

*Historical
Afterword
on
Soviet Jewry
by Neal Kozodoy*

There are, according to the official Soviet census of 1959, some 2,268,000 Jews now living in the Soviet Union.¹ Of these, the largest proportion (75 per cent) resides in the Russian and Ukrainian republics; the rest are scattered throughout the remaining thirteen republics, with sizable communities in Byelorussia, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldavia, Latvia, and Estonia. They are concentrated heavily (95 per cent) in urban areas. All in all, the Jews form a small minority, 1.09 per cent of the total Soviet population.

Like the Ukrainians, Georgians, Germans,

¹ The exact figure, as reported in *Pravda*, February 4, 1960, was 2,267,814. However, there are reasons to believe that the actual number is closer to 3,000,000, since for the first time registrants were not required to provide proof of nationality and many Jews, particularly those married to non-Jews, may well have declared their nationality to be other than that specified on their internal passport. See Moshe Decter, "The Status of the Jews in the Soviet Union," in *Foreign Affairs*, January, 1963, and William Korey, "The Legal Position of the Jews in the Soviet Union," in *Midstream*, May, 1966. I wish particularly to thank Moshe Decter for sharing generously with me the results of his own extensive research into the problem of the Jews in the Soviet Union.

and so forth, Jews are regarded by Soviet law as members of a distinct nationality, despite the fact that they lack a continuous geographic territory. Under the terms of a decree first issued in 1932, every Soviet citizen is required to have his nationality specified on his "internal passport," the principal means of identification in the USSR.² Thus, a person born of Jewish parents is automatically listed as Jewish. (One born of mixed parentage may, upon registering, select as his own the nationality of either parent.)

As a nationality Jews are entitled to rights guaranteed by law and extending to the free development of their culture and their language. Yiddish (Hebrew, as a language of liturgy, was from the earliest day of the Soviet regime considered reactionary and an instrument of Zionism and was effectively suppressed). Up until 1948, with a few brief interruptions, Jews enjoyed a cultural life of their own, with newspapers, books, and journals, publishing houses, schools, professional theaters, and research institutions. Today, despite USSR ratification of the 1962 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which obligates it "to recognize the right of

²Decree adopted by the Central Executive Committee and the Council of Peoples' Commissars, December 27, 1932. (*Pravda*, December 28, 1932)

members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including the maintenance of school and . . . the use or the teaching of their own language,"³ there is not a single Yiddish school throughout the Soviet Union nor a single class where Yiddish is taught. (In the 1959 census, 18 per cent of those registered as Jews—a little over 400,000—gave Yiddish as their native language, although here, too, the actual figures of those who read or speak the language are probably higher than the official report indicates.) By way of contrast, the Volga Germans, who like the Jews are dispersed over several territories and whose total number (according to the 1959 census) comes to somewhat over 1,600,000, have, since their restoration to national rights in 1964, enjoyed the full benefit of schools, textbooks, and pedagogical institutions. "In districts of a number of provinces, territories and republics that have a German population, there are secondary and elementary schools where teaching is conducted in

³Commission on Human Rights, "Study of Discrimination in Education," January 5, 1961. See also the statement made by the Soviet government to UNESCO: "The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics reports that every Soviet citizen may have his children taught in any language he wishes. . . ." (Commission on Human Rights, "Periodic Reports on Human Rights Covering the Period 1960-1962," December 20, 1963.)

German or German is taught to children of school age. . . ."⁴

The closing of Jewish schools after World War II was followed by the dismantlement of the large Jewish publishing structure. The publishing house Der Emes (The Truth), which had brought out the thrice-weekly *Aynikayt* and 110 other publications in the three years after the war, was closed in 1948, its fonts of Yiddish type melted down. The Jewish State Theater in Moscow was shut down in 1949, about a year after its leading actor, the legendary Solomon Mikhoels, was murdered by the secret police. The Jewish Anti-fascist Committee, of which Mikhoels had been an official, was dissolved in 1948, and most of its other officials were also liquidated.

In 1959, six years after Stalin's death, the first Yiddish book, by Sholom Aleichem, appeared after a silence of eleven years. It was followed by four more Yiddish books written by deceased authors. In 1962 and 1963, no Yiddish books were published. More appeared in 1964, with promises of still more to come. (In 1961 alone, by comparison, 62 books were produced in the Soviet Union for the Maris and 144 for the Yakuts in their own languages. The Maris and Yakuts are two small, primitive

⁴From a decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, signed on August 29, 1964, published December 28, 1964.

Asian groups, numbering 504,000 and 236,000 respectively.⁵ In 1964, two Yiddish books were published in a total of 18,000 copies. The Maris that year had 56 books published in their own language in a total of 180,000 copies.) There is still no Yiddish theater, with the exception of traveling groups of amateur actors and singers. (The Gypsies, numbering 132,000, have a state theater.) Nor is there any newspaper, except for the *Birobidzhaner Shtern* (Birobidzhan Star), a triweekly paper produced in the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan (whose 14,000 Jews comprise 8.8 per cent of the region's population), in an edition of 1,000, containing mostly local news and translations of items from the major papers.⁶ In 1961, a Yiddish literary journal, *Sovietish Heimland* (Soviet Homeland) began publication as a bimonthly, with a press run of 25,000, a sizable proportion of which was marked for shipment abroad. At the time, Yekaterina Furtseva, the Soviet Minister of

⁵Moshe Decter, "Status of the Jews."

⁶The Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan in the Far East was established by decree of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR in 1934, and was recommended as a "national homeland" for Soviet Jews. Relatively few were attracted there as permanent residents, and today, as former Premier Khrushchev noted in an interview printed in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, April 9, 1958, "All that is left now in Birobidzhan are signs in Yiddish at the railroad station, but there are no Jews. . . ."

