

Preface

A PEOPLE IN TRAVAIL

This is a book about an urgent problem. It deals primarily with Soviet Jews, but inasmuch as Jews everywhere are an integral, and generally intricate, part of the country in which they live, the book necessarily also treats of the country concerned, the Soviet Union. It has been said that no country can rise above the status of its women; it may likewise be said that no country can rise above the status of its Jews. The problem of the Soviet Jews is inescapably the problem of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet authorities deny there is a Jewish problem in their country. Their denial is suspect a priori, since they simultaneously deny that there is a Jewish people in their land, a fact patent to all who visit there. They grant that there are a couple of million Jews in their republics, but refuse to accept the implication thereof. There has never been a community of Jews anywhere in the world who did not have their roots in their great historic tradition and did not regard Jews in other lands as fellow Jews, accepting racially, spiritually, or symbolically their common kinship in Abraham. To say that Soviet Jews have nothing in common, or anything to do, with Jews elsewhere is to run counter to the facts of life. To insist that the Jews in the Soviet Union today have no desire to maintain their national identity, or lack an interest in their own culture, is, certainly for most of the Jews there, a negation of Soviet realities.

Such an unrealistic official view of a Jewish community would be of no consequence in a Capitalist society. If an American President, or the majority party in Congress, made such declarations about the American Jewish community, they would represent no more than a harmless aberration. American Jews would go on with their thousands of institutions and organizations just

the same. But when the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, or the Soviet Communist party, entertains such a notion, the results are catastrophic for the spiritual life of the Soviet Jewish community. It is the first time in Jewish history that an entire community has been deprived of the opportunity to live its own cultural life.

Moreover, the vagary of concept gives rise to anomalous attitudes and situations. We find Soviet spokesmen taking both sides of the issue. We hear that Soviet Jews are just Soviet people, totally assimilated into the general population. We likewise hear that Soviet Jews occupy a disproportionate number of positions in the higher echelons, whereas they should not be permitted to hold such positions in excess of their percentage in the general population. This view, of course, sets the Jews clearly apart from the general population.

In the current changing social conditions in the Soviet Union, the contradictory status of the Jews tends to create material and psychological difficulties. There are charges that Jews are set aside, discriminated against, racially maligned. Without doubt, many Soviet Jews feel a change in their social position for which they have not been psychologically prepared. They have lived too long in the illusion of "it can't happen here." All this tends to drive the Soviet Jews back into their historic fold and heightens their national consciousness. Soviet Jews today know less about things Jewish than ever, but they have never felt more Jewish.

Thus we arrive at a new development in the life of the Soviet Jews. It is a trend that makes for a Jewish problem under Socialist conditions, a phenomenon few believed possible. Men of good will, Jews and non-Jews, will not grasp at a hasty judgment. Neither will they hesitate to face the truth. They will call for a sifting of facts, a study of the background, and an impartial elucidation. This book is intended for them. It is neither anti-Soviet nor pro-Soviet. It does not place this new development in the purview of the cold war. It has only one aim: to present a true picture of the situation and search for a possible solution, all within the framework of the Soviet system.

This book is built, in part, around three visits to the Soviet Union, in the years 1934, 1946, and 1959. None of these was

hurried or superficial. All three were rather extensive in time and area, with considerable prior and subsequent study of the pertinent literature. Although my interest lay in the entire Soviet situation as a great experiment in new social-economic relations, the condition of the Jews was, by virtue of my profession, a primary concern. On my first two visits I found myself in what might be described as an especially favored position. On my third I was happy even to have received a visa, but I was treated correctly, possibly a shade better than I personally deserved.

When I first arrived in Moscow in 1934, I was an innocent abroad, a rare creature among the visiting journalists of the time, a simple bourgeois liberal, identified neither with pre-committed Communists nor with biased Socialists or others who came for confirmation of their critical attitude. The press officer of the foreign ministry hoped I would present an objective picture, even if not one entirely to his satisfaction, and he endeavored to make it easy for me to get about and see all the people I wanted to see. He may have been disappointed, but not too much so. When my columns on the trip appeared in the paper, they were severely criticised by the press of both extremes, Communist and Socialist.

On my second visit, in 1946, I was practically the unofficial guest of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, being myself at that time the president of the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, which had been the host of the officers of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee on their visit to this country in 1943. I had also been identified with such organizations as the American Committee for Birobidjan (Ambidjan) and the National Council for American Soviet Friendship. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee made it possible for me to visit much of the Soviet Union and meet many of the Jews returning from evacuation at a time when there was practically no tourist service.

