

## The RYS Daily 3/25/07 Public and Political Action IX

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The edicts promulgated by the Russian government even penetrated to the private domain of Jewish law and custom. Here the Maskilim had a hand. In their periodicals they published articles pouring scorn and contempt upon Jewish practices, on the Talmud and the traditional Jewish educational system. Some even sent venomous letters to the government calling on them to intervene and bring "light" to the Jews by establishing government schools in all localities, to persecute the Chassidic Rebbes, to dismiss the rabbis — the eminent Torah scholars — from their posts, and to replace them with "doctors" imported from Germany; to force Jews to change their mode of dress; to cancel the permits granted to the traditional teachers (melamdim), to limit the number of books to be printed, etc."

The government acceded to their requests. It promulgated laws circumscribing the freedom of movement of traditional Jewry. A ukase was issued in 1844, requiring the Jews to change their clothing, forbidding the study of Talmud and Hebrew grammar in the cheder schools, limiting the number of books to be printed, abolishing the rights of orthodox rabbis, etc. Then, in 1857, a new decree was promulgated and signed by the Czar forbidding anyone to teach unless he possessed the matriculation certificate of a gymnasium school or seminary. Here the very survival of Torah study was threatened, and the danger that mass assimilation would ensue loomed large.

R. Israel and his colleagues waged incessant warfare against these decrees, both from the outside and on the inside. First they rallied all their forces to fight for the abolition of the laws. Their representations were greatly helpful, and here, if not completely, at least partially successful. After a protracted struggle, they obtained a deferment of the law abolishing the cheder schools for twenty years, and finally succeeded in having it rescinded altogether. Furthermore, every melamed was able to obtain a permit to teach without government examination or interference on the payment of a fee of three roubles.

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