Culture, declared that the decision to allow publication of the Yiddish journal was taken "to please our friends abroad."⁷ *Sovietish Heimland* is now a monthly journal, and has published the work of over 100 Jewish authors. Its editor, Aron Vergelis, vigorously denies the presence of discrimination in the Soviet Union against Jewish national culture, despite the fact that the Jewish writers and artists purged in the "black years" under Stalin have yet to be formally rehabilitated as a group.

More than a nationality, Jews in the Soviet Union are also considered to be a religious group, and as such are subject to the campaign against all religion conducted by the Communist Party. The state, however, as distinguished from the party, guarantees the right of all religious citizens to worship freely.⁸ This includes the right to organize central federative bodies, such as the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, the Moslem Board, and so forth. Judaism, however, has not had a central coordinating body since 1926. It is unable to publish periodicals or devotional literature, manufacture ritual ob-

⁷ *Jerusalem Post*, February 3, 1961.

⁸ Decree of the Council of Peoples' Commissars of January 23, 1918, subsequently reiterated. See, too, the report of the Soviet government to the United Nations, available in "Study of Discrimination in the Matter of Religious Rights and Practices, Conference Room Paper No. 35."

jects, maintain training schools for rabbis, or enjoy formal contacts with coreligionists abroad.

In 1959, fifty thousand copies of the Russian Orthodox version of the Bible were released by state-owned presses. In 1958, the Baptists issued a Russian edition of the Protestant Bible in ten thousand copies. Even though the state has assured all religions lacking federative centers a supply of "necessary paper and the use of printing plants,"⁹ no Hebrew Bible has been published in the Soviet Union since 1917, and no Jewish religious book of any other kind has appeared in print since the 1920's. In 1957, a photo-offset reproduction of a pre-revolutionary *siddur* (prayerbook) was permitted in an edition of three thousand copies. Religious calendars are unavailable, except for photographed copies of handwritten calendars that circulate from hand to hand. Similarly, devotional articles such as the *talith* (prayer shawl) and *tfilin* (phylacteries) are virtually impossible to obtain.

The Russian Orthodox Church maintains two academies and five seminaries for the training of priests; the Moslems have a *madrassa* in Russia, and in addition are allowed to send their clerical students abroad to the seminary in Cairo. The Jews had no institution for the training of rabbis until 1957, when a Yeshivah

⁹ "Conference Room Paper 35," p. 14.

(rabbinical academy) was established at the Great Synagogue in Moscow. Since that time it has ordained two students. Of the thirteen who were studying at the Yeshivah in April 1962—eleven of them over the age of forty—nine were prevented from resuming their studies in Moscow on grounds that they lacked the permits necessary for residence in the capital. According to the *New York Times* of July 27, 1965, the chief rabbi, Yehuda-Leib Levin, told an American delegation of rabbis that the government would permit twenty students to register in the Yeshivah in the fall of that year. Needless to say, Jewish rabbinical students are not allowed to pursue their course of study abroad. Nor has any Jewish religious delegation from the USSR been permitted to visit Jewish institutions outside the Soviet Union or to maintain formal ties with co-religionists abroad. During the Jewish High Holy Days in September, 1961, a special loge was constructed in the Great Synagogue of Moscow for the seating of visitors and officials from the Israel Embassy to prevent communication between local worshipers and foreigners. In October, 1961, lay leaders of the Moscow and Leningrad synagogues, among them Gedaliah Pecharsky of Leningrad, were convicted of alleged espionage and sentenced to lengthy prison terms for conspiring with "Israeli spies," who were in

turn described as tools of American intelligence.¹⁰

In 1957, restrictions were passed on the public baking and sale of matzah, the unleavened bread eaten by religious Jews during Passover. At first the ban was confined to the city of Kharkov, but it soon spread to other areas. In March, 1962, Rabbi Levin announced that the public baking and sale of matzah were totally forbidden—the machines in the state bakery had "broken down"—and he advised his congregants to bake an unleavened bread at home. Passover of 1963 saw no change in the situation, but in July, 1963, four Jews were brought to trial on charges of profiteering in the production and sale of matzah. In the meantime the authorities changed their position and now claimed that it was illegal for state bakeries to produce matzah or for state stores to sell it on the grounds of separation of church and state. In a document submitted to the United Nations on July 11, 1956, however, Soviet policy had been spelled out as follows:

By order of the USSR Government, on days preceding particularly important holidays—such as Passover in the case of the Jews—the shops of the state trading organizations

¹⁰ *Trud*, January, 1962.

sell special types of bakery products, matzah for Orthodox Jews, etc., to enable worshippers to perform the appropriate ritual.¹¹

In 1964, the Moscow Jewish community was permitted to rent a small bakery for the production of matzah, and Rabbi Levin was also authorized to request shipments from abroad, although many of these were subsequently impounded or returned by the authorities. By 1965, in response to protests from abroad, some synagogues were allowed to produce matzah on their own premises. A Jew desiring to obtain the unleavened bread must bring the necessary flour to the synagogue and register his identity, a procedure which leaves much to be desired and is in any case only a step toward restoring the status quo as it was before 1957, when matzah was freely available in state stores throughout the country.¹²

Ever since the Bolshevik seizure of power in November, 1917, the Soviet government has consistently reaffirmed the civil rights of Russian citizens and taken legal measures to punish any infringements of those rights. Discrimination on grounds of race or creed was to be eradicated in all areas of life, especially

¹¹ "Conference Room Paper 35," p. 11.