My third visit, in 1959, was under a dual shadow. My name had figured in the plot against the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee as emissary of American imperialists, and although the martyred leaders were posthumously rehabilitated, the plot itself had never been repudiated. In addition, I had disagreed

rather violently with Mr. Khrushchev in my columns during the preceding couple of years, of which due notice had been taken in the local Communist press. Nevertheless, I was granted a visa and accorded the usual amenities, some of the officials even going out of their way to try to help me. Most surprising, no action was taken against me after my impressions of the Soviet Union, some of which were quite unfavorable, began to appear in New York and Tel Aviv while I was still traveling in that country. Perhaps I had my family identification to thank for this—it was of help also on my earlier trips; the centennial of my father-in-law, Sholom Aleichem, one of the most popular and beloved authors in the Soviet Union, had just been celebrated with new editions of his works, public meetings, and a postage stamp in his honor.

The first part of this book describes my three visits, giving a cross section of the Jewish situation and of Soviet conditions generally at three decisive moments, and endeavoring to analyze my findings and interpret my impressions. The second part follows up this inner view of the Jewish situation with a full discussion of the several phases of the Jewish problem in the Soviet Union, its historical background, the social forces behind it, and the current trends. The concluding chapter submits the possible solution.

What Was the Past?

Some parts of modern Russia were inhabited by Jews long before the Russians arrived on the scene, possibly as far back as two thousand years ago. In the seventh century, the Jews north of the Caspian Sea were so influential they converted the local rulers to their faith. A kingdom of some importance, whose monarchs and ruling families professed the Jewish religion, existed there for nearly two centuries. Some of the Jews of that region, arriving from the Byzantine Empire, ranged over the north, including the Muscovite domain. These might be called the original Russian Jews. Since they were few in number, fully Russianized except for their religion, and of service to the Muscovite merchants, they constituted no problem.

It was only after the Czars began to annex parts of the Polish

empire, like the Ukraine, and then provinces of Poland proper, that large numbers of Jews, possibly a million, came under Russian rule. These Jews had come to Poland several centuries before on the invitation of the Polish kings, to fill the social gap between the feudal landlords, who regarded any gainful employment, even management of their own estates, as beneath their dignity, and the serf-like peasants just below subsistence level. The Jews were to be the traders, artisans, and administrators—in a sense, a bridge to the new bourgeois society. But the Polish kings failed to suppress the feudal lords to make the birth of the new society possible, and the obsolescent Polish feudal state crashed under its own weight. Poland was divided between three absolute monarchies with mercantile and handicraft classes of their own. In Russia these classes, to avoid mercantile competition, insisted that the Jews of the annexed territories be confined to the provinces of their origin, the so-called Pale of Settlement. Within the Pale, conditions had already been worsening in the face of growing population, narrowing economic opportunities, and widening competition. The inevitable result was overcrowding and pauperization, and thus a Jewish problem arose.

Czarist Russian policy toward the Jews wavered between the realism of the larger state interests and the obscurantism of narrow special privilege. The larger interest of the state called for the assimilation of the Jewish traders and craftsmen—10 per cent of the population of the new provinces. But the merchants and artisans of Muscovy would not countenance this competition, and their stand was reinforced by the prevailing religious fanaticism and racial prejudice. At times the Czarist government made serious efforts to assimilate the Jews by dispersing them over the vast stretches of the land, attempting to turn many of them into agriculturists, and making them adopt Russian speech and customs. But the method defeated the purpose. Crude force, pressure for immediate results, and above all, equating Russification with abandonment of Judaism, created a resistance that all the might of the Czar could not break. The recourse was to the policy of segregation, which became increasingly anti-Semitic and persecutory as the need for emotional

diversion and a scapegoat grew with the rising revolutionary movement.

As Russia entered the twentieth century, the situation of the Jews could be summarized as follows: Russia proper, with its widening economic opportunities, was closed to all of them except a few of the rich. In their own Pale, that is, Poland, the Baltic provinces, and the Ukraine, they were now barred from the countryside and excluded from some of the major cities, like Kiev. They were thus limited to residence in the villages and towns of the Pale. Even there, their economic pursuits were narrowly circumscribed. They were excluded from agriculture, civil service, military office, middle and higher education (which were the gateway to the professions), and by various devices were obstructed in industrial employment. They were left with small trade, shopkeeping, and artisanship, among a rural population growing steadily poorer, and faced increasing competition from the non-Jewish urban elements, who were being hard pressed from above and below. Naturally the congested condition and impoverishment of the Jews increased as their numbers increased. And the Jewish population—as the result of high birth rate and a comparatively low infant mortality—multiplied fivefold within a century—within the same geographic and economic confines.

Rather than make an effort to ameliorate the condition of the Jews, the Russian government took deliberate steps to worsen it by tightening the restrictions, imposing special excessive taxes, and barbarously inciting the local people—at times to the extent of shipping in professional thugs to lead the local riffraff in a pogrom on the Jews. What prospect did the Russian authorities hold out to their five million Jews? In his own brand of “Christian” spirit, the head of the Russian state (Greek Orthodox) church, Pobedonostsev, prognosticated that one third of the Russian Jewry would emigrate, one third would be liquidated—he did not indicate by what means, and the gas chamber had not yet been conceived—and one third would be converted to the Russian church and assimilated.

