

# THE PERSECUTION OF JEWS IN ESTONIA IN THE LATE 1940S AND EARLY 1950S

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## BACKGROUND THROUGHOUT THE USSR

State anti-Semitism characterises the post-the Second World War period of Stalin's rule in the USSR. Representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia, technocrats and some leading communists suffered the most. The persecution of Jews was not in the least a new phenomenon in Russia, and its roots extended back to the times of the Russian Empire, when limitations were established for Jews in choosing where to live (the so-called черта оседлости, the Pale of Settlement in English). Jewish settlement was concentrated in Ukraine, where about half of the Jews in the USSR lived in 1939,<sup>1</sup> and Byelorussia. Moscow and Leningrad were also larger Jewish centres, which the brunt of the policy hostile to Jews was directed at in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Alongside state anti-Semitism, common anti-Semitism was also commonplace in the USSR, which also dated back to the era of the Russian Empire. This was most typical among Russians, Ukrainians and Poles. Post-Second World War misery intensified this. Jews played an important role in Ukrainian society, and there it was feared that Jews would be given back the houses and jobs that had previously belonged to them.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous studies have been published in both the West and in Russia concerning the repression of Jews and their situation in the late-Stalinist years.<sup>3</sup> The activity of the Jewish Antifascist Committee,

its liquidation and the repression of its leaders have attracted the most attention.<sup>4</sup> A publication of documents concerning the activity of the Jewish Antifascist Committee has also been issued.

Stalin's own personal anti-Semitism, which originated in the years of his youth when he had conflicts with Lev Kamenev and Jakov Sverdlov, who later became leaders of the USSR, and intensified in the later power struggle, when Jews headed by Lev Trotsky were his rivals, is pointed out, on the one hand, as a cause of the post-war state anti-Semitism.<sup>5</sup> Foreign policy played a more important role. The leadership of the Soviet Union maintained a policy of friendliness towards Jews during the Second World War due primarily to pragmatic considerations. This can be explained by its relations with the Allies in the war against Germany. For example, the Jewish Antifascist Committee was created in 1941 for propagandistic purposes and was used primarily to seek the support of American Jews.<sup>6</sup> Soviet policy concerning Jews was ambivalent after the Second World War. It actively supported the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine in order to weaken Great Britain's position in the Middle East. After the state of Israel was established in 1948, the USSR supported it in hopes of helping left wing sympathisers to gain power, which would be counter to Western-oriented Arabs.<sup>7</sup> Yet the first signs of anti-Semitism in Soviet domestic policy were noticeable at the end of the Second World War already. Jelena Zubkova

1 3 million Jews lived in the Soviet Union in 1939, half of them in Ukraine. – Katrin Boeckh, *Stalinismus in der Ukraine: die Rekonstruktion des sowjetischen Systems nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Wiesbaden, 2007, p. 399.

2 Benjamin Pinkus & Jonathan Frankel, *The Soviet Government and the Jews, 1948–1967: a documented study*, Cambridge, 1984, p. 85.

3 Some of the more important works since the 1990's: Arkadi Vaksberg, *Stalin Against the Jews*, New York, 1994; Геннадий Костырченко, В плену у красного фараона: политические преследования евреев в СССР в последнее сталинское десятилетие (In Captivity of the Red Pharaoh: the political persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union during the last decade of Stalinism), Moscow, 1994; *Der Spätstalinismus und die "jüdische" Frage: zur antisemitischen Wendung des Kommunismus*, Hrsg. von L. Luks & D. O'Sullivan, Köln-Weimar-Wien, 1998; Л. Люкс, "Еврейский вопрос в политике Сталина" (The Jewish question in Stalin's policy), Periodical Вопросы истории, No. 7, 1999, pp. 41–59; Геннадий Костырченко, Тайная политика Сталина: власть и антисемитизм (Stalin's secret policy: power and anti-Semitism), Moscow, 2001.

4 Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941–1948*, Boulder 1982; Arno Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden: die tragische Geschichte des Jüdischen Antifaschistischen Komitees und der sowjetischen Juden*, Berlin, 1998; Еврейский антифашистский комитет, 1941–1948: документированная (The Jewish Antifascist Committee. 1941–1948. Documented History), eds. S. Redlich and G. Kostyrchenko, Moscow, 1996.

5 A. Vaksberg, *Stalin Against the Jews*, pp. 17–19.

6 K. Boeckh, *Stalinismus in der Ukraine*, pp. 400ff.

7 Ibid., p. 398.

names the case of the Soviet Information Bureau ( ) as one of the first undertakings.<sup>8</sup> Namely, and its chairman Solomon Losowski became the object of strong criticism in 1946 for alleged shortcomings in personnel policy. Among others, the “inadmissible concentration of Jews” was also mentioned as a shortcoming, as a consequence of which the sacking of Jewish employees began.<sup>9</sup>

The turning point of the anti-Semitic campaign was 1948, when the arrest of Jews began, the Jewish Antifascist Committee was shut down, and the ideological struggle against cosmopolitanism, Western influences, formalism, anti-politicalism and other ideologies and ways of thinking hostile to the Soviet Union began. This was clearly anti-Jewish, but was also used against national cultures and the national intelligentsia in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Byelorussia and Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of the state of Israel was an important impulse, as it strengthened Judaism throughout the world, including the USSR.<sup>11</sup> The leadership of the USSR had systematically combated the possible rise of Jewish self-awareness. Katrin Boeckh has emphasised that the Soviet government did not inform its population of the Holocaust and used every opportunity to endeavour to avoid the subject of the Jewish Holocaust in the USSR in public. Boeckh postulates that the objective of the “policy of concealment” was, on the one hand, to prevent Jews from becoming the object of attention of public opinion, and, on the other hand, to prevent the emergence of sympathy towards Jews among the non-Jewish population in connection with the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the authorities endeavoured to incite anti-Semitism. The press covered political trials and exposed ‘conspiracies’, attempting to demonstrate that a ‘Zionist conspiracy’ exists. ‘Jewish nationalism’ and ‘Zionism’ became the key words of anti-Semitic campaigns, which were repeated in all the larger and smaller ‘criminal cases’ held in the second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s. Jelena Zubkova has listed 70

smaller ‘criminal cases’ alongside the two larger ‘criminal cases’ – the Jewish Antifascist Committee (1948–1952) and the case of the ‘murderers in white coats’, or the so-called ‘group of terrorist doctors’ (1952–1953).<sup>13</sup>

