof, went with Lenin when he made a journey across Germany.

In a letter from Reverend B. S. Lombard to Earl Curzon on 23 March 1919, it was written:

My Lord,  
I BEG [sic] to forward to your Lordship the following details with reference to Bolshevism in Russia . . . It originated in German propaganda, and was, and is being carried out by international Jews . . . All business became

paralysed, shops were closed, Jews became possessors of most of the business houses, and horrible scenes of starvation became common in the country districts.

And finally, in a memorandum by Mr B. on the 'Progress of Bolshevism Abroad', it is noted that

At the Putilof Works, anti-Semitism is growing, probably because the food supply committees are entirely in the hands of Jews – and voices can be heard sometimes calling for a 'pogrom'.

## Sunday Trading Laws

I live in Golders Green, with a large number of Jewish shops that are closed on Saturday and open on Sunday. In our 24/7 society, it's easy to forget that the imposition of restricted trading on Sundays presented difficulties for Orthodox Jewish shopkeepers. Almost 100 years ago, on 14 May 1906, Reverend Herman Adler, the then Chief Rabbi, was called as witness to the Joint Select Committee on Sunday Trading. He claimed that:

A law compelling Jewish traders to close their shops on Sunday would press with undue and exceptional severity on Jewish butchers and poulterers. Even if their own conscientious scruples would not urge them to abstain from business on Saturdays, the regulations under which they hold their licences from the Jewish Ecclesiastical Authorities and the Board of Shechita would oblige them to keep their shops closed . . . Jewish bakers, who employ Jewish workmen, and who have not worked on Saturdays, should be allowed to bake bread and supply their customers on Sundays . . . The enforcing of a Sunday Closing Act would mean starvation to themselves and their families.

An insight into a Jewish baker's life was presented by Mr Joseph Watkin, who was questioned by Mr Stuart Samuel on 17 May 1906:

SS: You are a Jew and a naturalised British Subject?

JW: Yes.

SS: You have been in this country 25 years?

JW: Yes.

SS: I understand that you are a baker in Liverpool

JW: Yes.

SS: How long have you been a baker in Liverpool?

JW: About 25 years.

SS: Do you bake on Sunday?

JW: Yes.

SS: Do you bake on Saturday?

JW: No.

SS: Are you closed on Saturday?

JW: Yes.

SS: Up till what time –

JW: Some time after sunset.

