

manhigim of the generation were present at the congress. Gaonim, Rabbonim of the great communities, Chassidic leaders and heads of the large kehillohs were there to represent Orthodox Russian Jewry. The Chofetz Chaim, the Brisker Gaon, Rav Dovid Friedman of Karlin, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Sochetshover Rebbe and the Gerrer Rebbe, z.t. l., were the revered leaders of the convention. The spirit of unity was all-pervasive. Former rifts were forgotten, old friendships renewed. The need to organize was urgent. Honorary President of the congress was the Karliner Gaon. Rav Chaim Ozer was selected as Executive President, the man of action, upon whom rested the responsibility for the practical success of the organization. The historic importance of the congress far exceeded the practical effect which it had at the time. This was the first time in over a hundred years that various factions of Orthodox Jewry had combined their forces for the common good. The foundation had been laid for what was later to become 'Agudath Israel'. Clearing away the rubble to make room for the foundation stones and carefully and tirelessly piling brick upon brick so that the building might eventually be built was Rav Chaim Ozer, the master planner, the dynamic Torah scholar with the dream of Orthodox unity - the Godol HaDor.

Thus, the 'Knesseth Israel' organization was founded and hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Jews joined in the work of preserving Yiddishkeit in Russia. The great majority of G-d fearing Russian and Polish-Russian Jews were supporters of 'Knesseth Israel'. The Gedolei Torah at the helm of the movement wielded a powerful and widespread influence. At first, the future of the organization seemed highly promising, but the Russian Government, which had been opposed to the organization from the first, was determined to exterminate it. A new tyranny had come to Russia and its millions