

# Soviet Jewry Since the Death of Stalin: A Twenty-five Year Perspective

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FOR A PROPER PERSPECTIVE on the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union, it is important to understand the special role that Jews play in Soviet nationality doctrine. The Bolsheviks accepted as legitimate the separate national concerns of the various nations and peoples of the former Russian Empire, and the Soviet state structure is based on the territorial principle—Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Lithuania, etc. Since the Jews were without territory, the Bolshevik answer to their needs was total equality. This was to be achieved through gradual assimilation, which was to come about as a result of an “objective process.” In Lenin’s view, opponents of Jewish assimilation—including the socialist Bund, with its program of Jewish cultural autonomy—were clerical reactionaries and petty-bourgeois. Lenin was not anti-Jewish; he sincerely (and naively) believed that Russian Jews would be glad to merge with other national groups into a classless socialist society. In 1919, the Bolsheviks abolished the *Kehillah* (Jewish communal structure) and nationalized all Jewish communal agencies. At the same time, they created a number of specialized government organs (a Jewish commissariat, Jewish soviets, Jewish courts, etc.) which were intended to serve the needs of Jews during the period of transition from a capitalist to a socialist society.<sup>1</sup> Lenin died in 1924 and, after several years of internecine strife, was succeeded by Stalin.

In his early years Stalin was not antisemitic. His views on the nationality issue, presented in *Marxism and the National Question*, were shared by many Bolsheviks and even some Mensheviks, including Jews. Later in life, however, Stalin began to exhibit a personal anti-Jewish bias, to which his daughter Svetlana Allilueva has testified. Toward the end of World War II the old Russian nationalist concept of *russkost* (the glorification of all things Russian), so dear to the hearts of 19th-century Slavophiles, began to mix with the Marxist ideology of the makers of the Bolshevik Revolution. Soviet ideology shifted from an emphasis on “socialism in one country” to a militant national communism. Stalin, a Georgian by birth, made a significant contribution to the chauvinistic mood of the Russian people. The glorification of Russia and her national past became an important aspect of

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<sup>1</sup>Most of these government organs were liquidated under Stalin in the decade 1930–40.

life in the USSR. At the same time, expressions of nationalist sentiment on the part of other groups in the Soviet Union were branded as "deviationist."<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the 1940's Soviet officials initiated a campaign against "cosmopolitans." A large number of writers, artists, and composers were accused of being insufficiently patriotic and of following alien ideas borrowed from Western capitalist countries. It soon became evident that the campaign against "cosmopolitans" was focused on Jewish intellectuals, most of whom were, in fact, loyal to the Soviet state. In the course of the campaign the very idea of a separate Jewish group life became suspect. Jewish books and memorabilia disappeared from Soviet libraries and museums. The specter of "Sionskii Kahal," a hostile world Jewry, resurrected from the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," became an acceptable propaganda tool in the Soviet fight against Zionism and the newly-established State of Israel. As a result, antisemitism assumed a new respectability in the Soviet Union, and spread to leftist movements in various parts of the world.

The campaign against "cosmopolitans" was followed by the infamous "doctors' plot." Six outstanding doctors, all Jews, were accused of conspiring with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and American intelligence services to poison high Soviet officials. Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, the day the "show trial" was to begin, brought a halt to the matter. The trial never took place, and those physicians who had survived their detention were released and rehabilitated.

With Khrushchev's accession to power, changes came about in the social and political climate; there was a liberalization of the regime. The great fear pervading Soviet society under Stalin gradually disappeared. The situation of Soviet Jewry, however, continued to be defined within the rigid framework of xenophobia and anti-Jewish bias inherited from the Stalin era. Khrushchev was plainly not interested in revitalizing Jewish life. Indeed, he himself, as a high Party and state official, had been among the framers of many of the anti-Jewish measures taken under Stalin. To Khrushchev, who was born in a peasant village in the Kursk district on the Ukrainian

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<sup>2</sup>On Stalin's nationalism see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary* (New York, 1973), and the same author's "The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy," *Slavic Review*, December 1972, pp. 563-589. See also Svetlana Allilueva, *Only One Year* (New York, 1969). At the end of World War II many Russian exiles in France and elsewhere underwent a "change of direction" and accepted the Soviet regime. Some who returned to the USSR paid dearly for their patriotic gesture.

According to many observers of the Soviet scene, Stalin is enjoying renewed popularity among the masses as a symbol of patriotism. The horrors of the Stalin era are almost forgotten; survivors of the old generation do not want to remember, and the young simply do not know. A. Zinoviev, a scholar and writer who recently left the Soviet Union, has stated that if free elections were held today, the Communist Party would receive a majority.

border, Jews and Judaism were totally alien; he exhibited all the prejudices of his class, including a hostility toward Jews that he was never able to overcome. Khrushchev was overthrown by a coalition of Stalin's collaborators, and in 1964 a collective leadership, with Brezhnev as secretary-general of the Party and Kosygin as premier, took over the reins of government.

Again there were changes in the direction of greater liberalization of Russian society. With respect to matters affecting the Jewish population, however, nothing changed. The old policy of "integration" remained basic to the new regime. While open, violent antisemitism disappeared, deep-seated anti-Jewish bias remained. Only recently echoes of the "doctors' plot" were heard at the trial of Anatoli Shcharansky, a Jewish dissident accused of spying for the United States.

### POPULATION

In 1959, the Soviet Union conducted a general census. Published figures indicated there were some 2,267,000 Jews in the USSR, representing about 1.1 per cent of the total population. As a result of industrialization and the Nazi occupation the number of Jews in the historic regions of Jewish concentration, the Ukraine and Belorussia, had decreased substantially. At the same time, the number of Jews in the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic), both in Russia proper and its constituent parts, had increased. There were even Jewish centers in the Asiatic regions of the Soviet Union consisting not only of local Jews but also of Ashkenazic Jews from Russia and Poland. (According to the census there were some 300,000 Jews in these areas.) Of the total Jewish population, 2,161,702 were residing in cities, and only 106,112 in rural areas. Even taking into account the Jewish autonomous region of Birobidzhan, created in 1928, with its population of some 14,000 to 15,000, it was clear that the attempted "agrarianization" of Russian Jews had proved to be a fiasco.

The next Soviet census, that of 1970, indicated a total Jewish population of 2,151,000, or some 117,000 less than in 1959. This five per cent decrease cannot be explained on demographic grounds, and the figure is, in fact, suspect. According to the data, the decrease occurred in the Slavic areas of the country. In 1970, Soviet citizens were permitted to choose the nationality under which they wished to be registered (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, etc.), and it is quite possible that Kremlin authorities, interested in preserving the Slavic plurality in the country, encouraged certain groups to "pass." The Jews were the only group that showed a population loss. A.M. Maksimov, the Soviet statistician, argued that the decrease resulted from the "fusion of the nations which, under the conditions of a socialist

society, has the character of friendship and bears no resemblance to assimilation in bourgeois society.”<sup>3</sup>

It is odd that some scholars have uncritically accepted the 1970 census figure on the assumption that assimilation and the wish to conceal Jewish identity might account for the unprecedented drop in Jewish population between 1959 and 1970. Some have proposed complex theories—dividing Soviet Jews into various groups (halachic, “passport,” assimilated, and others)—for arriving at a proper figure. These are interesting theories, but they call for caution in their application since, if we were to adopt them for statistical purposes, it would be necessary to change our estimates of the Jewish population in the United States, England, and other countries where there would be, for example, no “passport” Jews, but certainly a division between assimilated Jews and others. If we accept Soviet population figures, we may one day face the grave situation of finding only a small number of “statistical” Jews remaining in the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities will then claim that Jews no longer constitute a significant minority there.

A balanced estimate, taking into account the Jewish family structure and allowing for those Jews who have left the country, would put the Jewish population of the Soviet Union in 1977 at 2,678,000. Recent Soviet emigrés have spoken of three to four million Jews residing in the USSR, but this is an exaggeration. We shall have to wait for better times, when statistics coming out of Moscow are more open and honest, to arrive at a more precise figure on the number of Jews in the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

While it is true that the Jewish community in the Soviet Union is not homogeneous, there is no need, for our purposes, to divide Soviet Jews into different sub-groups, i.e., Ukrainian, Baltic, Oriental, etc. Under present circumstances, the future of Jews everywhere in the Soviet Union will be determined by what happens in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, and a few other central Soviet cities where groups of Jewish intellectuals are concentrated.