Purges of personnel began in 1949 in ministries, industry, academic and scientific institutions, and the editorial offices of newspapers and journals. All Jews in leading positions were dismissed, although nationality was never the formal reason for their removal. Instead, the pretexts were family ties abroad, living in occupied territory during the war, or not carrying out the duties of their jobs.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, documents exist which clearly reflect the nationality-based principle of the purges. A secret letter entitled ‘Concerning the unfavourable situation in the USSR MGB’ was issued by the All-Union Communist (Bolshevist) Party Central Committee (hereinafter referred to as the CPSU CC) on 11 July 1951. As a consequence of this letter, Jewish officers and officials in the MGB apparatus were arrested as ‘Zionist conspirators’.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish Writers’ Association was disbanded and the Jewish-language almanac was shut down by the decision issued on 3 February 1948 by the CPSU CC Secretariat.<sup>16</sup>

Anti-Semitism was also prevalent in several satellite states of the USSR with significant Jewish communities after the Second World War. Under directions from the USSR, Jews belonging to the authorities of several Eastern European states were arrested in the late 1940s and early 1950s. They were tried at show trials under the magnified attention of the press.<sup>17</sup>

## ESTONIAN AND BALTIC CONTEXT

The position of Jews in Estonia differed significantly from their situation in the large cities of the USSR, and in Ukraine and Byelorussia. The propor-

<sup>8</sup> Jelena Subkova, “Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der KPdSU (1945–1953)” in *Terror. Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936–1953*, Hrsg. H. Weber & U. Mählert. Paderborn, 1998, pp. 225–230.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>10</sup> Campaign against “bourgeois nationalists” in Estonia, see O. Liivik, “Bourgeois nationalism”, the ideological enemy of communists, and repressions in Estonia. RISTVIIDE / CROSS-REFERENCE

<sup>11</sup> See J. Subkova, “Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der KPdSU”, pp. 227ff.

<sup>12</sup> K. Boeckh, *Stalinismus in der Ukraine*, p. 405.

<sup>13</sup> J. Subkova, “Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der KPdSU”, p. 228.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228ff

<sup>16</sup> Рудольф Германович Пихоя, *Советский Союз : история власти, 1945–1991* (Soviet Union : the History of Power 1945–1991), Moscow, 1998, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Jews were put on trial at the same time in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Rumania as well. See: Georg Hermann Hodos, *Schauprozesse : stalinistische Säuberungen in Osteuropa, 1948–1954*, Berlin, 2001.

tion of Jews in the population of Estonia was only 0.4–0.5%. While over 4400 Jews lived in Estonia in 1939, their number increased slightly after the war, rising to 5400 in 1959.<sup>18</sup> The composition of Jews was heterogeneous because alongside those who had evacuated to the USSR to escape the German occupation and had returned to their homeland in Estonia, large numbers of Jews arrived in Estonia from elsewhere in the USSR. The number of returnees is estimated at 1500.<sup>19</sup> Unlike their active cultural life during the period of the independent Republic of Estonia, when Jews had their own cultural autonomy,<sup>20</sup> Jewish cultural associations did not operate in Estonia during the post-war years and their religious activity was also limited.

Anti-Semitism in Estonia during the post-war years has not been thoroughly examined. Olaf Kuuli has briefly described the moods of the population in association with the Doctors' Plot in an article.<sup>21</sup> A University of Tartu bachelor's thesis also considers the attitude towards Jews in association with the Doctors' Plot.<sup>22</sup> The situation of Jews in Latvia<sup>23</sup> and Lithuania has been examined more.<sup>24</sup> There were approximately 30,000 Jews in Latvia after the Second World War,<sup>25</sup> which was considerably more than in Lithuania<sup>26</sup> and Estonia. Thus we will briefly consider anti-Jewish repressions in Latvia.

Irène Šneidre has examined political trials and claims that repressions against Jews took place like they did against Latvians not on the basis of nationality, but rather under the criteria of class.<sup>27</sup> The anti-Semitic campaign that began in 1947 took the shape of a struggle against 'Jewish bourgeois nationalists'. Šneidre divides anti-Jewish repressions in 1944–1952 into three categories:

- 1) against Jews who had survived the Holocaust, who were accused of collaborating with the repressive organs of Hitler's Germany;
- 2) against intellectuals who had lived in the Republic of Latvia prior to the war and participated in Jewish social life, and belonged to political parties and cultural organisations;
- 3) Jews who were members of Jewish congregations that had been restored after the Second World War.

Jews were arrested in Latvia in the mid-1940s already. Jews, who had coordinated the emigration of Jews to Palestine, were arrested in 1946. By that time, a few hundred Jews had succeeded in departing from Latvia. Arrests of Jewish intellectuals began in Latvia in 1949. The beginning of 1953 was an important milestone, when the so-called Doctors' Plot was 'exposed' in Moscow.<sup>28</sup> Jews were already being arrested in Lithuania in the mid-1940s as well. Nearly 200 Jews had been arrested for Zionist activities by 1948.<sup>29</sup> Primarily Jewish intellectuals who had belonged to social organisations during the period of the independent Republic of Lithuania fell victim to persecution during the period when anti-Semitism was gathering strength in 1949–1953. In addition, Jews who had lived and studied abroad, and those who had relatives abroad, as well as former entrepreneurs fell victim to repressions. Jews who had worked in leading positions in the Party and state apparatus were not spared from persecution either. Such Jews were in both Latvia and Lithuania.

