peasants' impoverishment by giving them alcoholic beverages on credit or in exchange for their pawning essential items. The peasants are thereby rendered incapable of managing their domestic economy.[7]

Spurred by Karneev's report, the Senate asked the governors of other provinces to submit their views on the Jewish question, in what was the first official survey of Imperial officials on the subject. The responses were universally unsympathetic in their assessment of the Jews' role in society, and in their prescription of restrictive measures.[8]

"The Defender of His People": Nota Notkin's Reform Projects

Nota Khaimovich Notkin entered the official discussion of the Jewish question at this tense and rather inhospitable moment, with a 1797 memorandum addressed to General Procurator Aleksei Kurakin, and submitted for consideration by the Tsar. In it, Notkin drew attention to the Jews' own acute poverty, examined its causes and harmful consequences, and made specific proposals for its alleviation.

Notkin's memorandum attributed the Jews' growing poverty to the restrictive legal measures taken against them in recent years: the prohibition on their trading in the cities of inner Russia, the expulsions of Jews from their long-standing places of residence in the villages, and the imposition of double taxation. These measures had caused thousands of Jews to lose their livelihoods, and had put tremendous financial burdens on the kahals. Inter alia, Notkin acknowledged that the Jews' economic hardships had also produced negative consequences for society at large. Jews had become increasingly concentrated in the leasing of taverns and the sale of alcohol, an activity which was not "useful to society," and many of them failed to pay taxes to the state treasury because of their financial plight.[9]

To address this crisis, Notkin proposed, first, the overall "equalization of [the Jews'] taxes with that of members of other religions," and second, an ambitious government program of retraining and resettlement. Specifically, he advocated the creation of Jewish colo-

nies in the territories of New Russia along the Black Sea, which would engage in animal husbandry (the breeding of cattle and sheep), crafts (the manufacture of cloths, ropes, and sails), and farming (including the planting of trees and vineyards). As an incentive for Jews to resettle in the south, colonists should be exempted from all state taxes for a number of years, following which they should be allowed to pay their taxes in kind, in the form of agricultural and industrial products. The colonists would eventually become full-fledged owners of their enterprises, with the right to sell them freely. Notkin was confident that the project would attract foreign (Jewish) investment, and would actually increase the treasury's income from Jewish taxation.[10]

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Notkin's memorandum was its deft use of contemporary absolutist and physiocratic ideas. The stated goal of his colonization plan was to render the Jews "good and useful citizens in society, and punctual tax-payers to the treasury." To achieve this goal, their lives needed to be rearranged so that they could "have sustenance from the labor of their hands" and engage in "useful work." Notkin accepted much of the late eighteenth-century criticism of Jewish involvement in the production and sale of alcohol, although his explanation of its causes and his prescription for its reform differed from that of Russian contemporaries. Following in the tradition of C. W. Dohm and Moses Mendelssohn, Notkin argued that the Jews were capable of economic reform, if only productive avenues of employment were opened up to them. His proposal to create Jewish agricultural and industrial colonies bore the influence of a similar effort undertaken by Joseph II of Austria in 1786.[11]

Notkin's memorandum was the first contribution by a Jew to the political debate on the Jewish question in Russia. Although neither Kurakin nor Tsar Paul responded in writing to his proposals, Notkin continued to be actively involved in the debate in subsequent years, when it assumed greater urgency and intensity.

In June 1800, the Senate dispatched Count Gavriil Derzhavin on his second official tour of Byelorussia, this time to investigate the shortage of bread in the region, and instructed him to pay special attention to the activities of the Jews, "who are a major cause of the peasants' ruination there." Derzhavin's report or "Opinion"

(the full title was "The Opinion of Senator Derzhavin Regarding the Avoidance of Grain Shortage in Byelorussia by Curing the Mercenary Trades of the Jews, and Regarding Their Reform, and Other Things") was a comprehensive Judeophobic tract. It presented a demonic image of the Jews, as the eternal enemies Christ and of mankind, as dishonest and avaricious parasites, and as an inherently criminal, immoral people. His concrete proposals to the Senate regarding the reform of the Jews' legal status were as follows: the abolition of the kahal and its replacement by a governmental "Protector of the Jews" in charge of their affairs; abolition of the Jews' right to vote and be elected in municipal elections; the forced deportation of "unnecessary Jews" from the villages, where they distilled and sold alcohol, to agricultural colonies in New Russia. He urged that the ban on Jewish residence in inner Russia be maintained and, indeed, strengthened, and that Jewish proselytizing activity be prohibited, as well as the employment of Christian servants by Jews.

Derzhavin also proposed strict state control over Jewish culture: outlawing traditional Jewish dress, requiring the education of children above age twelve in Russian state schools, strict censorship and control over the publication of Hebrew books, and a ban on importing such books from abroad. The "Opinion" was guided by a vision of isolating the Jews, restricting their harmful activities, and closely policing all aspects of their lives.[12]

Shortly after Derzhavin submitted his "Opinion," Tsar Paul died, and his report was left in limbo. In November 1802, the recently crowned Tsar Alexander I ordered the formation of the State Committee for the Organization of Jewish Life, whose task was to draft new, comprehensive legislation. The Committee consisted of Derzhavin (then Minister of Justice), Count Viktor Kochubei (then Minister of Internal Affairs), Mikhail Speranskii (then Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs), Count V. A. Zubov, and the Polish counts Adam Czartoryski and S. O. Potocki. In a sign of openness, Committee members were permitted to select deputies from among the "most enlightened Jews" to serve as advisers to the Committee, and Notkin was invited by Derzhavin to serve in that capacity. In his letter of invitation, Derzhavin acknowledged Notkin's "zeal on behalf of the general good, and useful propositions for the Jewish

people, which have reached the attention of His Imperial Highness."[13]