## RELIGION

Maintaining a religious life in the Soviet Union is very difficult. The official atheistic outlook of the state works against free religious observance. Jews are particularly handicapped because the Jewish religion is intimately

<sup>3</sup>*Istoria SSSR* (Moscow), No. 5, 1971.

<sup>4</sup>For an exchange of views on the subject of the Soviet Jewish population, see AJYB, Vol. 77, 1977, pp. 468–476. See also Salo W. Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1976), p. 296. In 1977, *Sovetish Heymland* printed a piece about the *American Jewish Year Book* accepting without comment the latter’s population figure for the Soviet Union in 1975—2,680,000.

linked to Jewish national life. Soviet policy affecting the one has a direct impact on the other.

Religious life in the Soviet Union is regulated in the main by the law of April 8, 1929, which established the status of voluntary societies desiring to maintain religious facilities for their members. These societies, called *dvadsatkas*, are composed of 20 members who, with the permission of the authorities, may rent a building for the conduct of religious worship, burial services, and other religious rites. These societies are not permitted to maintain educational facilities for children. They may not print prayer books or produce prayer shawls, phylacteries, or other articles needed for the observance of Jewish ritual without permission of the authorities.

The *dvadsatkas* are certainly not an adequate substitute for the *Kehillah*. In retrospect, it is clear that the Soviet government would not permit the existence of any institutions or agencies which might indicate the formal existence of a Jewish minority. In this regard the Soviet Union is an exception to the other Communist nations of Eastern Europe. Everywhere but in Russia there is a Jewish communal structure, consisting of both religious and secular institutions, which is officially recognized. In Hungary, there is even a rabbinical seminary which conducts educational programs and carries out Jewish historical research.

The 1936 Soviet Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion to everyone in the USSR. The reality, however, has been quite different. Moreover, while there are limitations on the free exercise of religion with respect to all denominations, those placed on the Jewish religion are particularly restrictive. Without synagogues, religious articles, and rabbinic education, Jewish religious life in the Soviet Union has deteriorated to a very great extent.

Not long after the death of Stalin, the Soviet press reported that "special courts" in Kishinev were conducting trials of religious Jews accused of perpetuating "superstition," "ancient rites," and other "criminal" acts. The trials, which violated the Soviet constitutional guarantee of freedom of worship, made pariahs of the accused. Soviet authorities did everything in their power to hinder the observance of Jewish religious law. Jewish employees of Soviet factories, shops, and offices were not able to observe the Sabbath. Such observance could result in exclusion from school and employment. Recent Jewish emigrés from the USSR have reported that numbers of Soviet Jews, particularly Lubavitcher Hasidim, are leading Marrano-like lives, adjusting to difficult conditions by taking employment as night watchmen, avoiding their bosses, or bribing them to close their eyes to observance of the Sabbath and other religious practices.

A small number of synagogues survived both the Stalinist terror and the Nazi onslaught. They were old and dilapidated. Under Khrushchev, the

closing of synagogues took on a mass character in the Ukraine, the Caucasus, Siberia, Lithuania, Belorussia, Moldavia, and Russia proper.<sup>5</sup> Synagogues were closed under various pretexts, with buildings being turned into Red Army clubs, Komsomol meeting halls, and even warehouses. These actions were accompanied by press campaigns in which, for the benefit of the non-Jewish population, it was repeatedly emphasized that Jewish houses of worship are centers for drunkards and criminals.

There is great uncertainty as to the number of functioning synagogues in the Soviet Union today. The governmental Committee for Religious Affairs reported in 1960 that there were 400 synagogues in the Soviet Union, a figure officially furnished to the United Nations as well. In the same year, however, *Mission Today*, the bulletin of the Soviet embassy in Vienna, indicated that there were 150 synagogues. In 1965, Solomon Rabinovitch, a Soviet propagandist on Jewish affairs, spoke of 97 synagogues. Rabbi Juda Leib Levin of Moscow, during his visit to the United States and Canada in 1968, reported that there were some 100 Jewish houses of worship. As recently as October 1974, the synagogue of Tomlino, not far from Moscow, was closed because, according to the authorities, it was not properly registered. Unofficial sources indicated there were 62 synagogues in 1975. The number presently functioning is unknown. Recent official statements have referred to "several tens," which, if taken to mean 50, would indicate that there is one Jewish house of prayer for every 50,000 Jews in the Soviet Union today. Soviet authorities have acknowledged the existence of some 300 *minyanim*, prayer groups meeting in private homes. The situation with respect to the *minyanim*, however, is beset with problems. In many cases, participants have been brought to trial for violating laws regulating religious organizations.

Soviet authorities are well aware of the significance of the synagogue for Jewish life, and from time to time launch fierce attacks against those who are active in synagogal affairs. In 1960, there was a wave of arrests of lay leaders of Jewish congregations on trumped-up charges of espionage and "connections with the embassy of one of the capitalist states." In 1961, three prominent Jews connected with the synagogue in Leningrad, T.R. Pechersky, E.S. Dinkin, and T.A. Kaganov, were sentenced to long prison terms on similar charges. Three Moscow religious leaders—Roshal, Goldberg, and another whose name could not be ascertained—were sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Individuals holding positions with synagogues in Kiev, Minsk, Vilna, Tashkent, and Riga were removed from their posts. The arrests created a stir of protest in the West. In succeeding years

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<sup>5</sup>Synagogues were closed in such large cities as Zhitomir, Kovno, Saratov, Kazan, Tula, Kremenchug, Poltava, Chernovits, Lvov, and Orenburg.

the authorities abandoned this campaign of mass repression, and some of those who had been arrested were permitted to leave for Israel. Action continued to be taken, however, against individuals who, for one reason or another, displeased the authorities. In 1978, Solomon Kleinman was "relieved" of his position as chairman of the Moscow synagogue. Iakov Mikelberg, a former vice-chairman, took his place. It was reported that one of the reasons for Kleinman's removal as chairman was his desire to centralize Jewish religious affairs around the Moscow synagogue, thus making himself a spokesman for Soviet Jewry. Such plans were not favorably regarded by the Kremlin.

In 1977, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz of Elizabeth, New Jersey reported that the Moscow synagogue had undertaken some important initiatives, including the establishment of a Family Affairs Committee to deal with the complex problems of broken Jewish families. In 1976, at a meeting in Budapest of Jewish communal leaders from Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Russia, it was reported that the Moscow synagogue had requested permission to send an observer to the World Jewish Congress. Nothing further, however, was heard about this request. A Soviet Jewish delegation under the late Rabbi Levin was permitted to go to Belgrade in 1970 to attend the birthday celebration for Lavoslav Kadelburg, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities there. In 1977, one Canadian and three American rabbis participated in the celebration of the 70th birthday of Solomon Kleinman of the Moscow synagogue; Leonid Shcherbakov represented the governmental Council for Religious Cults at the banquet. It is to be hoped that these infrequent celebrations are a portent of better things to come.

The radical decline in the number of synagogues has created a serious situation not only for believing Jews, but also for Jewish secularists. There is no Jewish organization, agency, or school in the Soviet Union that can serve as a center of Jewish life. The only possible center is the synagogue, and its importance cannot be overemphasized.

Jews are a unique group in the Soviet Union in their lack of a central religious organization. The Russian Orthodox Church, which enjoys a special status, is well-organized, and its hierarchy engages in far-reaching political and propagandist moves. Russian Orthodox leaders are frequent visitors to the United States and attend religious conclaves in Europe and Israel. The Georgian Orthodox Church is administered by the Patriarch Catholicos in Tbilisi. The Armenian Gregorian Church is headed by the Supreme Patriarch in Erevan, who maintains a liaison with coreligionists abroad. Groups as diverse as Baptists and Buddhists have central coordinating bodies. Moslems in the Soviet Union have central organs in the European areas of the Soviet Union, as well as in Siberia, Central Asia,

Kazakhstan, the northern Caucasus, and Transcaucasia. On occasion, Moslems have visited Mecca and Medina. The privileges enjoyed by these groups are, of course, of only relative advantage; all, to varying degrees, are controlled by the State and have little leeway in the pursuit of their activities. Nevertheless, Soviet Jews are in a special situation.