The persecution of Jews and forms of manifestation of state anti-Semitism can be found in post-war Party personnel policy in Estonia analogously to its southern neighbours. Regardless of the fact that Jews

<sup>18</sup> *Eesti A & O*, compiled and edited by S. Noor, Tallinn, 1993, p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Emanuel Nodel, "Life and Death of Estonian Jewry", *Estonian Jewish Museum*, <<http://eja.pri.ee/history/Nodel.pdf>>, (accessed 14 October 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Read concerning Jewish cultural autonomy: *Vähemusrahvuste kultuurielu Eesti Vabariigis, 1918–1940 : dokumente ja materjale* (Cultural Life of National Minorities in the Republic of Estonia, 1918–1940 : Documents and Materials), compiled by A. Matsulevit , Tallinn, 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Olaf Kuuli, "1953. aasta EKP materjale sirvides" (Perusing ECP Materials from 1953), *Quarterly Tuna*, No. 2, 2001, pp. 90–94.

<sup>22</sup> Triin Soonsein, *Rahva meeleolud eestis 1953. aastal : bakalaureusetöö* (Moods of the Population in Estonia in 1953 : Bachelor's thesis), Tartu, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Irène Šneidre, "Political Trials against Jews In Latvia (1944–1952)" in *Holokausta izpetes problemas Latvija : starptautiskas konferences referati 2000. gada 16.–17. oktobris, Rīga un petījumi par Holokaustu Latvija = The issues of Holocaust research in Latvia : reports of an International Conference 16–17 October 2000*, Rīga, 2001, pp. 328–349; Leo Dribins, Armands Gūtmanis, Maris Vestermanis, *Latvia's Jewish Community : History, Tragedy, Revival*, Rīga, 2001, pp. 64–65.

<sup>24</sup> Vytautas Tininis, *Komunistinio režimo nusikaltimai Lietuvoje 1944–1953 : Sovietų Sąjungos politinių struktūrų, vietinių jų padalinių bei kolaborantų vaidmuo vykstant nusikaltimus 1944–1953 m. II Tomas. Istorinė studija ir faksimilinių dokumentų rinkinys = The crimes of the communist regime in Lithuania in 1944–1953 : the role of the political bodies, their local subdivisions and collaborators of the Soviet Union in committing crimes in 1944–1953. Volume 2, a historical study and a set of documents in facsimile*, Vilnius, 2003, pp. 63–67.

<sup>25</sup> 36,592 according to the census of 1959.

<sup>26</sup> Approximately 10,000 Jews lived in Lithuania in 1946.

<sup>27</sup> Irène Šneidre, "Political Trials against Jews In Latvia", p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> L. Dribins, A. Gūtmanis, M. Vestermanis, *Latvia's Jewish Community*, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> V. Tininis, *Komunistinio režimo nusikaltimai Lietuvoje*, pp. 63–67.

did not belong to the government of the ESSR, their proportion in the Communist Party compared to their proportion in the population was significantly larger. Of the 2409 communists registered as members of the ECP in 1945, 69 were Jews. The number of Jews grew along with the increase in the number of Party members, and their proportion consistently remained near 3%. For example, 510 of the 17,639 members of the ECP in 1950 were Jews. The growth in the number of Jews in the Party was inhibited in the early 1950s. There were 573 Jewish communists in the membership of the ECP in early 1954 (the ECP had 21,229 members at the same time).<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, mostly Jews who had grown up and been active in the Republic of Estonia, whom the authorities associated with Zionist activity either personally or through relatives, fell victim to repressions and purges in personnel. Another important accusation was doing business in the Republic of Estonia. Zionist accusations were mostly supplemented by the ownership of stock or shares, enterprises or real estate. As in Latvia, Jews who had survived the German occupation were also arrested in Estonia and were accused of collaboration with the Germans. For example, two Jewish women were arrested on 12 November 1944. They were released in February of 1945 already.<sup>31</sup>

## THE CASE OF THE AISENSTADT FAMILY<sup>32</sup>

Conflicts typical of many Jewish families were manifested in the Aisenstadt family, which lived in the Republic of Estonia. Namely, Hirsh Aisenstadt<sup>33</sup> was a prominent public figure and businessman in the Republic of Estonia. He was the chairman of the Jewish Cultural Self-Administration for 15 years, the director of the (Estonian Petroleum) joint-stock company based on American capital, and the con-

sultant for the Shell company local office.<sup>34</sup> Pekka Erelt, who has written about the living conditions of Jews in Tallinn, has claimed that Aisenstadt was an important taxpayer for the Republic of Estonia because he paid 3000–4000 kroons in income tax annually.<sup>35</sup> Yet his son Leo Aisenstadt grew up to be a communist, who as a member of the illegal Estonian Communist Party (hereinafter referred to as the ECP) did not recognise the state in which he was born. Leo Aisenstadt joined the ECP in 1936 and was also a member of the association of left-wing Jews in Estonia known as 'Licht'.<sup>36</sup> Leo Aisenstadt graduated from the University of Basel as an economics major. Aisenstadt wrote in his life story for the ECP that he turned away from the Zionist movement towards Marxism while he was living in Switzerland.<sup>37</sup> Aisenstadt's 'conversion' most likely took place due to anti-Semitism in Germany, which he experienced during his studies and trips to Central Europe. His circle of acquaintances definitely also influenced him. There is no direct information concerning his recruitment by Soviet foreign intelligence.<sup>38</sup>

However much father and son Aisenstadt differed from each other in terms of their views of the world, it seems that the growing threat for Jews coming from Germany drew communists and people fighting for the Jewish state and culture nearer to each other. Stalinist Soviet nationalities policy contributed to this, mobilising first and foremost representatives of minority nationalities who had previous sympathy towards the USSR in areas occupied in 1939–1940. Many local Jews supported Soviet power in Estonia, as was the case in other occupied and annexed territories elsewhere in 1939–1940.<sup>39</sup> On the one hand, this was manifested by persons entering the service of the new regime in the economic, Party ideology and administrative apparatus, as a result of which negative attitudes towards Jews apparently spread among Estonians, according to Anton Weiss-Wendt.<sup>40</sup> Yet there were also those among

<sup>30</sup> Коммунистическая Партия Эстонии в цифрах, 1920–1980 : сборник статистических данных (Estonian Communist Party in Figures, 1920–1980 : Collection of Statistical Data), Tallinn, 1983, pp. 108ff.

