

# On the Jewish Question

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## The Fight Against Anti-Semitism

(The following is the second portion of the discussion article whose first part appeared in the December 1966 issue.)

### *The International Class Struggle*

We turn next to the question of nationalism as it relates to the world arena. With the victory of the working class and the establishment of socialism in a number of countries, the class struggle has acquired an international dimension in the form of the struggle between a new, rising socialist world and an old, declining capitalist world. This struggle, between the working class in power and the capitalist class in power, is the vehicle of the central social process of our times and the most profound social transformation in all human history: the transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale and with it the abolition of all exploitation and oppression of man by man. All other present-day struggles—in particular the class struggle in individual capitalist countries and the national liberation struggles of the oppressed peoples—take place within the framework of this central conflict and are profoundly influenced by it.

At the heart of the socialist world stands the Soviet Union, first land of socialism and the most powerful bulwark of peace, freedom and socialism in the world. It is, indeed, the very cornerstone of the whole edifice of social progress today. To the Soviet Union the national liberation movement owes in no small measure its great impetus and the impressive number of victories it has already achieved. And to the Soviet Union the Jewish people throughout the world particularly owe in no small measure their prospects for the future and even, in large degree, their present existence.

The successes of the Soviet people, led by their Communist Party, in overthrowing tsarism, in building and defending their socialist society, and in laying the foundations for the transition to communism, were made possible by the Leninist policy of ending all national oppression and establishing the full equality of all nations and nationalities within the

USSR. This is one of the great triumphs of socialism. The Soviet Union is, in fact, a living refutation of the bourgeois nationalist idea that national chauvinism is inherent in human beings and hence ineradicable.

As for the Soviet Jews, their lives have been transformed as a result of the October Revolution and the establishment of socialism to a degree difficult for most Americans to grasp. In a way, the change is comparable to that which would occur in the lives of Negro Americans if every form of jim-crow discrimination and segregation were completely wiped out and full equality established in every respect.

Indeed, Soviet Jews are better off than the Jews in any capitalist country. They may live where they please; there are no restrictive covenants and no "gilded ghettos." They may work in any occupation they choose. There is no discrimination against them in the professions or in executive and managerial positions—the latter in striking contrast to the widespread discrimination which the American Jewish Committee, in a recent series of studies, has found to exist in industrial, public utilities, banking and other types of enterprises in this country. If instances of discrimination or other anti-Semitic acts can be cited, they occur as *exceptions*, as remnants of the past, whereas here they constitute the pattern.

It is not in the Soviet Union that Jews are subjected to the anti-Semitic rantings and actions

of a Rockwell (can one even *imagine* the existence of such a creature there?) but in this country. It is not there that repeated acts of vandalism against synagogues and the flooding of the country with anti-Semitic filth take place but here. It is in the United States that Jews face the Semitic violence sparked by a fanatical ultra-Right, not in the Soviet Union. In a word, Soviet Jews enjoy a degree of freedom and security which does not exist here. *This is the central fact to be noted in any evaluation of their status.*

To this must be added the saving of millions of Jewish lives by the Soviet Union in the face of the advancing Hitlerite armies, and its momentous contribution to the victory over fascism, as well as its role in the establishment of the State of Israel and subsequently in defending Israel's existence through its firm pressure on the Arab leaders against seeking to settle their differences with that country by force. And today, when the forces of fascism and war rear their ugly heads anew in West Germany, it is Soviet Premier Kosygin who calls the alarm, not President Johnson or any other national spokesman in this country. On the contrary, it is U.S. ruling circles which are primarily responsible for the renazification of West Germany, with all the dangers this holds for the Jewish people.

Unquestionably the welfare of Jews the world over is bound up with the progress and growing

strength of the Soviet Union as the firmest champion of the rights of all peoples. Hence the fight against anti-Semitism and defense of the interests of the Jewish people demand *first of all* defense of the Soviet Union against the attacks of its enemies and detractors and the firm pursuance of American-Soviet understanding and friendship.

The draft resolution recognizes this when it states: "Today, as in the past, the Soviet Union is the staunchest champion of peace and human freedom in the world. The interests of the Jewish people, no less than those of any other people, lie in seeking friendship with the Soviet Union and in combating anti-Sovietism." However, it does not in my opinion give sufficient emphasis to this cardinal point, which ought to be the *beginning* of any discussion of the status of Soviet Jews.