One of the most crucial problems facing Soviet Jewry is the almost total lack of trained religious personnel—rabbis, *mohalim* (circumcisers), cantors, and *shohatim* (slaughterers). Since the Bolsheviks came to power, the number of rabbis receiving ordination has been continually decreasing, and the situation is even more serious with respect to *mohalim*. Since the October revolution there has been virtually no institution for the training of *mohalim*, with the result that Soviet Jews have been largely unable to perform circumcisions.

We know from reliable sources that there were 40 rabbis in the Soviet Union in 1965, including a number who had been trained in Poland and Lithuania. Unofficial reports indicate there were five rabbis in the Soviet Union in 1977; two in the Ashkenazic areas and three in the non-Ashkenazic regions. Among the rabbis who enjoyed recognition during the period under review were Solomon Shlifer of Moscow, Juda Leib Levin of Moscow, Nuta Olevsky of the Marino-Roshchinskaia synagogue in Moscow, Chaim Lubanov of Leningrad, Abraham Panich of Kiev, Juda Menachem Rabinovich of Vilna, Shmuel Davidashvili of Tiflis, M. Openstein of Kuibishev, J.N. Alaiev of Samarkand, G. Mizrachi of Bacu, and the present rabbi of Moscow, Iakov Fishman.

During the period under review, Hasidim, particularly those of the Lubavitcher persuasion, played an important role in maintaining Jewish religious life. Rabbi Josef-Itchak, who became the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1920, provided a model in this regard, in that he pursued many efforts in the areas of Jewish religious education and Jewish welfare, despite the dangers involved. The last remaining hasidic rebbe in the Soviet Union, A. Tversky, of the Skvir dynasty, left for Israel in 1964.

During the period of liberalization that followed Stalin's death, the Moscow rabbinate asked permission to establish a yeshiva in Moscow. In 1957, after repeated requests, Rabbi Shlifer of Moscow received such permission; the yeshiva was to be housed in, and supervised by, the Moscow synagogue. This was a significant departure from Soviet practice, and the Yeshiva Kol Iakov was greeted with enthusiasm by Jews both in and outside the USSR. Rabbi Shlifer, the first head of the yeshiva, died soon after it was opened. He was replaced by Rabbi Juda Leib Levin, who remained in the post up to his death in 1971. The yeshiva had a small but competent staff, including, at different times, Rabbis Shimon Trebnik, Chaim Katz, and Jacob Kamenetsky. Rabbi Fishman, who had been ordained under Rabbi Levin, and



who had served as a rabbi in Perm, took over the teaching duties in 1971. Itsik Hurvits served as administrative head.

The yeshiva began its work with great hopes for the future. Initially there were 35 students. Soon, however, the authorities began to harass students, refusing to renew residence permits of those from Soviet Asia. Enrollment dropped to 20 in 1960, 11 in 1961, 6 in 1962, and 4 in 1965. Within a short time, the yeshiva had practically ceased to function except for an occasional class attended by a small number of elderly Jews. In 1970, there were reports that 19 new students would enter the yeshiva, but nothing came of this. In the meantime, some teachers had emigrated to Israel, and others had left the yeshiva for other reasons. In 1974, Rabbi Fishman informed Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren of Israel that the yeshiva had resumed its efforts with some 18 adult and 10 young students in attendance. In 1976, on a visit to New York, Rabbi Fishman made reference to 10 students. In 1977, the enrollment was down to eight. Quite clearly, the yeshiva was in no position to train the needed rabbis.

With the permission of the authorities, three young men from the USSR went to Budapest to study at the neological (Conservative) rabbinic institution there. One student was also training at Yeshiva University in New York through an arrangement with the American Appeal-to-Conscience Foundation, which covered the tuition fees and living expenses of the student.

A rabbi proposed by a *dvadsatka* must be acceptable to the authorities. Given this situation, some Soviet Jewish dissidents, and some Jewish activists in the West, have expressed a lack of confidence in the few rabbis and chairmen of synagogues now laboring under great difficulties in the Soviet Union. When Rabbi Levin of Moscow spoke at New York's Hunter College in 1968, the old man, clearly not free to express himself candidly, was received with catcalls and hostile demonstrations by many in his audience. It is, of course, true that all religious institutions in the Soviet Union are strictly supervised and must accept clearly defined limitations in order to function. The alternative, however, would be no synagogues at all. Observers abroad must be careful about expressing opinions on this very grave matter and would be wise to refrain from criticizing individuals in Russia because they have succeeded in maintaining no more than a skeletal Jewish religious life. There is deep interest in conserving, under any conditions, a Jewish religious framework in the Soviet Union, in the hope that one day it will assume greater strength.

Soviet Jews are severely handicapped in practicing their religion because

they have hardly any prayer books, prayer shawls, phylacteries, or *mezuzot*.<sup>6</sup> In the mid-1960's, Rabbi Shlifer was permitted to print 10,000 copies of a standard prayer book. For the most part, religious items are only available on the black market at very high prices. Religious articles cannot be purchased in state shops, and the synagogues encounter great difficulty in distributing whatever small quantities they are able to obtain. Soviet authorities, suspicious of contacts between Russians and foreigners, have taken strict measures to prevent Jews from receiving gifts from tourists. In 1959, Soviet postal authorities returned to Israel parcels of religious items sent to the Soviet Union by the rabbinate of Israel. In February 1962, Rabbi Levin advised the members of his synagogue not to accept gifts from foreign visitors. In August 1963, *Izvestia* carried an article criticizing an American rabbi who, the paper claimed, distributed more than 800 prayer books and other religious articles.

In 1968, a new prayer book, *Sidur Ha'Shalom* (Prayer Book of Peace), edited by Rabbi Levin and containing prayers for festivals and other special occasions, was published by the Moscow synagogue. A religious calendar containing a Russian translation of the *Kaddish* was also issued by the Moscow synagogue. In 1977, Soviet authorities permitted the New York-based Appeal-to-Conscience Foundation to ship 10,000 copies of the Pentateuch to Moscow. In the same year, Chief Rabbi Rosen of Rumania sent 300 prayer shawls and a quantity of *mezuzot* to the Soviet Union. Rabbi Pinchas Teitz of Elizabeth, New Jersey sent to Moscow 16 boxes containing prayer books for Rosh Hashana and a large package containing 550 sets of *etrogim* (citrons) and *lulavim* (palm branches) for *Sukkot*.

Under Khrushchev, Soviet authorities, for the first time, began to interfere with the celebration of Passover.<sup>7</sup> In 1959, 1960, and 1961, the preparation of matzot was prohibited in Kiev, Odessa, Rostov, Kharkov, Kishinev, and Riga, although it was permitted in Moscow, Leningrad, and Tbilisi. In 1963, bakeries that had been set up by various synagogues were shut down, and the state bakeries, under various pretexts, refused to prepare *matzot*. At the same time, gifts of *matzot* from abroad to private individuals were not delivered by postal officials, and many Soviet newspapers published letters protesting "unnneeded *matzot*." In July 1963, Emil Katz, Wolf Bogomolsky, Claudia Bliachman, and Malka Brio were brought to trial in Mos-

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<sup>6</sup>We do not know how many religiously observant Jews there are in the Soviet Union. *Sovetish Heymland*. No. 4, 1977, cites a figure of 3 to 6 per cent, representing about 25,000 to 50,000 people, in the Ukraine. No source is given for this estimate, and it must be assumed to be a guess. See AJYB, Vol. 62, 1961, pp. 285-286; *Vestnik Izrailia* (Tel Aviv), May-June 1960; and Solomon Rabinovich, *Yidn n Soviet Farband* (Moscow, 1960).

<sup>7</sup>From the early days of the Bolshevik regime, the observance of Passover was ridiculed by the Bezbozhniki, the official state agency charged with spreading anti-religious propaganda. Observant Jews, however, were always able to obtain flour for the preparation of *matzot*.

cow for baking *matzot* for "profit and speculation." Three of the accused were sentenced to prison terms; the fourth, an 82-year-old invalid, was released because of his age. A press campaign linked *matzot* with the Exodus and, thereby, with the "worst enemies" of Communism—Israel and Zionism.