<sup>31</sup> *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis. 2. köide* (Political arrests in Estonia under Soviet occupation. Vol. 2), compiled by L. Oispuu, Tallinn, 1998, pp. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Cross-reference Olev Liivik, Estonian Communist (Bolshevik) Party Central Committee 8th Plenum in 1950 and the "Estonian Affair" 1949–1952. RISTVIIDE

<sup>33</sup> The German version of the name "Eisenstadt" is also used.

<sup>34</sup> Investigation file of Girš Eisenstadt, Department of the Estonian State Archives (*Eesti Riigiarhiivi filiaal*, hereinafter ERAF) 130SM-1-1406.

<sup>35</sup> Pekka Erelt, "Jutude Tallinn" (The Tallinn of Jews), *Weekly Eesti Ekspress*, 25 January 2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Estonia 1940–1945 : reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*, Tallinn, 2005, p. 1130.

<sup>37</sup> Leo Aisenstadt's personal Party file concerning his specific affairs in connection with his Party career, ERAF 1-7-126, pp. 8ff.

<sup>38</sup> Although the names of his references for Party membership may allude to this. See below.

<sup>39</sup> See Dov Levin, *Baltic Jews under the Soviets, 1940–1946*, Jerusalem, 1994; Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils : Eastern European Jewry under Soviet rule, 1939–1941*, Jerusalem, 1995.

the Jews who expressed their sympathies altogether demonstratively. Namely, some Jews are said to have greeted the members of Red Army armoured units with 'exuberant kisses' in Latvia in the summer of 1940.<sup>41</sup> Estonia was no exception either. The Jewish Cultural Self-Administration, created in the Republic of Estonia, and shut down in July of 1940 after the Soviet annexation, set about collaborating with the occupying powers. The daily newspaper (People's Voice) wrote on 29 July 1940 about the last meeting of the Jewish Cultural Self-Administration, where the Jewish Cultural Self-Administration was terminated and the meeting was closed with a rendition of the . Whereas the preceding cultural autonomy was characterised as having been 'hated', which had allegedly oppressed Jewish national culture through the Zionist movement.<sup>42</sup>

Soviet-minded sentiments spread particularly among younger generation Jews with left-wing views, among them Leo Aisenstadt, who ripped the national flag of the Republic of Estonia down from (Tall Hermann) Tower together with his companions on 21 June 1940.<sup>43</sup> Leo Aisenstadt nevertheless did not become a first class communist. Prior to the outbreak of war between Germany and the USSR, he worked as the editor of newspaper Трудовой путь (~ Working Path) and as ESSR Deputy People's Commissar for Finance. Yet his position could have saved Hirsh Aisenstadt, who was an engineer at , from repressions.<sup>44</sup> Owing to his activities in the Republic of Estonia, he should have been among the first Jews to be repressed – approximately 400 Estonian Jews were deported to Siberia along with other Estonians in June of 1941, which made up nearly 10% of Estonia's Jewish population.<sup>45</sup>

Both Aisenstadts succeeded in evacuating from Estonia at the beginning of the war. The younger Aisenstadt continued his career in the Party, and the older Aisenstadt worked as an engineer in the rear area in the USSR. After returning to Estonia, Leo Aisenstadt continued ideological work, working at

the daily newspaper. In 1947, he was approved as the editor of the journal (Estonian Bolshevik). Hirsh Aisenstadt worked at after the war and retired in 1946.

Repressions of the Aisenstadts began in 1949 and can be associated with the persecution of Jews in the USSR. As characteristic of the Stalinist USSR, the formal grounds for trying the case was a complaint written by Oskar Sepre concerning Leo Aisenstadt.<sup>46</sup> It called attention to the activities of Leo Aisenstadt's father in the Republic of Estonia and asserted that Leo Aisenstadt had written 'employee' instead of 'capitalist' as his father's status, which is what he actually was, when filling out his personal data questionnaire. In addition, Sepre had ascertained that Leo Aisenstadt had allowed his father to write articles in the , which he initialled himself and paid himself fees for those articles. On top of this, the unsuitable life story background of Leo Aisenstadt's wife, the Estonian writer Leida Kibuvits, was pointed out.<sup>47</sup> Leo Aisenstadt's case was on the agenda of the ECP CC Bureau meeting on 29 June 1949. Leo Aisenstadt was also summoned to the deliberation of his case. Four main points of accusation stood out in the Bureau as follows:

- 1) his father was a business magnate,
- 2) he was a known Zionist figure,
- 3) he allowed his father to write articles in Eesti Bolševik,
- 4) hiding his social background.

The last point appeared to be the most telling fault for the members of the Bureau because people from a 'capitalist' background were 'class strangers' and as such had no place in the Party. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that those who spoke at the meeting did not express anti-Semitism. The fact that Aisenstadt was a Jew was not mentioned at all. The Valga County Party Committee 1st Secretary of that time Aleksei Ovsjannikov altogether acknowledged his contribution in the underground communist movement within the Zionist movement.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Anton Weiss-Wendt, "The Soviet Occupation of Estonia in 1940–41 and the Jews", *Periodical Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, No. 12, 1998, pp. 308–325.

<sup>41</sup> D. Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> "Juudi kultuuroromavalitsus likvideerub. Juudi kultuurnõukogu viimane istung lõppes internatsionaaliga" (Jewish cultural self-administration is liquidated. The final session of the Jewish Cultural Council ended with the singing of the Internationale), *Daily Rahva Hääli*, 29 July 1940.