How does the malevolent augury of that evil man stand up in the retrospect of three score years? About one third of the Russian Jewry did emigrate to find hospitable and auspicious

havens in the Americas, the British Dominions, Palestine, and Western Europe. One third was liquidated—not by Czarist Black Guards but by invading Nazi brutes. And the remaining third? They were not converted to the Russian church, nor were they assimilated. There is no danger of their ever being converted, for the Russian church itself exists only on sufferance of the godless regime. But the foreboding of assimilation has not been as definitely refuted. There is danger of that. And there seems to be a Soviet policy in that direction.

The Russian Revolution raised great hopes among the Jews of Russia. At long last they would be set free and would enjoy the same rights, privileges, and opportunities as the rest of the population. The Revolution also presaged better times generally. The end of the corrupt medieval police state would liberate the creative forces of all the peoples in Russia, who would then, in true fellowship, get into harness to “catch up with Europe”—the dream of generations of the Russian intelligentsia. The Jews were eager to join with the rest for the great pull. No other people in the vast land surpassed them in this patriotic ardor, for it was in a free, prosperous, enlightened Russia that they saw their own future, both individually and as a nation. And they had a strong foundation upon which to build a great national future.

Excluded from Russian society and isolated from their Gentile neighbors, the Jews of Russia had created a rich national life of their own. Their religious culture had penetrated literally all the people. There was not a Jew who could not read the Hebrew prayer book or translate at least some bits of the Hebrew Bible. None was so ignorant as to be unable to follow the talmudic discourses of the local or itinerant preacher. And anybody who was somebody had at least a couple of years' study at a Yeshiva, an academic school. If a similar situation existed in the West, every Christian would know some Latin and most of them would be able to read and translate the Vulgate into their own tongue.

Within their own world the Jews of Russia had had their Renaissance and Enlightenment in their Haskala and Neo-Hebrew and Neo-Yiddish literatures, except that in their case the process was reversed, their Diderot and Voltaire preceding

their Chaucer and Cervantes. Alongside their religious life, the Russian Jews developed an extensive and vital secular culture, primarily in Yiddish but also in Hebrew and Russian. They had their own press—dailies, weeklies, and monthlies, including trade journals and literary magazines—and their own publishing houses, theatres, art galleries, and educational system.

No less extensive, and perhaps even more deeply rooted, were the social institutions the Russian Jews had evolved, although the general population had no such institutions. The smallest, poorest Jewish town had a free school for the children of the indigent, a shelter for the itinerant beggar, societies to care for the sick (there were no hospitals or other medical services), societies for burial (there were no professional undertakers), societies for protecting widows, providing for orphans, operating a free loan system, even for supplying dowries and seeking out mates for poor girls—there were to be “no Jewish nunneries.” In the cities, these services, still on a voluntary basis, functioned on a larger scale and were augmented by others corresponding to special urban needs: trade schools, medical stations, legal assistance, and co-operative efforts in mutual aid.

Social awareness led to political thinking, and as political groupings began to form in Russia, the Russian Jews were ready for them. Some joined the general Russian parties, particularly the liberal ones, and often rose to positions of influence within them. Mostly, however, they organized parties of their own, on much the same platforms as the general parties but with additional planks in regard to their own people. Jewish workers organized a Socialist party, for example, before such a party came into being among the Russians. Its program included not only the immediate call for a democratic republic and the ultimate aim of a Socialist society for Russia, but also a demand for national autonomy for the Jewish people in the regions where they were concentrated. Other Jews combined their political orientation, whether bourgeois democratic or Socialist, with the ultimate aim of a national Jewish state in Palestine. And there were still other parties with differing aims that shaded between the two.

All told, then, there was a veritable Jewish nation in Russia at the time of the Revolution. It was a fairly large nation of

more than 5,000,000 souls, 97 per cent of them speaking their own tongue, perhaps no more than a third of them able to read Russian, leading their own life in their own way in every sphere—economic, social, religious, and cultural. They were no less a nation than the Ukrainians or Byelorussians, except that they were a minority in the districts, although not always in the towns, they inhabited. Lenin had correctly characterized Czarist Russia as a “prison of nations.” Russian Jewry was one of those prisoner nations, and like the others, looked forward to liberation.