¹² See "Passover and Matzoth: A Case History of Soviet Policy," Commission Study presented at the Ad Hoc Commission on the Rights of Soviet Jews, Carnegie International Center, New York, March 18, 1966.

those pertaining to such matters as residence and movement, employment, schooling, military service, ownership and use of property, and participation in elections and government. In a number of these areas, Jews do in fact

enjoy the civil rights spelled out in the legal statutes. Residential restrictions are nonexistent, and there are no barriers to participation in various aspects of social life—the Party, trade unions, army, social services, clubs. Employment opportunities in a number of fields—particularly in science, medicine, law and the arts—are widespread.¹³

Nevertheless, it has become increasingly apparent that Jews are now subject to discriminatory employment practices in various administrative bureaus of the government and that quota restrictions operate with regard to Jews in party leadership positions and in education. In an interview held by a parliamentary delegation of the French Socialist Party on May 12, 1956, former Premier Nikita Khrushchev said:

Our heterogeneous populations have their republics. . . . Each of them has an autonomous government. Formerly backward and illiterate, these peoples now have their engineers and professionals. . . .

¹³ William Korey, "Legal Position of the Jews."

Anti-Semitic sentiments still exist there. They are remnants of a reactionary past. This is a complicated problem because of the position of the Jews and their relations with other peoples. At the outset of the Revolution, we had many Jews in the leadership of the Party and State. They were more educated, maybe more revolutionary than the average Russian. In due course we have created new cadres. . . .

Should the Jews want to occupy the foremost positions in our republics now, it would naturally be taken amiss by the indigenous inhabitants. The latter would ill receive these pretensions, especially as they do not consider themselves less intelligent nor less capable than the Jews.¹⁴

This attitude, in which Jews are regarded as alien pretenders rather than as members of the "indigenous" population of the Soviet Union, was reasserted by Soviet officials in subsequent interviews, and the practice of excluding Jews from certain key positions has apparently continued.¹⁵ However, internal Soviet reaction to this unofficial policy of dis-

¹⁴ *Réalités*, May, 1957.

¹⁵ See the interview with Yekaterina Furtseva in the *National Guardian*, June 25, 1956, and the articles by J. B. Salsberg, the former Canadian communist leader, in *Vochenblatt* and *Morgen Freiheit*, October through December, 1956; also Salsberg's article, "Anti-Semitism in the USSR?" in *Jewish Life*, February, 1957. None of these interviews was reported in the Soviet press.

crimination is now beginning to be expressed. Konstantin Skriabin, a Soviet academician, indirectly alluded to discriminatory practices at a meeting of the Central Committee in March, 1962: "From my point of view," he said, "a scientist should not be evaluated by his passport but by his head, from the point of view of his ability and social usefulness."¹⁶ And an editorial in *Pravda* on September 5, 1965, after attacking for the first time in over two decades manifestations of anti-Semitism, went on to note:

It is necessary to remember that the growing scale of Communist construction requires a constant exchange of cadres among the peoples. Therefore any manifestations of national separateness in the training and employment of personnel of various nationalities in the Soviet Republics are intolerable.

The proportion of Jews in political life has also been declining for many years. In 1937, 32 of the 569 deputies in the Supreme Soviet, 5.6 per cent, were Jews, whereas in the current Supreme Soviet only 8 of the 1,517 members are Jews, 0.5 per cent. Of the Supreme Soviets of the 15 Union republics, only in Lithuania does Jewish representation correspond to Jewish population figures, and al-

¹⁶ *Pravda*, March 8, 1962.

though the Novosti Press Agency (*Jews in the Soviet Union*, 1963) has publicized the figure of 7,623 Jews elected to local Soviets in 1961, it neglected to note that the total number of members elected that year came to 1,823,049. Jewish representation thus stands at about 0.4 per cent, as compared to the figure of 1.09 per cent in the total population. A study of Jewish representation in leadership positions of the Communist Party reveals similar discrepancies.¹⁷

Nicholas DeWitt, an American specialist on Soviet education, has noted that the quota system in admissions policies of universities operates "to the particularly severe disadvantage of the Jewish population."¹⁸ In 1935 Jews represented 13.5 per cent of all students in higher education, a figure which dropped by the end of 1960 to 3.2 per cent, although during the same period the Jewish proportion of the population decreased only from 1.6 to 1.2 per cent. Furthermore, "in those republics where Jews constitute an above average proportion of the urban population, their representation among university students is well below higher education."¹⁹ It should be noted,

¹⁷ William Korey, "Legal Position of the Jews."

¹⁸ *Education and Professional Employment in the USSR*, Washington, 1961.

¹⁹ Nicholas DeWitt, "The Status of Jews in Soviet Education," mimeographed, 1964.

too, that Soviet statistics on "higher education" combine in one category universities and other types of specialized schools, such as teacher training institutions and music conservatories. Jews are heavily represented in the latter types of school, and "this fact artificially raises the total by balancing out the much lower proportion of Jews in the universities as such."²⁰

The actual situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union must be seen against the background of a consistent campaign by the press and other official organs to denigrate the Jewish national character and the Jewish religion. Much of this campaign, in its language and direction, seems to be a carry-over from the darkest years of Stalin's reign of terror (1948-1953), when Jewish artists and writers were characterized as "homeless cosmopolitans" and were systematically liquidated. This period culminated in the notorious "Doctors' Plot" affair, in which prominent doctors were indicted as agents of an American-Zionist conspiracy, allegedly masterminded by the Joint Distribution Committee, to murder Soviet leaders. Only Stalin's death in 1953 saved these men from execution or banishment, and the whole affair was subsequently denounced as a sham, a "violation of Socialist legality."

²⁰ Moshe Decter, "Status of the Jews."