<sup>43</sup> Peeter Kaasik, Meelis Maripuu, Toomas Hiio, "21 June 1940 in Tallinn and Elsewhere in Estonia" in *Estonia 1940–1945*, Tallinn, 2006, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Investigation file of Girš Eisenstadt, ERAF 130SM-1-1406.

<sup>45</sup> Meelis Maripuu, "Execution of Estonian Jews in Local Detention Institutions in 1941–1942" in *Estonia 1940–1945*, p. 651.

<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, the actual letter written by Sepre, the Deputy Chairman of the ESSR Council of Ministers until 1948, has thus far not been found. Sepre's remarks concerning Aisenstadt are summarised in Leo Aisenstadt's file in his dismissal from the position of editor of periodical *Eesti Bolševik*, see: ERAF 1-7-126, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Leida Kibuvits's ex-husband was an officer in the *Omakaitse* (Home Guard). Leida Kibuvits was accused of publishing proze and poetry hostile to the USSR during the Soviet occupation. – ERAF 1-7-126, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Stenographic record of an ECP CC Bureau session, 29 June 1949, ERAF 1-4-873, pp. 251–273.

The ECP CC Secretary in the field of propaganda and agitation Ivan Kabin emphasised that the members of the Central Committee were aware of Aisenstadt's background but they put more stock in his underground work. The result of the deliberations was that the decision was made to dismiss Aisenstadt from his position as editor of , which was motivated by the fact that he concealed his social background and his father's previous activity, and the loss of political trust for reasons relating to his private life. The Party Board affiliated with the ECP CC was assigned to further check his earlier activity in underground work in the Republic of Estonia.<sup>49</sup> This was only a postponement. One month later on 30 July 1949, Aisenstadt was expelled from the Party for deceiving the Party, for connections with 'foreign elements', and for using his father, a 'figure in the Zionist movement', as a contributor to the journal that he headed.<sup>50</sup> On 6 December 1949, ESSR State Prosecutor's Office investigator of more important cases Sõrmus initiated a criminal case concerning Aisenstadt under the criteria of article 109 of the Russian SFSR Criminal Code.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of the fact that the criminal case was brought due to the 'abuse of position', the court file also contains some materials concerning Hirsh Aisenstadt – the investigation organs were interested in how many articles Hirsh Aisenstadt had written for the journal , which were published under Leo Aisenstadt's name. The elder Aisenstadt confessed to only one article entitled "The Struggle Came Later", since he claimed that he had written the remainder of the articles together with his son.<sup>52</sup>

The ESSR Supreme Court Criminal Cases Counsel handed down its verdict on 4 February 1950.<sup>53</sup> Leo Aisenstadt was arrested in the courtroom in connection with being found guilty of 'abuse of position' according to article 109 of the Russian SFSR Criminal Code and was sentenced to 8 years in correctional labour camp together with deprivation of rights for 3 years. Hirsh Aisenstadt's contribution to the journal was not mentioned in the verdict. The court decision stated the motivation of his guilt as paying fees to permanent and temporary employees of the

editorial office for fictitious translations during the time when he was the editor of . Fees were not paid to the employees, but rather were accumulated to form an 'illegal cashbox' to cover current management expenses.<sup>54</sup> A second episode of guilt involved paying additional fees to the Jew Josif Markovitch for editing articles, which was part of his ordinary job duties. Aisenstadt pleaded guilty only of violating financial discipline in connection with the 'illegal cashbox'. When the court decision was reviewed 40 years later in 1990, it turned out that the court did not seek testimony from the persons who received the fees, and did not sufficiently analyse the evidence.<sup>55</sup>

Considering the sentences meted out to members of the ESSR government, who were accused of 'bourgeois nationalism' in the early 1950s, Aisenstadt's sentence was relatively lenient. Yet this is as far as his more lenient treatment goes. Since he was sentenced to imprisonment for less than 10 years, he was released ahead of time in March of 1953 on the basis of amnesty, but unlike many persons convicted on the basis of article 58 of the Russian SFSR Criminal Code, he was not rehabilitated. He was not reinstated to the Communist Party, either. In 1955, the ECP CC produced the fact that Aisenstadt's references when joining the ECP had been Karl Säre and Johannes Meerits-Looring as the reason for refusing to reinstate him.<sup>56</sup> Aisenstadt's court verdict was not revoked until 1990 by decree of the Estonian Supreme Court Presidium, and he was politically rehabilitated.<sup>57</sup>

After the arrest of Leo Aisenstadt on 4 February 1950, two persons close to him were arrested within ten days. Hirsh Aisenstadt was arrested on 9 February 1950 and charged according to article 58-4 of the Russian SFSR Criminal Code. He was charged with directing large foreign companies during the era of the independent Republic of Estonia, being a houseowner, and organising and leading 'Jewish autonomy' for 15 years until 1940. In addition to the above-mentioned accusations, he allegedly led

49 Decision of the ECP CC Bureau, 29 June 1949, ERAF 1-7-126, p. 2.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 179ff.

51 Leo Aisenstadt's court file in the conduct of business of the ESSR Supreme Court Criminal Cases Counsel, Estonian State Archives (*Eesti Riigiarhiiv*, hereinafter ERA) R 280-8-501, p. 1.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 94–94v.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 176–176v.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 101. It came to light from Aisenstadt's court file that the "illegal cashbox" was used to purchase coloured pencils, paper, but also an automobile, for which there was no money in the budget.

55 Decision of the ECP CC Bureau, 29 June 1949, pp. 171–175.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 108–110.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 181.