Toward the end of 1964 (Khrushchev was now out of power), local administrations relaxed the prohibition against *matzot*-baking, and from that time on there has been little difficulty in this respect. While restrictions against the importation of flour products converted into bread have made it impossible for Jews to receive *matzot* from abroad, the authorities are now providing observant Jews, at least in the large cities, with sufficient quantities. Mikhail Tendetny, chairman of the Moscow synagogue, stated that sufficient quantities were being prepared for the 1975 Passover. In 1977, the authorities allocated 160 tons of flour for Moscow, 75 tons each for Kiev and Leningrad, and 30 tons each for Vilna and Riga. In 1978, Solomon Kleinman, then chairman of the Moscow synagogue, reported that there would be more *matzot* available than in the previous year. The situation in the small provincial cities, however, is still far from satisfactory.

During the 1960's and into the 1970's, Soviet authorities, using various pretexts, closed Jewish cemeteries in a number of cities. They also refused to allocate to Jewish families parcels of land to be consecrated for burial purposes. Problems involving burials arose in Minsk, Kiev, Leningrad, and Moscow, and many Jewish families were forced to cremate the bodies of their relatives.

Even during the worst period of Stalinist terror, strong feelings of Jewishness persisted among the Jewish population. Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, a new religious awareness has emerged among younger Jews, notwithstanding their lack of knowledge of Jewish religious tradition. This awareness has manifested itself in a variety of ways and represents not only a quest for faith, but also a reassertion of Jewish national identity. At the same time, a negative phenomenon has appeared—the attraction of Jews, particularly among the intelligentsia, to Russian Orthodoxy. It is a sad fact of life in the Soviet Union that individuals searching for religious meaning have found it much easier to obtain books about Christianity than about Judaism. Converted Jews include not only persons who have accepted Christianity as a private act of faith, but some who have become leaders and proselytizers of their new religion; some have even brought their new faith to Israel and the United States.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>The Russian emigré press, including *Vestnik* of Paris and *Novoye Hasskoe Slovo* of New York, has noted the trend toward conversion. Among the prominent converts are: Lev Regelson, a Moscow physicist, who, along with Father Gleb Iakunin, protested to the Fifth Assem-

## CULTURE

After World War II it became apparent that Soviet authorities would not permit a restoration of Jewish cultural life. Those Jews who undertook initiatives in this direction met with frustration and failure. For example, Chaim Kacherginsky, a Yiddish writer who had served in a partisan unit, attempted to renew Jewish activities in Vilna, but the authorities rejected his proposal to publish either a Yiddish newspaper or a periodical. While he succeeded in establishing a Yiddish-language school that went up to the third or fourth grade, he was not permitted to add other grades. He appealed to Solomon Michoels and Itsik Fefer of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, who in turn took up the matter with Lazar Kaganovich, then a member of the Politburo and a close associate of Stalin, but these demarches elicited no response. An appeal to the Central Committee of the Party in Moscow was unsuccessful. Kacherginsky was informed that there was no need for a full-fledged Yiddish-language school in either Vilna or Kovno, since Jewish children could enter Russian or Lithuanian schools. Soon the school was closed completely.<sup>9</sup>

The last Jewish social organization in the USSR, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which had been created during World War II for propaganda purposes, was disbanded in 1948; most of its leaders were murdered or sent to prison camps. Over the next eight years, Yiddish disappeared as one of the official languages of the Soviet Union. Hundreds of Jewish intellectuals and officials vanished—victims of what Soviet authorities euphemistically called the “cult of personality.” Some, including David Bergelson, Peretz Markish, Itsik Fefer, and Leib Kvitko, were shot in August 1952, only months before the death of Stalin.

After the death of Stalin there were reports that as part of the general policy of liberalization there would be changes with respect to Jewish cultural life. It was said that a Yiddish theater would be reestablished in Moscow, continuing the work of the great actor Michoels, who was murdered by the secret police in 1948. It was also reported—and Jewish fellow-travelers in Paris and New York gave the report wide coverage in their publications—that in addition to a Yiddish periodical, a Yiddish newspaper would be issued in Moscow. Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev, high Party officials, told a delegation of the Canadian Communist Party that

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bly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi about Soviet harassment of the Orthodox Church; Natalia Gorbanevskaja, a poet now living in Paris; Father Men, a well-known Orthodox priest, in Moscow; Nadezhda Mandelstam, the celebrated author of *Hope Against Hope*; Aleksandr Galich, a poet who died recently in Paris; and Melik Agurskii, the son of the former Evseksia leader, now living in Israel.

<sup>9</sup>Kacherginsky's efforts are described in J. Lestshchinsky, *Forward* (New York), May 2, 1948.

Jewish cultural endeavors would soon be normalized. There were even reports that a special commission was preparing to revive *Emes*, the leading Yiddish newspaper. Zalman Wendroff, a Yiddish writer, reported that a memorandum had been presented to the Central Committee of the Communist Party listing the steps to be taken to reestablish Jewish cultural endeavors. All of these statements and reports proved completely hollow. Khrushchev continued his predecessor's policy of forced assimilation. For a long time this policy was covered up by a number of Jewish journalists and writers in the West who should have known better, but apparently could not shed their pro-Soviet illusions.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1946 and 1959, a period that included six years under Khrushchev, no Yiddish books were published in the Soviet Union. During the next 18 years some 60 Yiddish books appeared.<sup>11</sup> Since 1972, the authoritative *People's Economy* has not listed Yiddish books among those published in the Soviet Union; books in some 89 other languages are listed. M. Isaev, in his *National Languages in the USSR* (1977), devoted two sentences to the Yiddish language. While Yiddish writers were being translated into Russian, Ukrainian, and other languages, the use of Yiddish was obviously being discouraged, since it represented a form of Jewish continuity unacceptable to Soviet authorities.<sup>12</sup> Hebrew was altogether forbidden.

In the entire Soviet Union there is only one Yiddish newspaper, the *Birobidzhaner Stern*, issued five days a week under the editorship of Nokhum Kortshminskii. This newspaper carries little news of Jewish interest. It was only in 1961, some eight years into the Khrushchev era, that a Yiddish periodical, *Sovetish Heymland*, appeared. Its editor is Aron Vergelis, a Yiddish poet who climbed the bureaucratic ladder to become the top *apparatchik* of the Soviet Union. Vergelis is a strict follower of the Party line; he knows what may be published. In 1964, replying to Bertrand Russell's inquiry as to why Jewish cultural institutions had not been

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<sup>10</sup>For details see Leon Shapiro's *Russian Jewry, 1917-1967* (New York, 1969), and the same author's outline of events in the new edition of Simon Dubnow's *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* (New York, 1975). See also Salo Baron, *The Russian Jews Under the Tsars and the Soviets* (New York, 1976).

<sup>11</sup>One Yiddish book appeared in 1960; two in 1961; one in 1962; two in 1964; four in 1965; four in 1966; four in 1967; two in 1968; nine in 1969; two in 1970; three in 1971; three in 1972; ten in 1973-74; ten in 1975-76. (There may be discrepancies in these figures when compared with official lists, since some titles appeared after substantial delays but were dated as of the year they went to the printer.)

During the same period substantial publication activities were promoted among the small nationality groups of the Soviet Union. In 1962, for example, 34 books were issued in the language of the Udmurts, a people numbering some 600,000; 49 in the language of the Maris (500,000 population), and 116 in the language of the Bashkirs (1,000,000 population).

<sup>12</sup>Iliia Gordon reported in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (1976) that there were some 466 titles by Yiddish writers available in 15 Soviet languages in some 45,000,000 copies.

reestablished in the Soviet Union, Vergelis stated that Soviet Jews had no need for "what is called cultural autonomy." He added that interest in Jewish culture had substantially diminished, and that it was not possible to increase it artificially. In 1966, Vergelis, on a trip to London, reported his intention to add a Russian-language section in his periodical. This never came about. Only in 1977 did *Sovetish Heymland* begin to include brief summaries of items in Russian and English for the benefit of those who do not read Yiddish.

Over the years *Sovetish Heymland* has broadened its content, and it occasionally dares to introduce items of Jewish news from the United States, Israel, and other foreign countries. It has taken note of the birthdays of Gladstein, Bikel, and Weinrich, and has even published an interview with the widow of Bialik. In August 1966, it featured an article by Shmuel Gordon arguing that Jews retained a distinctive character among the other nationality groups of the Soviet Union. Since the latter half of 1977, the magazine has been publishing, in installments, a manual for those wishing to learn Yiddish. For all its shortcomings, *Sovetish Heymland* is important because it affords at least some form of Jewish self-expression. The periodical has a circulation of 20,000 to 25,000.