Bearing the brunt of the Czarist oppression, being used as the scapegoat for all the abuses of the rotten system, the Jews could not escape the conviction that their salvation lay in the downfall of Czarist rule. Therefore they were in general sympathy with the revolutionary movement insofar as it concentrated its fire against the Czar. To be sure, some of the older people had misgivings about the Revolution because of its anti-religious trend. But this trend seemed valid in regard to the Russian church, where the upper crust was notoriously corrupt and openly an arm of the hated system, although it was senseless when applied to the synagogue, whose clergy was among the poorest in town. Other Jews were constrained by the tal-mudic saying that the Lord commanded the Jews, on their going into Exile, not to rise in rebellion against the government of the countries they would live in. Still others feared reprisals, and preferred to let the Russians fight it out among themselves. But Jewish youth threw all caution to the winds. To them the Revolution became a matter of conscience, the essence of their existence. For many of them, the rise of the revolutionary movement coincided with their own personal social and cultural awakening. They regarded their participation in the revolt as their personal emancipation. They would not wait for others to break their chains; they would shatter their chains themselves. They took to the Revolution with the abandon of neophytes. They would be the vanguard of the Revolution. This attitude was especially true of Jewish intellectuals studying abroad, of whom there were quite a few, inasmuch as Russian universities were practically closed to them. Some remained abroad after the completion of their studies, becoming revolu-

tionary expatriates like Lenin and joining their Marxian colleagues in the absentee guidance of the revolutionary movement back home. This accounts for the preponderance of Jews in the early leadership of the Revolution.

The Revolution—Hope and Realization

Just what did the Russian Jews expect from the Revolution?

Both the Jews who took an active part and those who only looked on sympathetically were certain that the Revolution would solve the Jewish problem in Russia—though Zionists added the reservation that the problem could be solved only to a limited degree in Exile. Even the Zionists, however, took it for granted that all restrictions on Jews would be removed, and all discriminatory legislation, of which there was a considerable body, abolished; Jews would be free to live everywhere, engage in any lawful activity, study in any institution of learning, and fill civil and military positions, like their non-Jewish fellow citizens. This change would at once eliminate overcrowding, reduce poverty, and elevate the standard of general education. The new equal opportunities would soon raise Russian Jews to a higher economic situation, social status, and stage of culture. They would catch up with the twentieth century and reach the level of their brethren in the West.

As to their national life, unquestionably it would flourish as never before. If they had managed to have so much in poverty, ignorance, and Czarist repression, how much farther would they go in full freedom and rising prosperity? Local autonomy or not, culturally they would be on their own wherever they might choose to live, and they would have as many Yeshivas, newspapers, periodicals, theatres, and religious, cultural, and social institutions—with their own content and in their own language or languages—as they would care to provide for. After the Revolution, the Jews in Russia would have it better than Jews had ever had it in their long Exile.

Characteristic of the spirit of the time is the case of one Jewish leader of the Russian Social Revolutionary party. This non-Marxian agrarian terrorist party was founded by five intellectuals, three of whom were Jews who had never had any

contact with the soil or peasantry, in fact, two of the three subsequently became leaders in the Yiddishist movement. The platform the five devised caught fire. The party gained a tremendous following; and in the first and only free democratic election after the Revolution won a large majority in the National Assembly, which the Bolsheviks dissolved by force some months later. The leader of this party—we will call him Peter—was a revolutionary in exile in Europe like Lenin and the others, when the First World War broke out. Like other Russian citizens stranded abroad, he found his way to the United States. There he became involved in Jewish communal affairs, learned to speak Yiddish, joined the Zionist *émigrés*, originated the idea of a World Jewish Congress, and being an engineer by profession, devoted his time to another new idea—to electrify Palestine with the water of the Jordan river. Jewish leaders in America, who knew Peter's illustrious career in the non-Jewish revolutionary movement in Russia, welcomed his talents and energy in the Jewish cause.

Then came the Russian Revolution. His friend and fellow party leader, Alexander Kerensky, became the prime minister of the new Russian republic, and sent an ambassador to the United States. At once Peter dropped all his Jewish interests and activities and devoted himself entirely to the needs of the Revolution. He was chairman of the large public meeting welcoming the new Russian ambassador, and spoke like a Russian for Russia, repeating the impassioned phrase *rodina nasha*, our fatherland. Then he returned to his *rodina* to assume the key post of governor of Petrograd, the former St. Petersburg and present Leningrad. Such was the spell of the Revolution on its generation. (Peter's story did not end there. When the Bolsheviks took over, he escaped from Russia and eventually reached Palestine, where, after years of great effort against tremendous obstacles, he managed to realize his earlier dream of electrifying Palestine. Peter was the notable Pinhas Rutenberg.)