Zionist nationalist movement and appealed to Jews to emigrate to Palestine.<sup>58</sup> His persecution began in the summer of 1949 with the termination of payment of his old age pension. The decision issued on 7 July 1949 by the minister of social insurance indicates that the payment of his old age pension was terminated because Aisenstadt did not have the required length of employment.<sup>59</sup>

Hirsh Aisenstadt was convicted of nationalist activity hostile to the Soviet Union on 17 February 1951 by the USSR MGB Special Counsel according to articles 58-4 and 58-10 section 1 of the Russian SFSR Criminal Code. He was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in correctional labour camp.<sup>60</sup> Aisenstadt pleaded guilty only to owning anti-Soviet literature. He appealed to the USSR minister of internal affairs on 12 April 1953 with a petition to alter the court decision and release him. Aisenstadt explained in his appeal that his 'Jewish social activity' ended in 1940 when he did not live in the USSR. In addition, Aisenstadt explained that he was not hostile to the Soviet Union. He was released in the winter of 1955 and rehabilitated.

Leo Aisenstadt's Estonian wife Leida Kibuvits was arrested on 13 February 1950. She was charged with working as an accounts clerk in the headquarters of the (Home Guard) 'military-fascist organisation' in 1942–1943 and with having a hostile attitude towards Soviet power. The ESSR Supreme Court Criminal Cases Counsel sentenced Kibuvits to MVD prison camp for 25 years according to articles 58-3 and 58-10 section 2 of the Russian SFSR Criminal Code. She was released in 1954.<sup>61</sup>

## ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE EARLY 1950S AND REACTIONS IN ESTONIA TO THE 'DOCTORS'-SABOTEURS PLOT'

The activities of Jewish functionaries were painstakingly monitored in ESSR Party and state apparatuses in the mid-1940s already. It appears that pri-

marily representatives from institutions of control in Moscow were assigned to do it. Representatives of the CPSU CC Personnel Administration sent a secret report concerning the results of the monitoring of the work of the ESSR Ministry of Internal Affairs in the field of personnel to their superior on 22 June 1947. Among other things, the report stated that Beltchikov,<sup>62</sup> who worked as adjutant to the Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksander Resev, had allegedly been an active member of a Jewish Zionist organisation until 1940. It was written in the report that Beltchikov's sister was married to the head of the ESSR MVD automobile transportation department Oreshkin.<sup>63</sup> Beltchikov's sister allegedly received packages from American Jewish organisations by way of Tallinn's Jewish congregation.<sup>64</sup> were initially not drawn concerning Beltchikov and Oreshkin, but both were removed from the MGB system in 1949 due to the loss of confidence in them. As far as Beltchikov was concerned, it was also discovered that he had run a shop in Tartu in 1939.<sup>65</sup>

There are also Jews who worked in lower positions whose dismissals did not include references to nationality, but rather to Zionist activity, concealment of social background, and family ties abroad. On 24 December 1949, the ECP CC Bureau deliberated expelling Jakov Aranovitch from the Party due to concealing his social background. Aranovitch had worked in the fishing and food industry system. When he joined the Party in 1945, he allegedly concealed the fact that his father had owned a sales kiosk and that his sister had emigrated to Finland in 1939. Although the ECP Tallinn Committee expelled Aranovitch from the Party, the ECP CC Bureau did not approve the decision and he was given a reprimand.<sup>66</sup>

Jews were also declared untrustworthy within the framework of the 'bourgeois nationalism' campaign. The Chekist Idel Jakobson, who had participated in crimes against humanity since 1940 and had been the head of the ESSR MGB investigation department in 1944–1950, was dismissed from the

<sup>58</sup> Investigation file of Girš Eisenstadt, ERAF 130SM-1-1406, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> A length of employment of 24 years and 5 months was written in his service record in 1941, but the years worked as director during the era of the independent Republic of Estonia were subtracted from his service record in 1949.

<sup>60</sup> Investigation file of Girš Eisenstadt, pp. 151–153.

<sup>61</sup> Investigation file of Leida Kibuvits, ERAF 129SM-1-4045, pp. 1, 3, 87, 88, 104.

<sup>62</sup> Apparently Rafail Beltchikov. This assertion was true because Beltchikov belonged to the Zionist student fraternity *Hasmonaea* when he studied at the University of Tartu in 1935–1940. See *Album Academicum Universitatis Tartuensis 1918–1944*, Tartu, 1994, # 15078.

<sup>63</sup> Aleksandr Oreshkin.

<sup>64</sup> CPSU CC Personnel Administration deputy department head Lukjanov's and inspector Obtatsov's report to CPSU CC Personnel Administration deputy head Nikitin, 22 July 1947, ERAF 1-5(vana)-12, pp. 43–61.

<sup>65</sup> Personnel file of Aleksandr Oreshkin, ERAF 1SM-2-11515, pp. 1–44.

<sup>66</sup> Jakov Aranovitch's personal Party file concerning his specific affairs in connection with his Party career, ERAF 1-7-393.

ESSR MGB system in 1950.<sup>67</sup> Jakobson worked in less prominent positions in 1950–1953 as the deputy head of the ESSR Arts Administration and thereafter as a department head in the ESSR Ministry of Social Insurance. Jakobson was expelled from the Party on 17 February 1953 at the height of the state anti-Semitism campaign in connection with the ‘Doctors’ Plot’ “because of a weakening of political vigilance and relations with ‘socially foreign’ persons”. Jakobson had taken persons under his protection who had been deported from Estonia in 1941. He and his wife had petitioned the ESSR Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1950 not to arrest or send out of Tallinn the wife and daughter of former big businessman Isaak Furmanski. Furmanski’s wife and daughter had secretly returned to Estonia from Siberia in 1947. Furthermore, while he was working for the MGB, Jakobson had petitioned Boris Kumm to prevent Jelena Falshtein-Levina, her mother and sister from being deported from Estonia because of her father, who had been arrested in 1941. As an MGB officer, Jakobson had not given notification of gatherings at the residence of someone named Perelman. Jakobson not only knew about this, he personally also visited Perelman. Perelman ran an illegal Jewish canteen.<sup>68</sup> All the accusations were associated with Jews. Jakobson was a valued Chekist, and thus was nevertheless spared from being arrested, and was reinstated into the Party in 1956.