According to *Sovetish Heymland*, there are some 100 Yiddish writers in the Soviet Union. Among them are younger men and women who, despite the difficulties presented by the unfavorable climate, choose to write in Yiddish. A number of older Yiddish writers, including Motl Saksier, Eli Shechtman, Yankl Yakir, Meshulem Surkis, Meir Baratz, and Joseph Kerler, have left for Israel.

It is not our task to evaluate Soviet Yiddish writing. Suffice it to say that it is very much in the mode of "socialist realism." It is of interest that while Russian letters has produced a number of highly talented dissenters, Yiddish literature has not; there is no hint of underground Yiddish writing. In published works there is little mention of the Holocaust or the evils of the Stalin era. One might expect that some 25 years after they were murdered by Stalin, someone would remember in print what happened to Bergelson, Markish, Kvitko, and the others.

It is clear that Kremlin leaders have a phobia about Jewish books. In December 1977, *Sovetskaia Kultura* carried an article by E. Evseev describing the Jewish exhibits at the Moscow International Book Fair; it bore the title "Ideological Saboteurs." Apparently, in Evseev's view, books of Jewish interest are automatically subversive.

In 1978, for the first time since World War II, Kremlin officials authorized the establishment of a professional Yiddish theater in the Soviet Union. It was announced that a Jewish chamber theater, under the direction of Iurii Sherling, was rehearsing in Moscow an opera depicting the life of a Jewish

family at the beginning of the 20th century. Sherling is a director who has been active in Moscow's Maiakovski Drama Theater. Some 30 young actors and singers were to participate in the production, which was to be given in both Yiddish and Russian.

Despite official discouragement, large numbers of amateur Yiddish theater and musical groups have functioned in the Soviet Union since the 1950's. When older actors, singers, and musicians initiated small circles specializing in Yiddish repertoire, younger men and women, who were interested in Jewish cultural expression, joined these efforts. Gradually, small amateur groups sprang up in Vilna, Kovno, Riga, Kishinev, Chernovits, Kiev, Leningrad, and Moscow, under the formal sponsorship of various local Soviet cultural agencies. In 1957, these groups gave 3,000 performances. In 1961, some 300,000 persons attended various programs of Yiddish repertoire. While these Jewish amateur endeavors were part of a wide system comprising similar groups performing in various other national languages, it was obvious that the authorities were not happy about the Yiddish groups; they were given no mention in the Soviet press. In Warsaw, however, the Communist Yiddish newspaper *Folksztyme* reported that Yiddish plays and recitals had become the most significant aspect of Soviet Jewish cultural life.

The best-known of the Yiddish amateur groups is the Vilna Dramatic Ensemble, which was formed in 1956. In 1977, notwithstanding the emigration of some of its members, the group, directed by Iudl Kats and Boris Landau, maintained a high level of activity; it had a vocal group, under Emil Kanevski; a jazz group, under Iasha Magid; and a dance ensemble headed by Nikolai Margolis and Raisa Svichova. The Moscow Yiddish Drama Ensemble, under the direction of Felix Berman and Josef Riklin, has presented programs in Rostov, Piatigorsk, Novosibirsk, and other cities. The Kovno Yiddish Drama Ensemble, under the direction of the veteran actor Iakov Betser, had 50 members in 1976. The Birobidzhan Yiddish Folk Theater, under Berta Shilman, has a dance group and orchestra. Other amateur groups include the Leningrad Drama Ensemble, the Tallin Yiddish Drama Ensemble, the Kishinev Studio of Yiddish Drama, and the Chernovits Ensemble. All performed old and new Yiddish repertoire, including works by Sholem Aleichem, Goldfaden, and Peretz, as well as modern Soviet Yiddish writers. The Vilna group even presented a Yiddish version of *Fiddler on the Roof*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>In many cities there were actors and musicians working alone or in groups: Nakhama Lifshits, Mikhail Aleksandrovich, Sidi Tal, Anna Guzik, Dina Roitkop, Zina Privoenskaia, Zinovii Shulman, Benjamin Chaitovskii, Lea Kolina, Sonia Binik, Mark Goldin, Polina Einbinder, Sofia Saitan, Anna Sheveleva, and Marina Gordon. Some of these performers have passed away; others have gone to Israel, the United States, and other countries.

There are many painters and sculptors in the Soviet Union working on Jewish themes, and some of them have had their works exhibited in various cities.<sup>14</sup> Gershon Kravtsov, who has concentrated on book illustration, had a special exhibit in Moscow. In recent years *Sovetish Heymland* has from time to time devoted space to artists working on Jewish themes.

Despite a hostile atmosphere, Soviet Jews are clearly striving to sustain some semblance of Jewish cultural life.

### ANTI-JEWISH POLICIES

The late Solomon Schwarz argued that antisemitism was revived in the Soviet Union in the late 1920's after having been nearly extinguished in the immediate post-revolutionary period. The facts do not corroborate this view. Antisemitism has been endemic in Russia under both the Tsars and the Soviets. Stalin subjected the Jews to terror, while under Khrushchev they were gradually placed in a "special" category, as they had been in the time of the Tsars. No longer "Christ-killers," they were now regarded as a "rootless" element, plotting with Russia's enemies in the West and engaging in Zionist conspiracies. After Khrushchev's ouster, his successors followed his policy with respect to Jews. Indeed, Brezhnev and his colleagues took the policy for granted.

Ilya Ehrenburg, the writer and staunch advocate of Jewish assimilation, was forced to take note of the growing antisemitism in the Soviet Union. In a series of articles published in *Novy Mir* (1959), he warned the Russian intelligentsia in a roundabout fashion about the dangers of antisemitism. His novels *The Storm* and *The Thaw* reflected the problematic Jewish condition. He was more aware than others of the existence of anti-Jewish bias, having been attached during World War II to the Red Army, where antisemitism was quite widespread. Other writers of Jewish origin, including Margareta Aliger and Pavel Antokolskii, touched upon the new Jewish situation in their works.

During the transition period that followed the end of World War II, it became obvious that anti-Jewish bias had permeated all sectors of Soviet

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<sup>14</sup>Among the painters and sculptors are Solomon Gershov, Meir Axelrod, S. Kaufman, Aron Futerman, Aleksandr Gluskin, Tanchum Kaplan, Viktor Midler, Shlome Iudovich, Leib Zevin, Robert Falk, Shmuel Kozin, Boris Valit, Mark Klionskii, Max Gelman, Joseph Chaikov, Shaia Bronstein, Aleksandr Tishler, Nohem Alpert, Zinovii Tolkachev, Hersh Inger, Shlome Teilinger, Mikhail Gurevich, Isroel Silberman, I. Mastbaum, E. Kogan, Oleg Fired, and Moische Veinman. Some of these artists are no longer alive; others have emigrated to the West.



society. The government took no measures against increased overt anti-semitism, and in many ways encouraged it for its own purposes. The country had been liberated from the Nazis, but in many areas anti-Bolshevik bands which had collaborated with the Germans during the war were still causing trouble. The authorities were trying to arrive at an acceptable arrangement with the rightist Ukrainian extremists who, under Hitler, had participated in anti-Jewish excesses. Thus, Jews encountered difficulties in attempting to return to their homes in the Ukraine. Khrushchev, who was "boss" of the Ukraine at that time, also decided to conciliate the Ukrainians by not reappointing Jewish officials to high posts. The local population interpreted these moves as clearly anti-Jewish measures and understood that there was no longer a need to conceal their own hostile feelings toward Jews.

Khrushchev, as was noted above, was one of the framers of the Jewish policy under Stalin. He was frank about his opinion of Jews.<sup>15</sup> Speaking to a French Socialist delegation in May 1956, he stated: "At the beginning of the revolution the Jews were more educated than the average Russian

Since then we have created new cadres . . . and now if the Jews were to occupy first place, it would spread discontent among the inhabitants who have roots in the country." For Khrushchev, Jews could not be considered as having "roots" in Russia. When the poet Evgenii Evtuchenko, scandalized by the absence of a monument at the site of the Nazi massacre of Kiev's Jews, wrote his celebrated poem "Babii Iar," Khrushchev, at a meeting of Soviet writers in 1962, attacked the poet for focusing on Jewish victims, and accused him of lying about antisemitism in the Soviet Union. The attack on Evtuchenko was no mere temperamental outburst; it was an effort to eradicate the memory of Babii Iar. Shostakovitch's "Thirteenth Symphony," which used the text of Evtuchenko's poem, was harshly criticized by Khrushchev at a meeting of the Ideological Commission of the Party and was removed from the repertoire.