To assert the primacy of the world struggle between socialism and capitalism, and with this the primacy of defense of the Soviet Union as the leading force for progress in the world, does not mean, of course, that one must adopt a totally uncritical attitude toward the Soviet Union. What it *does* mean, however, is that criticism must always be expressed with due regard for the *totality* of the picture, and that it must not be expressed in such a way as to give ammunition and encouragement to the purveyors of anti-Sovietism. In these respects, I believe the draft resolution has serious shortcomings.

### *The Unholy Crusade*

Precisely because the USSR is the most powerful bastion of the world anti-imperialist forces, the U.S. ruling class has always made it the target of unremitting attack. From the very days of the October Revolution up to the present, no effort has been spared to denigrate and undermine it in every possible way. Today the twin ideological weapons of the cold war are anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism.

Currently, one of the chief vehicles (if not *the* chief vehicle) for the promotion of anti-Sovietism is the unholy crusade against alleged "Soviet anti-Semitism." Within the past few years this has been built up into a public campaign of major proportions, heavily financed and employing every conceivable device to inflate this fraudulent issue and keep it incessantly in the public eye. An organization called Jewish Minorities Research devotes itself to pouring out a constant stream of anti-Soviet literature. An American Conference on Soviet Jewry, representing 25 national Jewish organizations, issues declarations, publishes newspaper ads and carries on a host of other activities. An endless succession of meetings, conferences, demonstrations, picket lines, petition campaigns and other public actions goes on, with due publicity in the press and on radio and television. Every major Jewish organization is under constant pressure to make this the number one point on its

agenda. A flood of articles appears in periodicals ranging from scholarly journals to leading popular magazines such as *Look* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, books are published in growing numbers, all painting a most dismal picture of the alleged plight of Soviet Jews.

Behind this highly-organized campaign are the cold warriors of the Right, those inveterate peddlers of racism and anti-Semitism, whose hearts now bleed for the "persecuted" Jews in the USSR. Behind it are the unflagging efforts of the State Department, which issues statements and other material and generally gives every encouragement to the "crusade." Behind it are the State Department's proteges—the fugitive fascist scum, embracing the most vicious anti-Semites and pogromists, who are given a haven here to continue their despicable activities. And behind it are the rabidly anti-Soviet social-democratic elements of the *Forward-New Leader-Dubinsky* stripe, as well as the Right-wing elements among the Jewish people.

Plainly, no effort or expense is being spared to maintain a perpetual state of hysteria and to create the illusion of a spontaneous mass protest. But it is also abundantly clear that the concern of these instigators of the "crusade" is least of all the welfare of Soviet Jewry. Rather, their purpose is to generate enmity toward the Soviet Union, to undermine the fight for peaceful coexistence and an end to the cold war, and to whip

up the poisonous anti-Communism which serves as the pretext for the war of annihilation against the Vietnamese people. *This is the essential character of this campaign.* And because it is basically anti-Soviet in its motivation and intent, it militates *against* the best interests of the Jewish people, whether in the Soviet Union or in the United States.

### *Good Intentions*

But what, it is asked, of those participating in the campaign who are not thus motivated but are truly concerned about the welfare of Soviet Jews? What of such individuals as Bertrand Russell, who insists that he is neither anti-Soviet nor a warmonger but is concerned only with the denial to Soviet Jews of certain cultural and religious rights which threatens their national survival?

One contributor to the discussion asserts that the draft resolution is wrong when it states that the instigators of the campaign "have sought to utilize every error, every shortcoming which may occur in the process of erasing the results of the crimes of the Stalin period and restoring Jewish cultural institutions in order to mislead many honest people, even some leading figures in the civil rights and peace movements." He says: "The participation of people like Bertrand Russell . . . is not based on being 'mislead.' It is based on very real shortcomings and errors still present in the Soviet policy

toward the Jews, which are recognized and listed in the draft resolution."\*

Leaving aside for the moment the manner in which the resolution places the question, I believe this view is entirely wrong. In the first place the objective effect of *any* participation in this campaign, however good one's intentions and however "moderate" one's criticisms, is to give aid and encouragement to the enemies of peace and freedom—and of both the Negro and Jewish peoples—and to lend oneself to their designs.