After the ECP CC 8th Plenum, compromising material was gathered in many ESSR offices. Some Jews in the Ministry of Justice system came under the scrutiny of the MGB. A statement signed on 21 April 1950 by ESSR Minister of State Security Moskalenko listed four suspicious employees of Jewish nationality: Heinar Grabe, Isaak Bulkin, Ber Gasman and Bernhard Markovitch.<sup>69</sup> They were accused of Zionist activity and connections abroad. The MGB was interested most in Heinar (until 1937 Haim Meier) Grabe, who was deputy chairman of the Supreme Court. Compromising circumstances in his case were membership in a Zionist organisation

and the fact that his father was a former rabbi and butcher shopkeeper.<sup>70</sup> Grabe was dismissed from his position but he was not repressed. Isaak Bulkin was a lawyer and was expelled from among candidate members of the CPSU for being a member of a Zionist organisation. He was also reported to have defended Trotskyism and immorality. Bulkin had already been expelled from the Party once before in 1941 because he was the son of the owner of a business and had belonged to a Zionist party, “which worked against the Jewish workers’ movement”.<sup>71</sup> As in 1941, Bulkin was spared from repressions in 1950 as well.

The functionary of Jewish nationality occupying the highest official position to be removed from his position during the ‘bourgeois nationalism’ campaign was Daniil Rudnev (originally Gurevitch). He worked as the editor of the newspaper (Soviet Estonia) until 25 January 1950. A memorandum dated 26 January 1950 from CPSU CC Propaganda and Agitation instructor Zhikharev to CPSU CC Secretary Suslov, who was not favourably disposed towards Jews, described at considerable length Rudnev’s activity at the newspaper.<sup>72</sup> The memorandum indicated that Rudnev hired ‘persons foreign to the Soviet people’ to work at the newspaper. The list named Jews without exception, of whom Leo Aisenstadt’s brother A. Aisenstadt, who worked as a press photographer, was clearly considered to be the most dangerous. Unlike his brother, he was not a Party member, but he had been a member of the (Defence League) in the Republic of Estonia, and was married to Renata Gutkin, who, like him, was also the daughter of a big capitalist and worked in the editorial office of the same newspaper. The memorandum also mentioned “the son of a big capitalist” Zaidelsohn, the son of a tanner Sundelevitch, the owner of an advertising bureau Bartashevitch, the cosmopolitan Levin, and other Jews whom Rudnev had hired after the war.<sup>73</sup> Rudnev’s serious error was considered to be that he did not expose the ‘sons of capitalists’, but rather gave some of them recommendations to join the Party.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>67</sup> ECP CC Bureau made this decision on 7 February 1950.

<sup>68</sup> Valdur Ohmann, *Eesti NSV Siseministeeriumi institutsionaalne areng ja arhivaalid (1940–1954) : magistritöö* (The institutional development and the records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Estonian SSR (1940–1954) : Masters thesis), Tartu, 2000, pp. 150ff.

<sup>69</sup> Signed statement from ESSR Minister of State Security Moskalenko to ECP CC Secretary Käbin about compromising materials concerning employees of the Ministry of Justice, 21 April 1950, ERAF 131SM-1-201, pp. 468–480.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> ECP CC Bureau session record No. 8, 15 May 1941, ERAF 1-4-74, p. 66; Isaak Bulkin could not have belonged to a Zionist party because there was no such party in Estonia. He could, however, have belonged to some Zionist organisation.

<sup>72</sup> N. Zhikharev’s memorandum to CPSU CC Secretary Suslov, 26 January 1950, Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History 17-118-335, pp. 23–31.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> One of them was J. Zaidelson, who was expelled from the Party by the decision issued on 27 April 1950 by the ECP CC Bureau, but the expulsion procedure beginning with the primary Party organisation was initiated “when facts came to light”. – *EKP KK büroo istungite regestrid. I : 1940–1954* (Registries of the ECP CC Bureau sessions, Part 1, 1940–1954), compiled by T. Tannberg, Tartu, 2006, p. 364.

It is interesting that the memorandum referred to the exposure of Leo Aisenstadt and his expulsion from the Party, which clearly proves the systematic persecution of Jews working in leading positions. The author of the memorandum asserted that after the Aisenstadt incident, Rudnev decided to 'purge' the editorial office of politically foreign elements and fired A. Aisenstadt's wife Gutkin and Sundelevitch "of his own free will". Regardless of that, there were a large number of people in the editorial office who were not politically reliable. As a matter of course, the substance of Rudnev's work in managing the newspaper and his lack of authority, which came to light in carelessness, was also disparaged. Namely, Rudnev had lost his Party card in 1947, but he was issued a new one.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly to Jakobson, Rudnev's persecution also took place in several stages. This was a frequent pattern in the case of Estonian communists as well.<sup>76</sup> Rudnev was expelled from the CPSU by the decision issued on 19 January 1953 by the ECP Tallinn Oblast Committee, at the peak of the campaign of persecution of Jews. This time he was, among other things, also accused of receiving a personal identification document in the name of "Rudnev" as a correspondent in 1942, which was actually his pen name. Later he allegedly illegally changed his name from Gurevitch to Rudnev and applied to change all his documents accordingly.<sup>77</sup> Rudnev was shown mercy after Stalin's death. An ECP CC Bureau decision amended the ECP Tallinn Oblast Committee decision of 16 June 1953, and Rudnev was reinstated to the Party with length of service from 1939 because he allegedly admitted his mistakes.