Some historians have concluded from the letter that Notkin and Derzhavin were on close friendly terms at the time, and that their relations soured only after the Committee's proceedings began. This seems unlikely, since Derzhavin's Judeophobic views were well known from his "Opinion." Derzhavin probably considered Notkin's appointment politically prudent, if not inevitable, since he was the foremost Jewish political leader, and had written a well-known memorandum on the Jews' economic reform. Derzhavin had no reason to fear that Notkin's opinions, as opposed to his own, would carry the day, since the Jewish deputies served only in an advisory capacity.[14]

One of Notkin's first actions following his appointment as deputy was to draw the Committee's attention to the fear and anxiety which its very creation had generated among Russian Jewry. He wrote to Count Kochubei—and not, interestingly enough, to his official "sponsor" Derzhavin—to advise him that the Jews were in a state of panic that the Committee intended to issue harsh decrees against them. In response to Notkin's appeal, Kochubei issued a reassuring circular letter in January 1803, which declared in part:

> By the establishment of a committee to oversee their affairs, it was not intended to hinder [the Jews'] position or diminish their essential privileges. On the contrary, through the examination of all circumstances, their better organization and tranquillity are sought.[15]

In May 1803, Notkin submitted a memorandum to the Committee regarding the Jews's "better organization and tranquillity." It offered a blueprint for reform which was diametrically opposed to Derzhavin's "Opinion" and the earlier anti-Jewish pronouncements of the Senate and provincial governors. Indeed, the memorandum can most profitably be read as a point-by-point response to Derzhavin's "Opinion."

Notkin emphatically denied that the Jews were morally defective, and that they were responsible for the ruination of the peasants.

> To consider the Jews as the only culpable ones for the poverty of the peasants is without foundation. In many places where there are Jews,

peasants live amid plenty, and on the contrary, in other places there are no Jews and the peasants suffer privation. . . . The abuses ascribed to the Jews are mostly unsubstantiated, and if there are abuses, they come solely from poverty. Therefore, in order to utilize the Jews for the benefit of the state and themselves, it is necessary to ward off their poverty.[16]

Notkin spoke out against the proposals to restrict the Jews' economic activity, noting that they would only aggravate Jewish poverty, and bring harm to other elements of society as well. If Jews were prohibited from leasing gentry properties and were expelled from the villages (as Derzhavin and others had suggested), one hundred thousand Jewish men, women, and children would be left homeless. Who would feed them? And if there were no Jewish inhabitants on gentry lands, the peasants would be deprived of an efficient way of disposing of their produce and purchasing finished goods. Scores of inns and taverns would be closed down, thereby hampering travelers in need of food and lodging, and harming the transport of goods.

In response to Derzhavin's proposal to forcibly deport large numbers of "unnecessary Jews" to agricultural colonies in the south, Notkin retreated from his own earlier enthusiasm for colonization. It would be enormously expensive to resettle and feed masses of Jews in New Russia, and to train them in agricultural work "to which they are unaccustomed and not inclined." He contended that the idea of turning the Jews into a people of farmers was "absurd," and that it was foolhardy to impose upon them the socioeconomic structure of other peoples. "It is impossible for everyone to lead the exact same kind of life."

Notkin proposed, instead, that government efforts concentrate on large-scale retraining of the Jews in crafts and light industry in their local dwelling places. Each Jewish community in the Empire would be required to establish its own factories, with the assistance of private Jewish capital and state funding. Poor Jews would be assigned to the factories as workers, and the factories themselves would be considered common communal property. As in his 1797 proposal, Notkin suggested that taxes be collected from the Jews in kind, in the form of industrial products, and he called once again for the elimination of the Jews' double taxation. He paid lip service to the idea of agrarianization by proposing that those Jews who

were interested in becoming farmers should be granted vacant Imperial lands in their province of residence and given technical assistance. But clearly Notkin placed his greatest hope on the prospect of industrialization, not agrarianization.[17]

Notkin's 1803 plan for the Jews' economic reform was not only more realistic than its 1797 predecessor, but also more ambitious. The earlier document had envisioned that the colonies along the Black Sea would serve as a socioeconomic safety valve, to absorb the Jews' excess population; it freely conceded that most Jews would neither move south nor change their occupations. The later project, on the other hand, proposed a mechanism for the radical occupational transformation of Russian Jewry as a whole, without the traumatic and costly endeavor of large-scale resettlement.

The 1803 memorandum did not limit itself to economic affairs, and included proposals for the reform of Jewish political institutions and culture as well. Notkin's ideas were clearly intended as an alternative to the harsh measures advocated by Derzhavin. Instead of abolishing the kahal, he suggested a system which would have merged Jewish self-governing bodies with the Imperial administration. Commissions of Jewish deputies would govern Jewish affairs in each province, under the supervision of the provincial governors. A governmental guardian, with direct access to the Tsar, would supervise Jewish affairs on the Imperial level. Notkin's system envisioned the preservation of a curtailed, but still significant, level of Jewish civil autonomy. Tax funds would be raised from the Jewish population by the state apparatus, and not the kahal, but the funds raised would be handed over to the Commissions of Jewish Deputies, who would disburse them as they saw fit—subject to the guardian's approval. The construction of factories, for instance, was to be planned and implemented by the Commissions of Jewish Deputies, but the plans would be subject to approval by the guardian.

Notkin's apparent goal was to devise a system in which Jewish autonomous bodies and the state apparatus worked in close cooperation with each other, rather than at cross-purposes. Reforms would be implemented by the Jewish leadership, and not imposed from above by the state.

This system was to be applied to the reform of Jewish education