These spokesmen of reaction and racism are quite happy to have the participation of the Bertrand Russells and Norman Thomases and other such individuals, and to join with them in public protests even on their own "moderate" terms. Of this there is no better illustration than the three-quarter page ad which appeared in the *New York Times* of December 4, sponsored by the American Conference on Soviet Jewry and signed by ninety U.S. senators.

In the text of the ad, these signers express their "staunch support of the American Jewish community's protest against the anti-Semitic policies of the Soviet Union." The ad avoids, however, the more wild-eyed fabrications

\*From "Some Proposals for Improvement" by A. B., appearing in a mimeographed discussion bulletin issued by the CPUSA on December 27, 1966.

by which this "crusade" has been marked, for example, the allegation that the lot of the Soviet Jews is worse than that of the Jews under Hitler. In its bill of particulars it charges only that Jews alone are forbidden "schools and other institutions of Jewish learning and research" and "the right to have any form of nationwide federation of congregations or of clergy," also that Jews are not permitted "to be rejoined with their families in the United States, in Israel and other countries."

Thus, the ad places only "moderate" demands, not materially different from those of the Russells and Thomases—or even of some in the progressive camp. It goes on to say that Soviet policy, "which seems to be aiming at the obliteration of the Jewish community and Jewish culture," must be vigorously protested "by every person who respects the fundamental right of a group to live in peace and security."

And who are the signers of this protest as subscribers to the defense of fundamental human rights? Among them are James O. Eastland, Allen J. Ellender, John L. McClellan, Herman E. Talmadge, J. Strom Thurmond and other notorious Dixiecrats. Among them, too, are John J. Tower, the ultra-Rightist senator from Texas, Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut and other such stalwart "champions" of human rights.

Certainly, one ought to think twice at finding oneself in such company. Such ads serve the inte-

rests of neither Soviet nor American Jews, but only those of their enemies. That is why undisguised racists, anti-Semites and reactionaries of all stripes so eagerly attach their names to them.

Will this campaign contribute in any way to the fight against the growing menace of the ultra-Right here? Will it contribute to the fight against the renazification of West Germany and the alarming upsurge of neo-Nazism there? Will it contribute to the struggle for Negro freedom? Will it contribute to ending the war of aggression in Vietnam and securing world peace? It is clear that it will do just the opposite.

The issue is not one of *what kind of campaign* should be waged. It is not a question of "exaggeration" versus "accuracy," of "immoderation" versus "moderation," of "unfriendly" versus "friendly" criticism. The point is that it is necessary to oppose *any* kind of public campaign whatever.

Nor can we accept the contention that genuine injustices exist in the treatment of Soviet Jews, that these give grist to the mills of anti-Soviet elements (as the draft resolution itself puts it), and that their elimination will remove the grounds for such "crusades."

First, anti-Soviet campaigns are based not on facts but on inventions. And as quickly as one invention is exposed, a dozen new ones take its place. Second—and more important, I submit that not even the "moderate" criticisms of a Russell are warranted.

### No "Forced Assimilation"

There is no Soviet policy of eliminating Yiddish culture. The *direction* of development—and this is what is important—is not toward its disappearance but toward its growing revival. Yiddish literature is on the rise, not on the decline. Some recognition of this is to be found, for example, in an article by Joel Cang entitled "Is There a Revival of Jewish Literature in Russia?" (condensed from *The Jewish Quarterly* in the *Jewish Digest*, December 1966). He writes:

The stream of Jewish literature in Soviet Russia is widening. Since its re-emergence as a vehicle of literary expression some five years ago, Yiddish has succeeded in re-asserting itself and winning due recognition both at home and abroad. Allowing for the limitations which a rigid adherence to Socialist realism imposes on Jewish, as well as on other creative art in Communist Russia, the Yiddish novelists and poets in the USSR are making a solid contribution to the mainstream of Jewish writings of our time.