Elimination of Jews from positions of responsibility in Soviet society came about gradually. In the country at large the process took a long time; within the Party it was easier. With the liquidation of the so-called anti-Party group in 1957, Lazar Kaganovich, the last Jewish member of the Politburo, was ousted. Although the "anti-Party" group had no connection with Jewish affairs, Kaganovich's ouster was symbolic. It was the end of a Jewish presence among the Party leadership. Today there are only three

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<sup>15</sup>Khrushchev reportedly used antisemitic expressions in speaking about Polish Jewish Communists during his visit to Warsaw to attend the funeral of Boleslav Bierut. He is said to have asked his Polish friends about the number of "Rabinoviches" still occupying responsible positions. See *Bulletin Interieur de l'Information* (Paris), November 5, 1965, and *Réalités* (Paris), March 1957.

Jews who hold positions of responsibility: Benjamin Dymshits, who serves as Vice Prime Minister, and Aleksandr Chaikovskiy and Lev Volodarskii, who are members of the Party's Central Committee. Jews have also disappeared from secondary Party positions, such as regional and territorial secretaryships. (Lev Shapiro, a Jew, is the Party secretary in the Jewish autonomous region of Birobidzhan.) There are no Jews in top policy-making positions in the Army or Foreign Office.<sup>16</sup> Jewish executives in Soviet institutions have difficulty gaining promotions, and are often forced to take early retirement to give their non-Jewish colleagues "a chance." Finally, a quota system for Jews has been introduced in many professions.

An examination of Jewish representation in the various soviets provides an illuminating case study of how Jews have been "put in their place" in the Soviet Union. In 1937, during the worst period of Stalin's terror, there were 47 Jews among Supreme Soviet deputies; 32 among the 569 deputies of the Soviet of the Union, and 15 among the 574 of the Soviet of the Nationalities. In 1958, under Khrushchev, there were five Jews among the 1,384 deputies in both chambers, two in the Soviet of the Union and three in the Soviet of the Nationalities. The same numbers and the same distribution obtained in 1962. This figure of five to six Jewish deputies, obviously based on a quota, has remained fixed. In 1974, there were six Jews among the 1,517 deputies; two among the 767 in the Soviet of the Union, and four among the 750 in the Soviet of the Nationalities. Even more significant are the figures for the soviets of the constituent and autonomous republics. In 1961, under Khrushchev, there were only 13 Jews among 5,761 members of the soviets of the constituent republics, and only 11 among 2,848 members of the soviets of the autonomous republics. In 1963, of a total of 1,958,566 deputies of all local soviets, there were 7,623 Jews.

Soviet Jews are concentrated in certain specific areas of activity. They are widely represented in economic planning, accounting, and sales and merchandising. Many are in science, medicine, and technology. In 1960, there were 20 Jewish members in the Academy of Medicine, and 57 in the Academy of Sciences. Among scholars receiving the Lenin Prize in 1964 were 13 Jews; in 1968 there were 30. These were individuals who had made their careers some time ago. Since 1968, the proportion of Jews among prize-winners has been declining, despite the great reservoir of Jewish talent.

There has been a steady decline in the proportion of Jewish students in universities and other institutions of higher learning. In 1960, Jewish students numbered 77,176 (3.2 per cent); in 1965, 94,600 (2.5 per cent); and

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<sup>16</sup>In the early 1970's, a Jewish naval officer in Leningrad was told by his superior that he could not expect normal advancement because this would mean placing a Jew in a "sensitive" position.

in 1972, 88,500 (1.9 per cent). The decline continued in 1974 and 1975. There is no doubt that a *numerus clausus* has been introduced in the universities, particularly in the prestigious schools of higher learning in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and Kharkov, and in some specialized institutions providing courses in foreign affairs, journalism, and the like.<sup>17</sup> There are no discriminatory laws on the books, but the authorities have devised ways of excluding Jewish students, even those with excellent credentials.<sup>18</sup> Some university professors are openly antisemitic, but there is no one to whom Jewish students can complain. Jews admitted to universities are often denied normal advancement in accordance with their academic standing.

In 1961 and 1962, special legislation was enacted to fight economic crimes. At first, the new decree prescribed imprisonment for acts considered harmful to the Soviet economy. Soon, however, capital punishment was introduced and made retroactive for those already imprisoned. The new legislation was intended to combat widespread malfeasance and pilfering in state enterprises. Since a relatively large number of Jews worked in these enterprises, the economic trials took on a clearly anti-Jewish character. In the proceedings, special attention was directed to Jewish surnames or other indications of the Jewish origin of the defendants. It was a repetition, on a smaller scale, of the methods used in preparation for the "doctors' plot" trials.

The first trial for economic crimes, held in Moscow in 1961, involved two Jewish defendants, Rokotov and Faibishevich. During the next two years at least 56 such trials took place, with 111 defendants (60 per cent of them Jewish) being sentenced to death. An examination of the trials reveals that Jewish defendants were punished much more harshly than non-Jewish ones. Contrary to usual practice, details of the cases were publicized in newspapers and other media long before the opening of the trials, exposing the defendants to ridicule and contempt not only for the crimes they had allegedly committed, but also for their Jewishness.

In 1963, Bertrand Russell wrote to Khrushchev protesting the cruelty of the trials and the disproportionate number of death sentences meted out to

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<sup>17</sup>An open letter addressed by G. Svirsky to V. Mishin of Gorky University, published in *samizdat*, is to the point here. Mishin had published a study, *Social Progress* (1970), in which he suggested that the Soviet Union adopt a policy of "national equalization" in education. Mishin objected to the fact that the percentage of students of Armenian or Georgian origin was only twice as large as their proportion in the population, while the ratio of Jewish students was seven times as large. Svirsky pointed out that if Mishin's formula were adopted, the number of Jewish students would represent 1.1 per cent of the total, indicating a return to the *numerus clausus* that had existed under the Tsars. He called Mishin's proposal a formula for intellectual genocide.

<sup>18</sup>A Jewish candidate may be subjected to several hours of preliminary examination in mathematics, instead of the usual one hour.

Jews. Russell, supported by Linus Pauling, François Mauriac, Albert Schweitzer, and many other Western intellectuals, charged that the trials manifested a rabid antisemitism. Khrushchev denied the charge. The trials continued after Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, but beginning some time in 1966, mention of economic crimes began to disappear from the Soviet press. There is no doubt that the actual number of trials for economic crimes was much larger than we have indicated, since many took place in the various republics and, due to language barriers, probably did not come to the attention of outside observers.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1960's and 1970's, anti-Jewish writings became widespread in the USSR. While such writings were not new, they first acquired respectability during the Khrushchev era. Anti-Jewish writings continued to appear after Khrushchev's departure from office, and under Brezhnev became an accepted part of Soviet literary production. Between 1960 and 1978, 90 such books were published in various languages. It must be kept in mind that there is no private publishing in the Soviet Union, and that every antisemitic book has been reviewed and approved by an appropriate state organ.

In 1961, the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences published Trofim Kichko's *Judaism Without Embellishment*. Kichko's thesis is that the Bible and Talmud preach hatred for non-Jews, and that Jews are swindlers and exploiters. The book's cover, modeled on Nazi propaganda, shows a hook-nosed Jew wearing a prayer shawl, his hands dripping with blood. Several works, among them F. Maiaski's *Contemporary Judaism and Zionism* (1964), Iurii Ivanov's *Caution Zionism* (1970), and V. Bolshakov's *Zionism in the Service of Anti-Communism* (n.d.), have attempted to show the similarities between Zionism and Naziism. Evgenii Evseev's *Fascism Under the Blue Star* charges Zionists with conducting a conscious policy of genocide. According to Evseev, Zionists dominate the world and have participated in mass killings, including the slaughter at Babii Iar. Evseev's book was published in 1971 by Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, with a printing of 75,000 copies. In some places, particularly the Ukraine, local writers have dealt with the subject of the "special Jewish character," making use of the propaganda of the Tsarist "Black Hundreds." These works provoked Aron Vergelis, the editor of *Sovetish Heymland*, to publish a two-part article, aptly titled "Not Only Ignorance," pointing out the dangers of the anti-Jewish propaganda contained in them. Vergelis strongly condemned the authors, accusing them of falsification and distortion. Finally, mention should be made of such anti-Jewish novels as I. Shevtov's *In the Name of the Father and the Son* (1970) and Iurii Kolesnikov's *The*

<sup>19</sup>See Solomon Schwartz, *Evreii v Sov Soiuze*, (New York, 1966).