The statewide anti-Semitic campaign began on 13 January 1953 with the TASS announcement of the arrest of the 'group of doctors-saboteurs', which appealed to the people to be politically vigilant. The campaign immediately assumed an anti-Jewish tone because the arrested Jewish Kremlin doctors were also accused by the media of carrying out American and British intelligence assignments through a bourgeois-nationalist organisation known

as Joint.<sup>78</sup> Leading figures of the USSR headed by Andrei Zhdanov allegedly died as a result of allegedly incorrectly applied medical treatments. The editorial "To Put a Stop to Stupidity in our Ranks" was published in daily newspaper on 20 January. Among other things, it attempted to convince readers that all the participants in the so-called terrorist group of doctors-saboteurs were in the service of foreign intelligence agencies. The name of the 'international Jewish bourgeois-nationalist organisation Joint' was also repeated.<sup>79</sup>

As the state campaign started up, local information was demanded concerning the moods and opinions of the people. The central organs required informational reports first and foremost to keep the campaign under control and to prevent unwelcome incidents. Beginning on 13 January 1953, 14 informational reports were sent to Moscow from the ECP CC over the course of 17 days.<sup>80</sup> Estonians, Russians and also some Jews took up points of view in these reports concerning the Jewish doctors. Yet they also contained expressions of opinion concerning Jews as a people that frequently reflected anti-Semitic judgements of character and even appeals for the repression of Jews. In the opinion of Olaf Kuuli, many expressions of opinion were written by Party employees themselves because they were trite and resembled slogans.<sup>81</sup> Most of the people quoted in the informational reports demanded the most severe penalties for the Kremlin doctors as traitors of the homeland and appealed to everyone to be vigilant as the USSR press had taught them to be.<sup>82</sup> It was written that Jews had never wanted to work and had always lived off others. Even in bourgeois Estonia already, they were either the owners of enterprises or at least engineers. They held high positions during the era of Soviet power as well. In addition, the government of the USSR was praised for having done a lot of good for Jews. The Jews, however, did not know how to appreciate it and turned into the agents of imperialists.<sup>83</sup> The more hostile declarations appealed to the people to destroy the Jews. A ship captain named Romanov declared that if a pogrom were to break out, then he would be prepared to hang Jews at his ship.<sup>84</sup>

75 N. Zhiharev's memorandum to CPSU CC Secretary Suslov, 26 January 1950, pp. 28, 29.

76 Cross-reference to Aleksander Velman's question. – Olev Liivik, *Estonian Communist (Bolshevist) Party Central Committee 8th Plenum in 1950 and the "Estonian Criminal Case" 1949–1952*.

77 ECP CC Bureau session record No. 33, 16 June 1953, ERAF 1-4-1536, p. 32.

78 O. Kuuli, "1953. aasta EKP materjale sirvides", pp. 90, 91.

79 Daily *Rahva Hääl*, 25 February 1953.

80 O. Kuuli, "1953. aasta EKP materjale sirvides", p. 91.

81 Ibid.

82 T. Soonsein, *Rahva meeolud eestis 1953. aastal*, p. 10.

83 Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

84 O. Kuuli, "1953. aasta EKP materjale sirvides", p. 91.

'Vigilant' citizens who came into contact with Jews for the most part diligently kept an eye on what kind of attitude the Jews took. Appraisals were predominantly ill disposed. Workers at the Tartu Leather Footwear Factory allegedly asked workers' correspondent Moglinka, who was Jewish, if there was anything new written in the paper after the exposure of the 'doctors-saboteurs'. The correspondent allegedly responded: "No, there's nothing interesting in the paper."<sup>85</sup> On the same day, workers had noticed that Jews gathered in the plant's cloth cutting shop on the day the editorial was published and discussed something in their own language.

Most of the Jews quoted in the informational reports naturally condemned the actions of the 'doctors-saboteurs'. The deputy head of the Tartu Clinical Hospital neurological department Heins was an exception. He allegedly said: "I don't believe that. It can't be so, that is wrong."<sup>86</sup> At the same time, some Jews complained of discrimination at the workplace, which even Party organs admitted. The head of the (Dawn) local industry enterprise supply department in Valga region Abram Kazanski resentfully told workers that after the publication of the announcement about the 'doctors-saboteurs', people started persecuting him because of his nationality. He was not allowed to work and was discriminated against. The ECP Valga Regional Committee ascertained that the price of the amount of coal missing from the storeroom was taken from Kazanski.<sup>87</sup>

At the same time, there is little data concerning the arrest of Jews during the 'doctors-saboteurs' campaign. A man named Boriss Reznik was arrested on 12 February 1953 and sentenced on 22 April 1953 to 10 years imprisonment for anti-Soviet agitation.

Reznik was released in 1955.<sup>88</sup> A Jewish mercantile employee named Isak Gronimov was arrested on 21 February 1953 and accused of Zionism. He was released on 5 June 1953 without being convicted.<sup>89</sup>

The massive anti-Semitic campaign lasted for only a few months. The repression of Jews stopped after Stalin's death. A USSR MVD announcement appeared on 4 April 1953 stating that the Jewish 'doctors-saboteurs' were innocent and released from prison.<sup>90</sup>

## SUMMARY

There is no information concerning more comprehensive repressions of Jews in the post-Second World War Estonia. Selective repressions formally did not take place on the basis of nationality, but rather on the basis of class and due to accusations of Zionist activity. There was no widespread common anti-Semitism in Estonia that would have led to the discrimination and persecution of Jews. At the same time, the removal of Jews from security and justice organs for previous Zionist activities, social background and connections abroad is noticeable in the late 1940s. This is particularly noticeable when the campaign against 'bourgeois nationalism' became more acute in 1950 and when the 'Estonian criminal case' was brought. The criminal case involving 'doctors-saboteurs' of Jewish descent fabricated in Moscow in the early 1953 also directly affected Estonia. The controlled expressions of public opinion that were clearly anti-Semitic were influenced during this anti-Semitic campaign orchestrated by the authorities. The discrimination of Jews in official positions expanded during the first few months of 1953, and isolated repressions were carried out.

<sup>85</sup> T. Soonsein, *Rahva meeleolud eestis 1953. aastal*, p. 15.

<sup>86</sup> O. Kuuli, "1953. aasta EKP materjale sirvides", p. 91.

<sup>87</sup> T. Soonsein, *Rahva meeleolud eestis 1953. aastal*, p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> *Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis*. Vol. 2, p. 422.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>90</sup> O. Kuuli, "1953. aasta EKP materjale sirvides", p. 91.