In newspaper articles today, Jews figure prominently as examples of antisocial types, profiteers, and conspirators. They are frequently singled out for mention in articles dealing with more general social ills, where, in a continuation of an old Stalinist policy, their Russian names are stripped away and their Semitic first names and patronymics given in full. A rather mild example of such news items appeared in *Trud*, the Soviet Trade Union paper, on June 9, 1963, over the signature of N. Ehrlich, the *Trud* "expert" on Jewish affairs. The text is in full:

In Vladimir Dal's dictionary the verb "to cling" is construed as "to attach oneself," "to harass," "to bother." The corresponding noun "clinger" [hanger-on] is construed by Dal as "a bore," "one who won't move away," "a man who foists himself upon others."

These epithets alone do not exactly evoke deep respect for the man thus characterized. There are, however, people who even take pride in this "calling," who make clinging their profession. We speak of hangers-on and loafers. They can often be seen in the central squares of our cities, in hotels, at receptions of certain foreign embassies. In other words, wherever one can meet foreigners.

The Soviet public has nothing but contempt for loafers; they are people alien to us. In our country all possibilities have been

created for productive labor. Every citizen of the Soviet Union has the opportunity to work not out of need but following his heart's command. Unfortunately there are still in our country people who try to live at the expense of others, to live as parasites. Finding no sympathy among honest toilers, these hangers-on and loafers attach themselves to foreigners, who throw miserable piti-ances their way in return for a vulgar joke or lampoon at the expense of our reality—from torn socks to the daubing of abstractionists. Take, O Lord, what we can afford [Russian proverb].

It has somehow developed that whenever one talks of "hangers-on" the image of some "stylyaga" [beatnik] comes to one's mind, complete with a shaggy mop of hair and ultra narrow trousers. It is not all that correct. There are "hangers-on" who, even more aggravating, are of a very, very respectable age—fathers of families.

Here you have three of them. Get acquainted: Moisie Lvovich Chernukhin, born 1907, Zinoviy Isaakovich Roginsky, born 1897, and Shimon Avseyavich Sheyfer, born 1883. They cling to foreign tourists and certain embassies in Moscow. It is unpleasant even to discuss them, but we are duty bound to speak about them as people have been coming to our Editorial Office to complain indignantly about the unsavory conduct of these individuals who have lost all sense of

shame and conscience. Let their dirty little deals become public property.

As far back as 1949, Chernukhin, along with other characters of his type, had been telling spurious tales about the conditions of life in our country. This calumny was used by the Israeli press to fan a hostile campaign against the Soviet Union.

In subsequent years Chernukhin many times met with Israeli citizens, obtaining from them Zionist and religious literature as well as items of religious observance. But do not think this was because of an ardent belief in God. The *taliths* [ritual shawls for prayer—N.E.], for instance, he used to sell to believers at speculative prices.

This hanger-on of declining years just loves embassy receptions. It is a passionate love, and he tries not to miss out on a single one. This love of his led him, a semiliterate, hardly able to read or write, to a reception at the Israeli Embassy held in honor of writers, artists, and scientists who came from Israel to Moscow to attend the World Congress for Universal Disarmament and Peace. Not conversation on methods of literary and scientific development occupied Chernukhin on that evening. Creeping like a snake from one foreigner to another, he begged for knick-knacks, surreptitiously stuffing his pockets and lining his clothes with little booklets of dubious contents which were lavishly strewn

on the tables. He did not by-pass oranges and sweets, either. He swiped everything.

Chernukhin does not omit holding out his palms for considerations to foreigners in the Moscow Choral Synagogue. One could see him often enough, not having finished his prayers, plunging headlong to the exit of the synagogue to lie in wait for foreigners.

Chernukhin's conduct evokes righteous indignation on the part of the believing habitués. At their demand he was expelled from the so-called "Committee of Twenty" [the governing body of the synagogue—N.E.], which deprived Chernukhin of the means to mingle with foreign guests, but this did not stop the ardent hanger-on. He manages to squeeze into the synagogue by the back door for a cringing handshake with foreigners, at the same time wheedling something for his speculative machinations.

His visits to embassies are dictated by a determination to grab as much foreign knick-knacks and foreign literature as possible with the aim of speculation.

A characteristic instance. On October 17, 1962, the Israeli Embassy organized a reception on the occasion of the Jewish New Year. Of course, Roginsky was there. The guests were talking and exchanging news while Roginsky was skipping around the tables, well-stocked with *taliths*, prayer books, books, journals, records, postcards, etc. The longer he skipped around these tables the thicker

his pockets got, and the wider swelled his sides. Toward the end of the reception Roginsky had grown so "obese" that one could hardly recognize him.

Sheyfer prefers to "work" at the synagogue. He spends all his free time there, and that he has in abundance. He is an old-age pensioner. Suffice it for a foreigner to show his face at the synagogue—Sheyfer is right there at his side begging for *taliths*, literature, and overseas knickknacks. The more the better.

Just a short while ago, on June 1, Sheyfer (for the umpteenth time) became the hero of a scandalous incident. During the service at Choral Synagogue, he sneaked into the box where the foreigners were sitting and started begging for "souvenirs." A member of the congregation, Rabinovich, told him off. In answer to this, such a torrent of abuse poured out of Sheyfer's lips that even an edited version of it would be too indecent to print. Sheyfer was running amok to such an extent that members of the congregation were compelled to throw him out of doors.

One could supply many more facts about the conduct of Chernukhin, Roginsky, and Sheyfer, but even from what has already been said it is clear how low these far-from-young people have fallen. Hangers-on like Chernukhin, Roginsky, Sheyfer, and the likes of them do not act out of friendly feelings toward foreigners nor out of a desire to help

them to know our country and the life of the Soviet people better. Avarice, groveling servility before everything foreign, spiritual waste, lack of pride in our great motherland—these impel the Chernukhins, Roginskys, and the Sheyfers into the embraces of sometimes not entirely blameless foreigners.