I contend that such a trend could not exist in the face of a government policy of suppressing Yiddish culture. And I have no doubt that the trend will continue, and that the means of its expression will go on expanding. Whatever errors or shortcomings exist will be corrected by the Soviet people—including the Soviet Jews—acting *in their own way*. They will be corrected because the Soviet Union is a socialist country ad-

vancing toward communism, a country in which the welfare of its peoples is the paramount consideration, not in response to the demands of self-appointed critics sitting in judgment from abroad.

Soviet Jews who want such things as Yiddish schools or grammars are quite capable of expressing their desires. Indeed, they *are* expressing them, among other ways in letters to the magazine *Sovietish Heimland*, as was recently reported by G. Kenig of the Paris Yiddish daily *Naye Presse (Morning Freiheit*, December 4, 1966). And Soviet Jews are well aware of the true nature of these campaigns allegedly in their behalf, and are frequently very angry and resentful about them.

We cannot here enter into a discussion of all the current allegations of Soviet discrimination against Jews, but one merits further comment, namely, the charge that Jews are not permitted to leave the USSR to join their families abroad. When questioned about this during his recent visit to France, Premier Kosygin stated: "As far as the reunification of families is concerned, if some families want to meet or if they want to leave the Soviet Union, then the road is open for them, and there is no problem in this." (*New York Times*, December 10, 1966.) The *Times* story also reports that there has been a dramatic increase in the granting of exit visas during the last year or so. But what is most significant is that both the restric-

tions on emigration and the recent relaxation apply not specifically to Jews but to *all* Soviet citizens. In other words, there is no discrimination involved.

#### *The Draft Resolution*

Unfortunately, the tone and content of the draft resolution are such as to give encouragement to the anti-Soviet campaign. It is not accidental that this section of the resolution has been seized upon by anti-Soviet spokesmen ranging from the *New York Times* to Radio Free Europe and trumpeted to the world as showing a change of heart on the part of the Communist Party of the United States in the direction of joining the critics of "Soviet anti-Semitism."

To be sure, the resolution fervently denounces the charge of "Soviet anti-Semitism" as "a slander and an outright fraud, which must be rejected and fought." It says: "Not only is there no official policy of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, but anti-Semitism and all other forms of national discrimination (or privileges) are prohibited by the Constitution of the USSR." But this is followed by a catalogue of "errors and shortcomings" which begin to cast doubt on the initial declaration.

This, it should be noted, is added to by the clear implication in Comrade Novick's discussion article of a policy of "forced assimilation" in the USSR. Such a policy, as we have already pointed

out, can only be characterized as a policy of anti-Semitism, and to imply it is tantamount to bringing in at the back door what one has denied at the front door.

Further, the resolution looks forward to "the continuation of the process now under way and its progress toward full restoration of the administratively suppressed Jewish cultural institutions." Support of the *Political Affairs* editorials of June and July 1964 is expressed, with the implication that these also call for such "full restoration." To expect a return to the state of affairs in 1948, in the face of the great changes and the considerable growth of assimilation which have taken place in the Soviet Union since then, is in my opinion quite unrealistic, and this was said at some length in the editorials. To use it as a criterion of correction of past errors and crimes is only to lay the groundwork for perpetual criticism of the Soviet regime and the false inference that if all the cultural institutions of the past do not reappear, this is due to Soviet policy opposing their restoration.

This section of the resolution needs to be redrafted in the direction of *unequivocally* rejecting any idea of "Soviet anti-Semitism" in whatever guise it may appear, and any campaign of pub-

ic criticism, however "friendly." The resolution needs also to devote itself more fully and more concretely to the fight against anti-Semitism here in the United States, where it is a really serious problem.

The preoccupation with the non-existent persecution of Soviet Jews serves to draw attention away from the very real dangers which confront American Jews. The Jewish organizations and leaders thus preoccupied devote scarcely one per cent of the energy expended on this "crusade" to combatting the growing menace of the ultra-Right in this country and the rise of neo-Nazism in West Germany. There are no mass meetings, conferences, demonstrations or petitions on these dangers, except on the Left. And even here an undue degree of concern over Yiddish culture in the USSR detracts from mounting the kind of campaign against anti-Semitism in the United States which the situation demands.

The draft resolution, therefore, needs to be amended so as to present a consistently internationalist line throughout, and one which fully directs the weight of the struggle against U.S. imperialism and its war policies in the first place.