*Promised Land* (1972). Shevtov's novel, which can only be described as a romantic version of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," was well received by the press, and enjoyed a success among young readers.

At times, Soviet anti-Jewish propaganda takes on a paranoid quality. Thus, the official "White Book" on the invasion of Czechoslovakia, published in several languages, repeats the accusation that the changes introduced in Prague by Dubcek were connected with international Zionism. *Zionism: Theory and Practice* (1973), published by the Academy of Sciences, emphasizes the links between Jewish banking families, and their central role in promoting international Zionism. T. Solodar's *The Wild Wormwood* (1977) presents a grotesque caricature of the Jewish religion. It is ironic that the old Russian "Protocols" have been resurrected and are being used by Marxist "scholars" in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet press engages in systematic anti-Jewish propaganda depicting Jews as conspirators working against the Soviet state. Newspaper articles use anti-Jewish stereotypes and appeal to the worst instincts of readers. Such articles, many of which are on a par with Nazi propaganda, appear in *Pravda*, *Isvestia*, *Ogonek*, *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, *Pravda Ukrainy*, *Zvezda*, *Nedelia*, *Sovetskaia Rossia*, and other newspapers and periodicals. On September 19, 1972, the Soviet news agency *Novosti* published an article linking the "evils" of Zionism with Jewish religious teachings. When the article was reprinted in *USSR*, the bulletin of the Soviet embassy in Paris, a stir was created among Western Communists. The International League Against Anti-Semitism in Paris brought a civil suit against *Novosti*, and on March 26, 1973, a French court found the managing editor of *USSR* guilty of defamation and incitement to racial hatred.<sup>20</sup>

Anti-Jewish propaganda extends also to radio broadcasts and lecture series. An important current "authority" on the Jewish question is Valerii Emelianov, an economist and university professor. In his lectures he speaks of a Jewish-Masonic plot to dominate the world. In January 1977, Soviet television presented an hour-long documentary film, *The Buyers of Souls*, which was replete with caricatures of Jewish money men and Jews conspiring with foreign governments.

One final aspect of Soviet anti-Jewish propaganda that should be noted is the silent treatment accorded the Jewish past. Soviet social scientists are engaged in a deliberate attempt to obliterate the very history of Russian Jewry. The first edition (1932) of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* devoted 160 columns to "The Jews," while the most recent edition contains only two columns. The latest editions of textbooks on ancient and medieval history devote two or three lines to the Jews. It is worth noting in this context

<sup>20</sup>See AJYB, Vol. 75, 1974-75, p. 500.

that while very little work in the field of Semitic and Hebraic studies is maintained at university level, the Near-Eastern division of the Leningrad Institute for Oriental Research commemorated in 1975 the 100th anniversary of the death of the Karaite scholar Avram Firkovich. Since Karaites are not viewed as Jews by the authorities, their history is treated with respect.

The policy of disregarding Jewish aspects of the Holocaust, inaugurated under Stalin and Khrushchev, continues under Brezhnev. The USSR is the only country in Eastern Europe without a monument dedicated specifically to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Repeatedly, Soviet police have prevented Jews from placing wreaths at the site of the massacre at Babii Iar.

The irony of Soviet anti-Jewish policy is that it makes the assimilation of Jews, which continues to be the stated policy of the regime, impossible. It may well be, therefore, that the future will witness the emergence of two Marrano-like Jewish communities in the Soviet Union—one consisting of Jews who wish to live Jewishly, and the other made up of Jewish Communists (in 1976 there were 299,744 dues-paying Jewish members of the Party) unable to find a place for themselves in Soviet society.

## JEWISH DISSIDENCE

Stalin's death accelerated changes in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's "liberalization" made for a somewhat more open climate that encouraged, for the first time in decades, the emergence of political dissent—a dissent which began to be manifested in the middle 1960's.<sup>21</sup> In 1965, the writers Andreii Siniavskii and Juli Daniel were arrested for publishing their books abroad under pen names. Following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Pavel Litvinov and others demonstrated openly against the Soviet action. A leading Soviet physicist, Andreii Sakharov, made a plea for intellectual freedom. In a widely-circulated essay, "Thoughts about Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom," he denounced Soviet censorship. An illegal Soviet periodical, *Chronicle of Current Events*, focused on issues of concern to the dissidents. The authorities tried to stop the movement by various means; some dissidents were exiled, and others were forced to go abroad after

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<sup>21</sup>There are a number of discernible trends among the dissidents: neo-Communists who want to return to Leninist tradition; human rights advocates; neo-Slavophiles; Christian socialists influenced by the thinking of Nicholas Berdiaev; democratic-socialists; and various nationality groups.

serving prison sentences.<sup>22</sup> From the beginning, Jewish intellectuals played an important role in the dissident movement.

Even more remarkable than the emergence of a general movement of dissent was the development of a specifically Jewish dissident movement. For the first time in decades, Jews in various Soviet cities began establishing liaison with one another; their aim was to leave the Soviet Union. The creation of the State of Israel and the Six-Day War of 1967 had a significant impact in increasing the resistance of Jews to ethnic and cultural assimilation. While there was some contact between the Jewish dissident movement and other dissident groups, the Jews chose to act on their own politically. There was a nearly exclusive emphasis on emigration; the motto of the Jewish dissidents was "Let my people go." They did not seek to bring about changes in Soviet society, or to revitalize Jewish life there. Jewish dissidents wanted to be "repatriated" to their "homeland," Israel. Among these dissidents, Vladimir Slepak, Veniamin Levich, Anatolli Shcharanski, and others who were refused exit visas became well known in the West.<sup>23</sup>

Many Jewish dissidents have struggled to lead a Jewish life in the Soviet Union while awaiting emigration. Groups of young Jews have organized small circles for the study of the Hebrew language and Jewish history, and for the celebration of festivals. Jewish scientists who have been refused exit visas have organized seminars dealing with their areas of specialization and with Jewish subjects. Some Jews have defied the authorities by organizing protests and sit-ins (including a sit-in at the offices of the Supreme Soviet), by submitting petitions to Soviet leaders, and by appealing to world public opinion.<sup>24</sup> Some Jewish dissidents have publicly renounced their Soviet citizenship, declaring themselves to be Israeli citizens, and demanding the right to emigrate. On Jewish festivals, large crowds have gathered in silent protest outside various synagogues.

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<sup>22</sup>Among those forced to leave the Soviet Union were Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin, Valerii Chalidze, Zhores Medvedev, Iosif Brodsky, Andreii Siniavskii, Pavel Litvinov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andreii Amalrik, Vladimir Bukovskii, Leonid Pliushch, Vladimir Maksimov, Viktor Nekrasov, General Grigorenko, Ernest Neizvestnyi, Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaiia, and Valentin Turchin.

<sup>23</sup>It is important to distinguish between Jewish dissidents, most of whom are of right-wing Zionist orientation, and the larger Jewish emigration movement, which is essentially motivated by non-political considerations.

<sup>24</sup>Among the petitioners were 26 Jewish intellectuals in Lithuania, including Party members, who called the attention of the Central Committee of the Party to the anti-Jewish writings being published by the Soviet press. In another petition, some 900 Jews complained that there was "no Jewish culture in the Soviet Union" and no possibility of living a Jewish life there, and requested permission to go to Israel. Some 100 Jewish protesters in Moscow presented a list of grievances to officials of the Central Committee. More than 150 Jewish activists from eight different cities protested at the Soviet Presidium against the refusal of the authorities to grant them exit visas.