A few words addressed to those who are palsy-walsy with such hangers-on.

Every year more and more Soviet people go abroad, more and more foreigners visit the Soviet Union. We have no intention at all to conceal ourselves from them with a stone wall. But we have our own Soviet pride. We do not like to breathe the same air with hangers-on and loafers, to be with them in the same room. Foreigners should never forget it if they really want to have true friends among Soviet citizens.²¹

Countless such articles appear every year, in major newspapers like *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and *Trud*, as well as in local papers. Although the names and circumstances differ, the characterization of Jews remains constant. They are uniformly depicted as marginal men, parasites on the Soviet economy, sneaky and "snake-like" in their movements, seeking out "not entirely blameless" foreigners for the purpose of maligning the Soviet homeland and gaining small trinkets and devotional articles which

²¹ Quoted from *Jews in Eastern Europe*, September, 1963.

they later sell at exorbitant prices. Hints of conspiracy with Israeli embassy officials are common. While some of these newspaper articles seem to be gratuitously insulting, others are directed at a clear goal. For example, the virulent press campaign conducted in Lvov from February to November, 1962, finally resulted in the closing of the Great Synagogue of Lvov, the last Jewish house of prayer in that Ukrainian city.²² Indeed, the campaign against the Jewish religion has had the effect of reducing the number of synagogues in the Soviet Union from a mere 450 in 1956 to 96 by April, 1963, and to 60 by the summer of 1965. Jews are consistently portrayed as visiting the synagogue for the sole purpose of dealing in black-market goods and engaging in anti-Soviet espionage activities.

Very often, charges against the Jewish religion are linked to themes of ideological subversion and political disloyalty on the part of Jews, especially their alleged subversive ties with the state of Israel. The Soviet Union, in 1948, was the first country in the world to extend formal recognition to Israel, but this initial overture was abruptly followed by a policy of hostility. Attacks by the press often

²² For an analysis and excerpts from the Soviet press, see Moshe Decter, "The Lvov Case: A Self-Portrait of Soviet Anti-Semitism," *Midstream*, June, 1963.

concern themselves with the holiday of Passover and its supposed message of nationalistic independence which is exploited by "Zionist conspirators":

The peculiar characteristic of most Jewish holidays is their clear expression of nationalism. Such festivals as Passover, for example, give rise to nationalist feelings, and poison the minds of Jews by diverting their thoughts to Israel, "the land of their fathers." . . . Judaism kills love for the Soviet motherland.²³

Jewish bourgeois organizations are doing their utmost to revive Judaism in our circumstances. Many Israeli tourists disseminate Zionist literature. Every year the Minsk synagogue receives matzah packages from abroad. But the matter doesn't stop at these "gifts" alone. Judaism is trying to create an ideological subversion, to fill the consciousness of working Jews in our country with bourgeois ideology.²⁴

One key phrase that occurs time and again

²³ F. S. Mayatsky in *Sovietskaya Moldavia*, official daily government newspaper in Kishinev, capital of Moldavia, July 23, 1959.

²⁴ From "The Shadow of the Synagogue," by J. Muraviev, in *Zviatza*, the leading Byelorussian-language paper of Minsk, capital of the Byelorussian republic, February 2, 1965. For an appraisal of Soviet-Israel relations see "Israel in the Soviet Mirror," a special issue of *Jews in Eastern Europe*, December, 1965.

in Soviet portrayals of Jews is that of "the golden calf." Jews are depicted as eagerly debasing themselves in a frantic search for profit, and the scene of their nefarious activities is frequently the synagogue:

For these "saints" nothing is holy! But there is one thing they consider holy: Money, money, money. . . . And the flow comes through into the pockets of the parasites of the Jewish synagogue of Alma Ata.

Money—this is their ideal. . . . This spring, Fanya Weisman and Sioma Weiner began to bake matzah. Were they motivated by religious feelings? Oh no! They wanted to profit from believers.

Stuffing themselves with matzoth and ethrogim, the preachers of Judaism—Spector, Kotlaryevsky, Shuchat, and Monastyrsky—pray only to the golden calf: how to collect more money from the believers for their own needs and for the militant spirit of the Israeli militarists.

The gods of the servitors of the synagogue are profit and money—"the golden calf."²⁵

The campaign to discredit Jews and Judaism reached a climax of a sort during the economic trials held in the Soviet Union from 1961 to 1965, which saw the reintroduction of capital

²⁵ Quoted in "Passover and Matzoth: A Case History of Soviet Policy."

punishment for crimes like embezzlement, bribery, and currency speculation. (Contrary to first reports, it now appears that the sentences were indeed carried out.) Thousands of persons were arrested, tried, and convicted to the accompaniment of sweeping press coverage and notoriety. Of the more than 200 sentenced to death, about 55 per cent were Jews, and in the Ukraine 80 per cent were Jews. The press campaign focused almost exclusively and with extraordinary zeal on the Jewish malefactors, and the reports reaching the West soon elicited a wave of protest, highlighted by Bertrand Russell's appeal to Premier Khrushchev for an amnesty.²⁶ A study of the economic trials carried out by the International Commission of Jurists concluded:

There has been an insidious and sometimes subtle propaganda campaign directed against the Jewish people of the Soviet Union, specifically against those charged with economic crimes and also against the supposed general characteristics of Jews that have been reiterated for centuries. If the reports of trials for economic crimes are even reasonably complete, the number of Jews receiving death sentences and severe terms of imprisonment is greatly disproportionate to their number as a minority group. . . .

²⁶ *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, February 28, 1963.