Today we know it would be a grotesque understatement to say merely that the hopes the Russian Jews placed in the Revolution failed to materialize. After the catastrophe of the Nazi invasion, there were still 2,268,000 Jews in the Soviet Union by official count. (The actual number may be closer to the earlier

semiofficial estimate of 3,000,000.) A surprisingly large number of them then still gave Yiddish as their mother tongue—close to half a million, a percentage comparing not too unfavorably with that of the American and Israeli Jewries. Nevertheless, there is not a single social or cultural Jewish institution in the whole of the Soviet Union today. There is not a semblance left of the former national life. All that remains is merely a few houses of worship (an exaggerated Soviet report to UNESCO gave the number as 450) and an anomaly in the Far East: a territory still called the Jewish Autonomous Region, where Jews are a *minority* of the total population of 163,000, and autonomy does not exist. Of Jewish cultural living, the sole survivor is the concert of Jewish folk music with readings of Yiddish, which points up the untenable position the Soviet authorities take on the issue of Jewish culture. On the one hand, they charge there is no interest in Jewish culture because all Soviet Jews have already been assimilated, and on the other, they boast that Jewish concerts had an attendance as large as 3,000,000 in one year.

A similar contradiction has recently appeared in the field of publishing. With three exceptions, no Yiddish books have been published in the Soviet Union since 1948, on the ground that there simply is no demand for them. But these exceptions—a volume of stories in Yiddish by Sholom Aleichem, on the occasion of his centennial in 1959, followed by collections of short novels by Mendeli Mocher Seforim in 1960 and of stories by I. L. Peretz (possibly to stave off the protests from abroad against the suppression of Yiddish)—were issued in editions of 30,000 copies. If there exists an expected readership of 30,000 for Yiddish classics, is it not conceivable that a similar number would read a Yiddish book by a living Soviet Yiddish writer? Suppose only half as many—say, even a third as many—would buy Yiddish books, would not that justify the publication of Yiddish books? After all, in Russia books often appear in much smaller editions.

The structure of Jewish equality, equal opportunity, and suppression of anti-Semitism that had been painfully built up during the first decades of the Revolution began to corrode in the late thirties, and all but collapsed in the last years of Stalin's life. Some repairs have been made since, but the framework is

rickety still. Ill-concealed anti-Jewish manifestations keep recurring:

This is all too obvious in the atheistic activities. Every so often we are treated to an ugly outburst against the Jewish religion that bears no comparison to the propaganda against other faiths in the land. Soviet anti-religious literature has never equated adherence to the Christian or Moslem religion with "destroying the love for the fatherland," as it has done in the case of the Jewish religion. No Soviet Mohammedan has ever been accused of identification with the state of Saudi Arabia because of the connection of his faith with the city of Mecca. But religious Soviet Jews are repeatedly accused of identifying with the government of Israel because of the central position of Jerusalem in their faith. Only in the case of the Jews have the issues of patriotism and loyalty been injected into the anti-religious campaigns.

The bias emerges in other spheres as well. Time and again the visitor to the Soviet Union hears of discrimination against Jews, particularly in certain branches of the civil and military services, in promotion to higher positions and admission to certain departments of the universities. Soviet spokesmen enter a general denial. Yet where there is so much smoke there must be some fire. There used to be many Jews in the Soviet foreign service, as anyone who had contacts with Soviet delegations abroad would readily confirm. Now there are hardly any. In fact, a Soviet official would be hard-set to name a single one, or to produce any Jewish students in the school for diplomats. In strong contrast to the past, Jews rarely occupy top positions today, although they still are frequently found in the secondary places. The number of Jewish students in the higher institutions of learning has dropped strikingly. It still may be high on a percentile basis, but that measure is incompatible with genuine equality, since there is no such restriction on others, and such a basis of admission is regarded as a manifestation of anti-Semitism in other countries. It would be an exaggeration to say that discrimination is general, but it would be an understatement just to say that it occurs. I heard of one academic institute in Leningrad where 30 per cent of the student body was Jewish. And I heard of others where the door was all but closed to Jews.

I personally met one victim of this flagrant discrimination. He was a Jewish boy, an excellent student at the ten-year school, who took the examination for admission to an institute. He had a close friend, a Gentile boy, who was a very poor student. As a favor to his friend, the Jewish boy substituted for him on his examination. There were then two examination papers by the same boy, one under his own name as of Jewish nationality and the other under the name of the friend of Russian nationality. The friend's paper received the highest mark of five, and he was duly admitted. The Jewish boy's own paper was given the failing mark of three, and he was rejected.

By and large, the Soviets have pursued two basic policies toward the Jews. One might be called Leninist and the other Stalinist. The first dominated throughout the lifetime of Lenin and during the years in which his tradition was paramount, down to the time when Stalin consolidated his absolute power. This policy was rooted in the Socialist tenet of absolute equality of all nations. In their Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had said that in the measure the individual was freed of exploitation by another individual, a nation would be liberated from the dominance of another nation. Lenin declared all nations within the former Russian empire absolutely equal, and forswore any form of chauvinism however slight. He warned particularly against Great Russian chauvinism, for since the Great Russians were the giant among the nations in the land, their chauvinism could be most injurious to the other nations. Regarding Russian Jewry as a nation equal to the others, Lenin took special occasion to condemn any manifestation of anti-Semitism, branding it as a most dangerous form of chauvinism because it had been deeply rooted in the masses and also had been used as a tool of reaction throughout history. In consequence, any form of discrimination, any differential, was automatically excluded.

