

The Hlukhiv Massacre, March 1918 (McGeever, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution*, pp. 46-48)

The most violent manifestation of 'Red antisemitism' in 1918 was undoubtedly the pogrom in early March in Hlukhiv, a city in the east of the Chernihiv region of Ukraine, close to the Russian border. Hlukhiv was one of the largest and most ethnically diverse cities in north-east Ukraine: according to the 1897 census, the city had just over 15,000 inhabitants: 8,600 Ukrainians, 2,200 Russians and around 4,000 Jews. In January 1918, at the tail end of the 'triumphal march of Soviet power', Hlukhiv was taken by a Red Guard unit under the command of V. O. Tsyganok. In early March, the Reds found themselves pushed out of the city by the 300-strong Ukrainian Baturinskii regiment which sought to 'cleanse the city of Bolshevism'. However, having regrouped on the outskirts of the city, the Bolsheviks soon joined forces with the Roslavl'skie Red Partisans, recently arrived from Kursk, and plans were put in place to recapture the city. After securing the support of local peasants, pro-Bolshevik forces mounted a successful assault on Hlukhiv, first taking the railway station, the post office and then other key points of the city.

1. How were the Red Guards able to seize control of Hlukhiv?

With power now established militarily, the Bolsheviks did not set out to intensify the class struggle or secure working-class hegemony as one might have expected; instead, the principal Bolshevik slogan after recapturing Hlukhiv was '*eliminate the bourgeoisie and the Zhidy!*' Eyewitness statements reveal the full extent of the horror unleashed. Firstly, with the Reds now firmly in control of the city, the Ukrainian Baturinskii regiment changed sides and aligned themselves with the Bolsheviks, proclaiming to the latter that they only fought against Soviet power in the first place because the *Zhidy* had paid them to do so. The Baturinskii troops thus seemed to be appealing to Bolshevik antisemitism in a bid to save themselves from punitive measures.

2. Who did the Red Guards associate Jews with in Hlukhiv?

After the regiment was incorporated, the now enlarged Red Guard unit proceeded to go from door to door, asking: 'Where do all the *Zhidy* live?' According to a contemporary eyewitness, many among the local Christian population pointed out the Jewish neighbourhoods to the Red Guards. In his memoir, written

in 1930, Rogatyns'kyi recalls that once they arrived, the Red Guards simply lined up entire Jewish families and shot them on the spot.

The pogrom started at 5 PM on 7 March, and over the course of the next two and a half days at least 100 of the town's Jewish inhabitants were murdered, perhaps many more. According to newspaper reports and eyewitness accounts, the town's entire Jewish intelligentsia were slaughtered, as was each and every Jewish schoolboy. Eight Jews were apparently thrown from a moving train, 70-year-old Rabbi Berel was shot and as many as 140 Jews were reportedly buried in a single mass grave. In one account, the Bundist Vladimir Kossovskii claimed that 'the street which housed the [local] soviet was literally sodden with Jewish blood'. As they ransacked Jewish homes and killed Jews, Red soldiers shouted, 'We are going to slaughter all the bourgeoisie and Zhidy!' When one Jew asked why they were being killed, soldiers reportedly answered, 'We've been given orders [from above] to kill all the Jews'.

3. What reasons did the Red Guards and their allies give for targeting Jews?

The complicity of the local Bolshevik regime in the violence is confirmed by other contemporary sources. For example, in a newspaper report in the Petrograd Yiddish daily *Unzer Togblat*, the unnamed author details the role of the local soviet in the violence. After two days of incessant killing, the soviet eventually issued the following order: 'Red Guards! Enough blood!' Yet this was by no means the end of the Hlukhiv massacre, for the very same Bolshevik commissars who called for the shootings to stop then immediately initiated large-scale lootings of Jewish property and homes. The local synagogue was destroyed and the Torah torn to pieces. Once the killing had stopped, the head of the local soviet then demanded (on the eve of Passover) that the remaining Jews hand over 10,000 rubbles; failure to do so, he warned, would see the violence resume. Meanwhile, Red Guard pogromists who had fallen in the struggle for power in Hlukhiv were given official burials in the town centre under a red banner bearing the words 'Long Live the International!' As is clear, in the case of Hlukhiv, Soviet power was secured by and through antisemitism.

4. How did local Bolshevik leaders encourage violence against Jews?