There is undoubtedly also a certain amount of anti-Semitic prejudice at all levels of Soviet society. . . . It is a simple matter to link the picture of the money-grubbing Jew of anti-Semitic fancy with the picture of the archvillains of capitalist cupidity. This had certainly been done by the Soviet press, but the most that can safely be said is that the picture painted of the moral malaise in the Soviet Union diverts attention toward Jews because the primary object of the Soviet polity is to divert attention away from the real truth, to find scapegoats. . . . It is a tragedy for the Soviet Jewish people that they have been made the scapegoat for the transgressions of those whose guilt it would be dangerous to make public.²⁷

Apprehension over Soviet treatment of Jews turned into outrage in February, 1964, when news reached the West of the publication of an anti-Semitic tract by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev. The book was *Judaism without Embellishment*, written by Professor Trofim Kichko, a Ukrainian academic "specialist" on Jews and Judaism. It was published in an edition of twelve thousand copies as a "scientific" study and work of scholarship,

²⁷ "Economic Crimes in the Soviet Union," in *Journal of the International Commission of Jurists*, Summer, 1964. See also Moshe Decter, "Soviet Justice and the Jews," *Midstream*, March, 1965.

with the following imprimatur from the Academy of Sciences:

There is no doubt that the profound and substantial work by T. K. Kichko, which contains a tremendous amount of factual material conscientiously and scientifically analyzed, will be a valuable manual for propagandists of atheism in their daily work and will assist wide circles of readers to appraise questions regarding the Jewish religion.²⁸

The contents of the 192-page volume are familiar enough. The book asserts that Judaism teaches contempt for workers and peasants, glorifies usury and extortion, and leads its adherents into hypocrisy, bribery, and financial speculation. Judaism "is impregnated with narrow practicality, with greed, the love of money, and the spirit of egoism." The book further connects Judaism with a worldwide conspiracy of Zionism and Western capitalism.

The text of *Judaism without Embellishment* is illustrated with a series of vicious cartoons sharply reminiscent of Nazi propaganda caricatures of the type found in Julius Streicher's *Der Stuermer*. They depict hooknosed Jews, wearing phylacteries, in the act of confiscating synagogue funds or brawling in the synagogue

²⁸ See Moshe Decter, "The Soviet Book That Shook the Communist World," *Midstream*, June, 1964.

over the distribution of spoils won from speculation in matzah and pigs and from thievery, deception, and debauchery. Ben-Gurion is seen "at work," erasing the word "not" from the Commandments, "Thou shalt not lie [*sic*]," "Thou shalt not murder," "Thou shalt not steal"; another cartoon, captioned "Bonn-Gurion," shows the ghost of Auschwitz trying to restrain the former premier of Israel from signing a document entitled, "An Agreement to Supply Arms to the Bundeswehr," a reference to the alleged military alliance between Israel and West Germany. Another illustration depicts a servile Jew licking a gigantic Nazi Storm Trooper boot, in allusion to the frequent Soviet assertion that during the years of the Hitlerite occupation, Zionist leaders served the Nazis and collaborated in their plans.

The publication of *Judaism without Embellishment* provoked an unprecedented storm of world-wide protest, most notably on the part of Jewish and general communist movements in Western Europe, Latin America, Australia, and the United States. For the first time, Soviet authorities found it necessary to issue a public disavowal. The book was criticized, with certain qualifications, by the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, and this criti-

cism was published in the Soviet press.²⁹ According to various reports, the remaining copies of the book were apparently seized and destroyed.³⁰

The "Kichko Affair" did much to mobilize public opinion outside the Soviet Union and to shape the growing swell of protest over the treatment of Russia's Jews. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell, an influential friend of the Soviet Union, has repeatedly lent his name to such protests and has himself written to various Soviet spokesmen, including former Premier Khrushchev and Aron Vergelis, the editor of *Sovietish Heimland*. (From his public pronouncements and past history, it is evident that Vergelis serves as a factotum of the Soviet authorities.) In July of 1964 Lord Russell wrote to Vergelis and enclosed an appeal he had received from a Jewish citizen of the USSR. The two letters follow (the second is in translation):³¹

²⁹ *Pravda*, April 4, 1964.

³⁰ *London Jewish Chronicle*, April 10, 1964.

³¹ Quoted in *Jews in Eastern Europe*, November, 1964. Lord Russell's letter was printed in *Sovietish Heimland*; the appeal of the Russian Jew was not. For the ensuing exchange between Vergelis and Russell, see *Commentary*, January, 1965.

The Editor
Sovietish Heimland
 Kirov Street
 Moscow, USSR

Dear Sir,

I am writing you to make known the feelings of several Soviet citizens, including members of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, who have addressed letters to me recently. These Soviet citizens wish to enjoy the right to a full cultural life in the Soviet Union. They are Jews and they feel that they are denied the means of living a complete and satisfying life because they are denied the cultural facilities made available to all other national and minority groups in the USSR. I consider this an important and urgent problem and I should be glad if you would kindly publish the letter I enclose, as well as my own letter.

I write because I am concerned for justice and for the good name of the Soviet Union. Unless people who are concerned for both raise their voices, the cause of peaceful co-existence and the pursuit of peace and general understanding between peoples and nations will be harmed by silence.

Yours sincerely,
 Bertrand S. Russell

Moscow, May 20, 1964

Dear Mr. Russell,

The Jews in Russia have read with deep sympathy your letters to N. S. Khrushchev concerning the discrimination of the Jews in the USSR in the trials that deal with economic crimes. But I must say that the people who induced you to do it used your name unexpediently. I believe there was place for a certain tendentiousness in the appreciation of the trials mentioned above. There was no need to use your name for this matter.