Lenin would not countenance so much as a minor differentiation in regard to Jews—not even when, for strategic reasons, one was suggested by Jews themselves. For example, at the Brest Litovsk peace conference, where Lenin was buying time with space, the Karaite Jew, Joffe, headed the delegation. He suggested to Lenin that inasmuch as Russian territory was to be

Выписка

из протокола № 47 заседания Президиума Всероссийского Центрального
Исполнительного Комитета Сов. Раб., Крест., Каз. и Красноармейских Депутатов.
от 21-го Июля 1919 г.

Слушали:

5. Заявление представителей Сионистской партии о стеснениях их организаций на местах

Постановили:

Так как ни одним декретом В. Ц. И. К. и С. Н. К. партия сионистов не объявлялась контр-революционной партией и поскольку культурно-просветительная деятельность сионистских организаций не идет в разрез с постановлениями Советской власти, президиум В. Ц. И. К. предлагает всем советским организациям не чинить препятствий этой партии в означенной деятельности.

Выписка верна:

Секретарь В. Ц. И. К.

А. Енукидзе. (подпись)

Печать
В. Ц. И. К.

Нотариальный Под'отдел Отдела Юстиции Московского Совдепа удостоверяет верность настоящей копии, представленной СИОНИСТСКОЙ ПАРТИЕЙ. Подлинник гербовым сбором не оплачен. - 1919 г. августа 9 дня, ПО РЕЕСТРУ № 5998



Народный Нотариус:

Секретарь:

Photostat of the Resolution of the All-Soviet Central Committee, supreme authority of the Soviet Union, that inasmuch as the Zionist party has not been designated as counter-revolutionary in previous decrees and since the cultural-educational activities of the Zionist party do not go contrary to the decisions of the Soviet government, no Soviet organizations are to place obstacles in the way of that party's aforesaid activities.

Приказ Київського Исполкома.

В Київських „Нєвїстїях“ от 18 іюля был опубликован слѣдующий приказ

На основаніи циркулярнаго распоряженія Наркомвнудела о закрытіи буржуазных сионистских и клерикальных еврейских партійных, политическїх, экономических и культурно-просвѣтительных обществ и учреждений, отдѣла управления, с согласіем президіума Губисполкома, постановляет:

1) Прекратить немедленно дѣятельность центрального и мѣстнаго комитетов партіи сионистов и ея фракцій, выступающих под названіем „Мизрахи“, „Цебре-Ціон“, „Дройф“, а также клерикальной партіи „Ахдус“ и еврейскаго національнаго секретариата. Немедленному закрытію подлежат общество „Тарбут“ и все сионистскія изданія

2) Выбѣить в обязанность всем членам комитетов и организаций, а также активным членам, в 7-дневный срок со дня опубликованія настоящаго постановленія, передать в отдѣла управления подписку о полном прекращеніи дѣятельности упомянутых организаций, обществ и учреждений.

3) Поручить представителям организаций К. П. У. и еврейскаго коммунистическаго союза, совѣтство с представителем отдѣла управления, проверить списки всех еврейских обществ и учреждений, как представивших свои уставы к регистраціи, так и не представивших. Общества, организация и учреждения, служащіе проводниками политических, сионистских и клерикальных партій, должны быть немедленно закрыты и переданы в распоряженіе ликвидационной комиссіи по еврейским дѣлам

4) Имущество всех ликвидированных учреждений передать соответствующим отдѣлам Губисполкома по актам через ликвидационную комиссію по еврейским дѣлам. Капиталы внести в депозит центральной ликвидационной комиссіи Наркомвнудела

5) Архивы сионистских и клерикальных партій, организаций и учреждений и всю проч. переписку опечатать и препроводить в центрально-ликвидационную комиссію по еврейским дѣлам при отдѣлѣ мѣстнаго управления Наркомвнудела

6) Предписать всем типографіям, под отвѣтственностью завѣдывающих, сообщать в отдѣла управления о всех печатающихся произведеніях, относящихся по своему направленію и содержанію к сионистским и клерикальным организациям, таковыя изданія задержать выходом в свѣтъ и конфисковать

7) За неисполненіе настоящаго постановленія члены указанных обществ, учреждений, организаций и партій будут преданы Ревтрибуналу по всем строгостям закона военнаго времени. Равно подлежат преданію суду Ревтрибунала все лица, стремящіеся и способствующія скрыть имущество клерикальных и сионистских обществ и организаций.