Soviet authorities have employed severe measures against the Jewish dissidents. They have prevented Jewish travelers from coming to Moscow to discuss plans for emigration. They have disconnected telephones to prevent communication between dissidents and their supporters at home and abroad. Many Jewish dissidents have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms. The case of Boris Kochubievskii of Kiev received wide publicity in both the Soviet Union and the West in 1969. In 1970 in Leningrad, there was a celebrated trial involving 12 individuals accused of attempting to hijack a Soviet airliner at Smolny Airport in order to fly it to Sweden. Eight of the defendants—Joseph Mandeleovich, Urii Fedorov, Aleksandr Murzhenko, Leib Chanokh, Anatolii Altman, Boris Penson, Israel Zalmanson, and Mendel Bodnia—were sentenced to prison terms of 4 to 14 years. Under pressure from the West, death sentences pronounced on two other defendants, Mark Dymshits and Edward Kuznetsov, were commuted to 15 years in prison. Wolf Zalmanson, an army officer, was court-martialed and sentenced to ten years. At another trial in Leningrad, nine Jewish defendants—Gila Butman, Mikhail Kornblit, Lassal Kaminskii, Lev Iagman, Vladimir Mogilever, Solomon Dreizner, Viktor Boguslavskii, Lev Kornblit, and Viktor Shtillman—were charged with belonging to an Israel-directed Zionist organization, and with distributing an illegal *samizdat* publication, *Iton*. The defendants were sentenced to prison terms of one to ten years. In 1975, Mikhail Shtern, a Jewish doctor in Vinnitsa whose children had applied for an exit visa, was brought to trial on trumped-up charges of bribery and given a harsh prison sentence. Other trials took place in Kishinev, Vinnitsa, Sverdlovsk, Kiev, Odessa, Riga, and Rostov.

In an attempt to discourage the emigration of individuals with an advanced education, a special education tax was introduced in August 1972. Soviet citizens obtaining exit visas were required to reimburse the state for the costs of their education at the rate of 5,400 rubles for a diploma equivalent to a B.A., and 19,000 rubles for a candidate degree equivalent to a European doctorate. In 1971, after vigorous protest in both the USSR and the West, the tax law was abrogated.

Soviet officials were not in a position, short of returning to Stalinist methods of mass repression, to put an end to the dissident movement. Thus, despite the hostile attitude of the authorities, the number of Jews expressing a desire to go to Israel increased, and Jewish emigration assumed substantial proportions. Small groups left in 1968 and 1969. In 1970, 1,000 left; in 1971, 14,000; in 1972, 33,000; in 1973, 35,000; in 1974, 20,000; in 1975, 13,000; in 1976, 15,000; and in 1977, 16,000. All told, 147,000 Jews emigrated in the period between 1968 and 1977. At first, the vast bulk of the emigrants went to Israel. As time passed, however, more and more of them chose to go to the United States, Canada, and other Western countries. By



1976, the figure for those emigrants choosing not to go to Israel had reached 50 per cent. This situation provoked an intense debate in Israel and the West, with some advocating that measures be taken against emigrants choosing to go to the West. As of this writing, common sense has prevailed, and Soviet Jewish emigrants are free to choose the country to which they will go.

Throughout the period under review there were protests in the free world on behalf of Soviet Jews, particularly the "refusniks," i.e., those refused exit permits. In the United States, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, the New York Conference on Soviet Jewry, and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry were in the forefront of these activities. Many non-Jews, including writers, scientists, and clergymen, joined in these efforts. In February 1971, the World Conference on Soviet Jewry was held in Brussels, with 800 delegates from 38 countries attending. In February 1976, 1,200 leading representatives of Jewish organizations from 32 countries met for a second time in Brussels.

Stimulated by interested Jewish groups, U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson, supported by 74 other United States senators, introduced an amendment to a 1973 trade agreement granting most-favored-nation status to the Soviet Union. The Jackson amendment sought to block the agreement if Soviet authorities did not stop harassing Jewish would-be emigrants. In Moscow the Jackson amendment was openly supported by Andrei Sakharov, but was opposed by another leading dissident, the historian Roy Madvedev. Moscow rejected the proposed amendment as an attempt to interfere in its internal affairs.

Jewish emigration from the USSR continues, with would-be emigrants basing their demands for exit visas, in part, on the 1973 Helsinki accord, which called for an increase in "human contacts" and the solution of "humanitarian problems." Groups have been established in various countries to monitor compliance with the Helsinki agreement. According to Amnesty International, 230 individuals in the Soviet Union have been jailed, deported, or committed to a mental clinic, in contravention to the Helsinki provisions. Many members of Helsinki monitoring groups in various Soviet cities have been arrested and convicted. In 1977, one such individual, Anatolii Shcharanskii, who was also active in the Jewish dissident movement and was among the "refusniks," was charged with espionage on behalf of the United States. Shcharanskii's trial, with strong anti-Jewish overtones, provoked a wave of protest in the West. President Jimmy Carter officially denied any connection between Shcharanskii and the CIA. Nevertheless, the defendant was given a heavy prison sentence.

We do not know the rationale behind Soviet policy with respect to Jewish emigration. Free emigration is an anomaly in the Soviet Union, since it

implies a desire to leave the Soviet "paradise" for a "lower capitalist order." Soviet authorities must also reckon with the possibility that other groups will follow the example of the Jews. Indeed, some have already done so—the Volga Germans, the Dukhobors, and others. Among other factors which may play a role in Soviet emigration policy are the desire to get rid of Jewish activists and thus deprive the Jewish community of politically dangerous leadership; the desire to remove Jews from sensitive border areas; the desire to placate fiercely nationalistic local populations; and the desire to eliminate a minority group which, according to Soviet theory, should "die out," but which apparently is unwilling to do so.

Only brief reference need be made to Soviet-Israel relations. When Israel became a nation, Kremlin leaders—counting on the support of the large number of Russian Jews there—assumed that they would be able to use it as a base for penetration of the Middle East. Israel, however, was unwilling to serve Soviet interests. The Soviets then opted for the Arabs. Soviet policy toward Israel soon took on a clearly antisemitic character, and over the years anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli propaganda has proceeded unabated. The Soviet Union was one of the countries that voted in favor of the 1975 resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations equating Zionism with racism and racial discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

Looking back, it is possible to delineate three stages in the development of anti-Jewish bias in the USSR. Under Stalin, it took the form of violent and repressive acts culminating in the annihilation of Jewish intellectuals and the "doctors' plot"; under Khrushchev, it took the form of widespread discrimination, sometimes disguised and sometimes open, in all areas of social life; under Brezhnev, the Khrushchev policy has become routinized and pervasive, signifying a return to the type of situation existing during the time of the antisemitic Tsarist "Black Hundreds."

Soviet society has lost its ideological foundation; little or no value is attached to Party policy pronouncements. The society is sick with alcoholism, and crime, particularly among 14- to 18-year-olds, is on the increase. At the same time, it is a conservative society that is unable to change or to find innovative means for the solution of its problems. Under these conditions, Jews serve as a convenient scapegoat.

We must be careful in making statements about the future of Soviet Jewry. Still, it is possible to point to a number of factors which will almost certainly play a role in determining what happens to the Jews in the Soviet Union.

Much depends on who will succeed the present leaders of the Politburo, most of whose members are over 70 years of age and whose leading man, Brezhnev, is apparently very ill. Will it be the heirs of Stalin or some other group? In the long run, a change at the top will have an impact on the Jewish situation;<sup>25</sup> a change in leadership will affect the minorities in the Soviet Union, including the Jews.

There is no doubt that Soviet Jews are threatened with assimilation. Jewish history indicates, however, that assimilation is not a simple process. A community of 2,700,000 Jews, with a great heritage, is not likely to disappear without resistance. The events taking place in the Soviet Union today are, in fact, an expression of such resistance. While at the present time Jewish dissidence is oriented mainly toward emigration, in the future it may well take another direction. Judging by present conditions in both Russia and the West, it is difficult to envision a mass exodus of Soviet Jews. Recognition of this fact should help put the emigration issue into proper perspective. Despite its importance, it should not monopolize the attention and efforts of those seeking to help Soviet Jews. Attempts should be made to strengthen Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>25</sup>See T.R. Rigby, "The Soviet Regional Leadership—the Brezhnev Generation," *Slavic Review*, March 1978, pp. 1–24. See also AJYB, Vol. 78, 1978, pp. 426–427.