In our opinion it is much more important to show to the whole world public-opinion and directly to the leaders of the Soviet Union the problem of enforced assimilation of Jews in the Soviet Union. Indeed, although there are about three million Jews in the USSR, we do not have a newspaper in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk and other centers, there are no Jewish libraries, there are no schools or courses where those who wish it could learn the Jewish language, there are no clubs, theaters or any other center for cultural activity, there is no public organization that could take care especially to serve the Jewish population.

To our deep sorrow it is impossible and even pointless to place this problem before the Soviet government or any other responsible organization.

We want nothing more than to receive the

same rights as the Jews in Poland, Rumania and Czechoslovakia.

We ask you and other influential people to address Premier Khrushchev requesting a solution to this problem. It is urgent.

With respect.

Yours,

(Signature withheld)

All questions concerning our letter we ask you to send to the Jewish journal, *Sovietish Heimland*, Moscow Center, Kirov Street. This letter was written to you on behalf of a great number of people, by a war veteran, an invalid of the war, father of several children, bearer of several war medals, member of the Communist Party.

(Signed)

More recently, Lord Russell has sent a statement voicing his concern over the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union to the World Union of Jewish Students (February 27, 1966). In this statement he particularly deplored the fact that

Soviet authorities have still taken no steps to end the separation of members of Jewish families disunited in appalling circumstances during the Nazi wars. . . . The one community which suffered the most at the hands of the Nazis—the Jews—has many thousands of individuals in the USSR who have been

waiting for more than twenty years to join their close relatives in Israel and other countries.

The general and Jewish press in Western countries has, of course, given coverage to the plight of Russia's Jews, and in recent years a growing number of protests has appeared in the communist press as well. At a rally held in Madison Square Garden in June, 1965, such public figures as Norman Thomas and U. S. Senators Jacob Javits and Robert F. Kennedy voiced their concern over the situation in the Soviet Union. President Johnson has also released statements of concern and received members of groups active in the protest movement, such as the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry; and a resolution appealing to the Soviet government to grant the Jews of Russia those rights to which they are entitled by law and which are enjoyed by other Soviet nationalities and religious groups has been passed by both chambers of the U. S. Congress. In more recent developments, the Reverend Thurston Davis, S.J., editor of the Jesuit weekly *America*, has urged Catholics to pray for the survival of Jews in the Soviet Union,³² and representatives of various Jewish organizations, both religious and secular, have issued several formal statements of protest to the

³² *America*, February 19, 1966.

Moscow government. An Ad Hoc Commission on the Rights of Soviet Jews, chaired by Negro civil-rights leader Bayard Rustin, was convened in New York in March, 1966. The members of the tribunal, which included law experts and Christian religious leaders, heard testimony by eyewitnesses and by authorities on Eastern European affairs. A month later a two-day conference on the status of Soviet Jewry was held in Philadelphia.

It is clear that protests from abroad have had an impact on the internal situation in Russia. The formal disavowal of Kichko's *Judaism without Embellishment* and the easing of restrictions against the baking of matzah were two direct consequences of such protests. Moreover, as the atmosphere within the Soviet Union itself becomes increasingly open and "liberalized," it has become possible to discern among the Soviet intelligentsia a growing sentiment of concern over the enforced "disappearance" of Jews from the annals of Soviet history, both past and present. This concern has been expressed perhaps most vocally by Yevgeni Yevtushenko, the popular young Soviet poet, in "Babi Yar," a poem which first appeared in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, (Literary Gazette), on September 19, 1961:

There are no memorials at Babi Yar—
The steep slope is the only gravestone.

I am afraid.
Today I am as old as the Jewish people.
It seems to me now that I am a Jew.
And now, crucified on the cross, I die
And even now I bear the marks of the nails.
It seems to me that I am Dreyfus.
The worthy citizenry denounces me and
judges me.
I am behind prison bars.
I am trapped, hunted, spat upon, reviled
And good ladies in dresses flounced with
Brussels lace
Shrieking, poke umbrellas in my face.
It seems to me now that I am a boy in
Byelostok,
Blood flows and spreads across the floor.
Reeking of onion and vodka,
The leading lights of the saloon
Are on the rampage.
Booted aside, I am helpless:
I plead with pogrom thugs
To roars of "Beat the Yids, and save Russia."
A shopkeeper is beating up my mother.
O my Russian people!
You are really international at heart.
But the unclean
Have often loudly taken in vain
Your most pure name.
I know how good is my native land
And how vile it is that, without a quiver
The antisemites styled themselves with pomp
"The union of the Russian people."
It seems to me that I am Anne Frank,

As frail as a twig in April.
 And I am full of love
 And I have no need of empty phrases.
 I want us to look at each other,
 How little we can see or smell,
 Neither the leaves on the trees nor the sky.
 But we can do a lot.
 We can tenderly embrace in a dark room.
 Someone is coming? Don't be afraid—
 It is the noise of spring itself.
 Come to me, give me your lips.
 Someone is forcing the door.
 No, it is the breaking up of the ice. . . .
 Wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar.
 The trees look down sternly, like judges.
 Everything here shrieks silently
 And, taking off my cap
 I sense that I am turning gray.
 And I myself am nothing but a silent shriek,
 Over the thousands and thousands buried
 in this place.
 I am every old man who was shot here.
 I am every boy who was shot here.
 No part of me will ever forget any of this.
 Let the "Internationale" ring out
 When the last anti-Semite on earth is buried.
 There is no Jewish blood in mine,
 But I am hated by every anti-Semite as a Jew,
 And for this reason,
 I am a true Russian.⁸³

⁸³ Translated by Max Hayward in *Partisan Review*, Winter, 1962. Copyright © by *Partisan Review*, 1962; reprinted by permission.