8) Проведеніе в жизнь настоящаго постановленія возлагается на начальніка городской милиціи и коммунальные комитеты.

9) Постановленіе вводится в жизнь со дня опубликованія
Предсѣдатель коллегіи отдѣла управления Кордовскій

Photostat of a decree of the Kiev Executive Committee of July 18, 1919, suppressing all Zionist activities and institutions, confiscating not only their properties but even their archives.



B. Z. Goldberg and some friends in Moscow in 1946. Left to right: Shimon Halkin (a poet), Itzik Fefer, Dr. Shimeliovich, Solomon Mikhoels, the author, Professor Lena Shtern, General Katz (World War II hero whose present whereabouts are unknown), and Peretz Markish. The only known survivors are the author and Lena Shtern.

ceded to the Germans, it might be more advisable for internal considerations that a non-Jew conduct the negotiations. Lenin would not hear of it. Communists, he insisted, could not entertain such considerations under any circumstances. Whatever Lenin's Communism had done to the religious and communal life of the Jews, the Jewish rights to a national life were not questioned, and their use of their national language was taken for granted. Secular Jewish national life was encouraged and the use of the Yiddish language promulgated. Definitely, it was Soviet policy to rebuild Russian Jewry into a Socialist Jewish people.

Just as Lenin's Jewish policy derived from his general conception of Socialism, so Stalin's Jewish policy grew out of his general revision, or abandonment, of Leninism. It was part of

his personal disregard for human values, against which Lenin had warned, his callous readiness to sacrifice principle for expediency, and his tendency in his last years to liquidate a fact if it did not accord with his theory. Back in 1913 Stalin denied that Jews were a nation. According to his own contrived definition of nationality, the Jews of one country were neither related to nor had much in common with Jews in other lands. By the same definition, the Jews of one country were not a nation either. They were just a people with certain transient peculiarities which they would shed as they became assimilated into the general population of the country in which they lived. Assimilation was a historical process. Temporarily, the peculiar people might be allowed to continue the illusion of being a nation, but the actual policy was to hasten the process of assimilation. Kalinin was talking out of turn, in 1930, when he said that it was the duty of the Jews to strive for the continuity of their nationality. Less independent in his thinking, and more sensitive to Stalin's personal views, the Jewish Communist leader Merezhin disowned Kalinin's statement. He said, "Kalinin, a member of the majority nation, may talk like that, but we Communists of a national minority cannot accept it."

The Stalinist Jewish policy began with a slow, devious process of attrition and harassment in the middle thirties, and ended close to the Hitler line with Stalin's death in 1953. By 1948, Stalin decided that the process of assimilation had run its course and that there were no longer any Soviet Jews. Since the Soviet Jews were unaware of their non-existence, the fact did not agree with the theory and therefore had to be liquidated in the Stalin manner. First, all the remaining Jewish cultural institutions were abruptly closed down. Then, all who had been prominently connected therewith, and leading Jewish intellectuals generally, were arrested and tortured to confess to a concocted plot of national treason. It is the unsung glory of Stalin's Jewish martyrs that they could not be broken enough to confess in an open trial, and were executed secretly. Another plot (of Jewish doctors) had to be invented to start an open anti-Semitic campaign in preparation for the planned deportation of all Jews to distant parts of Siberia.

What might have been another major catastrophe in Jewish

history, an expulsion greater than that from Spain, with no avenues of escape, was narrowly averted by the unexpected death of the biggest Great Russian chauvinist of them all, himself a Georgian.

The New Heirs of the Problem

So, this was the Jewish problem the new men in the Kremlin inherited from the Stalin regime. They had been silent observers of, though not willing participants in, his crimes against the Jews. After his demise, they broke with him on this issue, but they did not return to Lenin. They put an end to the Stalin madness, but did not undertake to face the problem.

The Soviet Jews sighed with relief when the old despot expired, and they pinned their hope on his successors. Now they look apprehensively to Nikita Khrushchev. One word of his would put an end to the anti-Jewish hooliganism; one remark of his would eliminate all discrimination; one nod would open the door to a new, free cultural life. When the talkative Khrushchev turns into a silent Sphinx, they are uneasy. They no longer fear expulsion or physical harm. Yet as long as their issue has not been met, as long as their status has not been clarified and old wrongs reappear in new disguises, Soviet Jews cannot feel secure. Being unequal, they cannot rest. Perhaps it is a compliment to Lenin's Russia that today's Soviet Jews cannot accept second-rate citizenship, or being rootless again.