Following the publication of this poem, Yevtushenko, then 28, was denounced for "over-concern with Jews, for singling out Jews as particular victims of Nazi genocide policy, and for slandering the Soviet people."⁸⁴ The poem, however, has remained immensely popular, and at public readings Yevtushenko is compelled by his audiences to read it over and over. The topic is clearly of great interest. Indeed, about a year after "Babi Yar" was first published, the following exchange between Yevtushenko and former Premier Khrushchev took place at a meeting between the Soviet leader and several hundred Soviet intellectuals:

Yevtushenko: First of all I want to thank the leaders of the party and government for kindly making it possible for me to speak here. Permit me to begin my speech with a verse which I wrote not so long ago which I consider very timely. [Recites the last two lines of the poem, "Babi Yar."]

Comrade Khrushchev: Comrade Yevtushenko, this poem has no place here.

Yevtushenko: Respected Nikita Sergeevich, I especially selected this poem and with the following purpose in mind. We all know that no one has done more than you in the liquidation of the negative consequen-

⁸⁴ Patricia Blake, *Partisan Review*, Winter, 1962. See also her introduction to "New Voices in Russian Writing," a special issue of *Encounter*, April, 1963.

ces of the Stalin cult of personality and we are all very grateful to you for this. However, one problem yet remains which is also a negative consequence of those times, but which today has not yet been resolved. This is the problem of anti-Semitism.

Comrade Khrushchey: That is not a problem.

Yevtushenko: It is a problem, Nikita Sergeevich. It cannot be denied and it cannot be suppressed. It is necessary to come to grips with it time and again. It has a place. I myself was witness to such things. Moreover, it came from people who occupy official posts, and thus it assumed an official character. We cannot go forward to Communism with such a heavy load as Judophobia. And here there can be neither silence nor denial. The problem must be resolved and we hope it will be resolved. The whole progressive world is watching us and the resolution of this problem will even more greatly enhance the authority of our country. By resolution of the problem I mean the cessation of anti-Semitism, along with instituting criminal proceedings against the anti-Semites. This positive measure will give many people of Jewish nationality the opportunity to take heart and will lead us to even greater success in all areas of Communist construction.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ See "Russian Art and Anti-Semitism: Two Documents," *Commentary*, December, 1963. This extract reprinted by permission; copyright © 1963 by the American Jewish Committee.

In 1965, the City Council of Kiev announced that it would erect a monument to the "victims of Fascism" at or near Babi Yar, although it is apparent that the unique Jewish tragedy connected with the name of Babi Yar will be glossed over. Nevertheless, the announcement was an indication that the virtual silence which has surrounded the subject of Jewish martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis in World War II may yet be broken. In addition, the Shostakovich Thirteenth Symphony, which contains a choral section setting "Babi Yar" to music, reappeared last year in a gala performance in Moscow. (It had been withdrawn from the repertoire in 1964, after two performances.)

There are a few signs, then, that Soviet policy with regard to the Jews may soon undergo some changes. The editorial which appeared in *Pravda*, containing an explicit condemnation of anti-Semitism (September 5, 1965), followed by two months a remark made by Premier Kosygin during an address to a rally in Riga, Latvia. In the course of his speech Mr. Kosygin denounced "nationalism, great-power chauvinism, racism, and anti-Semitism" as "completely alien to our society and in contradiction to our world view."⁸⁶ It was the first such remark made to a home audience in over two decades. But it is highly uncertain whether statements like these mark

⁸⁶ *Pravda*, July 19, 1965.

the beginnings of a real educational effort to eliminate the manifestations of anti-Semitism. In late October, 1965, the Soviet Union effectively blocked a draft article, proposed by the United States and Brazil, to be inserted into the United Nations "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination." The proposal was meant to "condemn anti-Semitism and take appropriate actions for its eradication." The Soviet delegation, by suggesting an impossible amendment to this proposal, forced the committee to pass a resolution doing away with all references to specific forms of race hatred. The proposed Soviet amendment read as follows:

States Parties condemn anti-Semitism, Zionism, Nazism, neo-Nazism and all other forms of the policy and ideology of colonialism, national and race hatred and exclusiveness, and shall take action as appropriate for the speedy eradication of those misanthropic [subsequently changed to "inhuman"] ideas and practices in the territories subject to their jurisdiction.⁸⁷

Despite such periodic reversals, the situation

⁸⁷ See "Soviet Jewry: A Current Survey," A Commission Study presented at the Ad Hoc Commission on the Rights of Soviet Jews, March 18, 1966. At a subsequent session (Spring, 1966) of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the article condemning anti-Semitism was finally approved and adopted. The Soviet Union abstained from voting.

does seem to be improving somewhat, if with agonizing slowness. One cannot, however, predict in confidence a steady process of amelioration: On August 16, 1966, it was learned that economic trials had begun once again, and that at least one Soviet Jew had been sentenced to death for alleged economic crimes. Yet it does seem that the Soviet Union is becoming somewhat more responsive to pressures from abroad and to the weight of public opinion at home, even though such events as the recent trial and conviction of the authors Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel reflect, at best, an ambiguous attitude toward the process of liberalization. The same *Pravda* editorial which condemned anti-Semitism, in the words of Lenin, as a "foul fanning of racial specialness and national enmity," contained a paragraph which, one may hope, could some day serve to fashion Soviet policy toward the Jews:

It must not be forgotten that the people of the whole world, and particularly the people who have freed themselves from imperialist oppression, look upon the Soviet Union, the world's first country of socialism, and on the relations that have taken shape among the peoples of our country, as a model. This means that strengthening the fraternal friendship among the people of the USSR is a most important international obligation of each Soviet Republic.