Communist propaganda often boasts that the Soviet system has eliminated the Jewish *luft mentsh* of the Czarist regime, the man who had neither a visible source of livelihood nor a place in the social pattern. He was a person "suspended in the air," so to speak. Now it is beginning to look as though the entire Soviet Jewry, as a Jewry, is becoming "suspended in the air." Soviet Jews are neither permitted to be themselves nor accepted as part of the others. They are some of those Children of Israel who, in the words of the ancient prayer, "find themselves between land and sea."

It was in the hope of shedding some light on both the objective circumstances and the inner feeling of the Soviet Jew that

the writing of this book was undertaken. Above all, my purpose was to analyze the historical process and seek a possible solution. Perhaps a book of this sort might also be of service to the Soviet people, Jews and non-Jews, if it could reach them. It might help them in thinking out their Jewish problem. I owe it to the Jews I met in the Soviet Union to bear witness that they are conscious of their peculiar position in Soviet society. Deep in their hearts they feel the problem, and in their own muted ways they grope for the whys and wherefores. And like the ancient prophet of their people, they ask: Watchman, what of the night? Yes, what of the night—will there be a morning?

For several years, two poems, one posing the question and the other giving the answer, have been current among Soviet Jews, a bit of modern apocryphal apocalyptic literature. They have not been published, of course, nor do they circulate in manuscript. They are recited from memory and passed on from person to person as in the days before writing was invented. Yet they are quite generally known. I heard them with only slight variations from a lady physician in Leningrad, a male teacher in Odessa, and a young writer in Tashkent. The poems are ascribed to two well-known Soviet authors, both Jews, the question part to the poetess Margarita Aliger and the answer to the novelist-publicist Ilya Ehrenburg, who also desires recognition as a poet. Mr. Ehrenburg has denied authorship of the answer section. Margarita Aliger could make no such absolute denial, inasmuch as the question part is a paraphrase and amplification of a poem she did write. But the authorship is of small consequence, for the poems have become folk literature expressing the feeling and thinking, the mood and hope, of the assimilated new generation of intellectual Soviet Jews.

In a book of poems, entitled *Thy Victory (Tvoya Pobyeda)*, Moscow, 1946), Margarita Aliger writes with nostalgia about her mother and her cozy little cottage in the south: In the long estrangement from her mother, the poetess had the comforting thought she could always go back home. Now, the cottage has been destroyed by the beastly Nazi invaders, and her mother, a refugee in the distant Kola region, is setting up a new home. The thoughts of the poetess turn to the wanderings and homelessness of peoples, and she wonders "how many *versts* from

Egypt to Russia, how many centuries and fates," and she asks how long the new home will be her mother's. Addressing her mother, she begs: "Mama, Mama . . . who is after us? Who are we, you and I?" The mother, "warming her hands at the open fire, beginning to build her life anew," answers: "We are Jews. How dared you forget?"

The poetess admits she had forgotten. All about her had been so simple and serene. She could not have imagined the horrors of Treblinka and the woes that befell her people. But now she realizes. "We are a people scattered in ashes," she says, "surrounded by enemies," and she asks, "Why? Wherefore?" But she takes pride in the quality of her people, the "descendants of the brave Maccabees," commanders and fighters at the front, doctors, musicians, and working people, and concludes on the optimistic note that in co-operation with the other Soviet peoples, the Jews will go on forever. "We are alive and breathing, do you see, Mama? We will never be wiped out by the enemy."

The popular paraphrase, although still naïve, probes more insistently and is not so easily satisfied. The spirit of its many verses is expressed in these lines:

A maiden on the Rhine, she asked
The bright, green dreaminess of streams:
What is our crime, O Heinrich Heine?
How did we fail to please, Mendelssohn?

I'll ask of Marx, I'll ask of Einstein,
Those who are great and ripe with wisdom—
Perhaps they know the answer to the secret
Of our crime against eternity.

The lovely canvases of Levitan,
The kindly luminescence of his birches,
Or Charlie Chaplin on the snow-white screen—
Won't one of you find answer to my question?

Have we not given freely, gladly,
All our treasures, all we owned?
Then what is our guilt,
And what is our crime against the world?

The reply, equally a folk creation that runs at some length, is more confident than incisive.

Unable to give answer to your question,
I can only say: Misfortune is our fate.
Our only crime is that we are Jews
Our only crime is that we are Jews.

Our crime is also that our children
Strive to achieve the wisdom of the world,
And that we're scattered o'er the earth
And have no homeland.

Did thousands of us, unsparing of our lives,
Fight battles worthy to become a legend
So we should hear: "Who are these—Jews?
They fought for Tashkent in the rear!"

We are not loved because—because we're Jews,
Because our faith's the source of many faiths.
And yet despite it—yes, despite—
We shall live, O Comrade Poetess!

The people are immortal! They will breed
New Maccabees, models for future heirs.
Yes, I am proud. I am proud and don't regret
That I am a Jew, O Comrade Poetess!