A YEAR OF "JEWISH LIFE"

BY V. J. JEROME

I EWISH LIFE, the English language **J** monthly published by the Jewish Bureau of the New York State Committee of the Communist Party, represents a welcome trend away from regarding the problems of the foreignborn communities merely as those of language, toward seeing them more broadly and more deeply as those of national groups. The new, decisive turn in the policy of the Party registered at the June, 1937, Plenum of our National Committee, took cognizance of the national groups as a cluster of communities, not only of immigrants speaking foreign tongues, but of their English-speaking descendants, even to the third and fourth generations.

These groups, Americans by birth, naturalization, or as producers of the country's wealth, partake actively in its current life and changing atmosphere. Predominantly proletarian and lower middle class, subjected to terrific exploitation and smarting under oppression—economic, political, and social—they are naturally a dynamic force in the progressive movements of our day; not, however, without a certain hesitation and inflexibility.

Rebuffs and browbeatings at the hands of chest-thumping "Americans," super-patriots, Ku Kluxers, open-shoppers, and strikebreakers, tend to keep alive the influence of their own national chauvinists, here and in their homelands. It makes some among them receptive to the latest slander of the democratic front and of socialism, whether from the mouth of Hitler or Jabotinski.

Furthermore, the political backwardness and prejudice of many wellmeaning native Americans, not yet overcome by the growth of progressive organizations, by unionization, and by the increasing influence of the Communist Party, lead to some feeling of isolation on the part of the national groups, some defeatism as regards full participation in American life.

It is in view of all this that a periodical such as *Jewish Life* has a special, indispensable function.

In the first issue we are given the following as perspectives of the magazine:

"To present a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the international Jewish scene with special emphasis on the Jewish question and the national question in the U.S.A.

"To educate the membership of the Communist Party and the Jewish masses generally in the fundamental aspects of the national and Jewish questions.

"To create a broad Jewish People's Front, as part of the American People's Front,

which will fight for the rights of the Jewish people and against discrimination and anti-Semitism.

"To mobilize the Jewish workers and toilers to recognize their leading position in the Jewish community.

"To bring the Jewish people into the closest solidarity with the progressive movements and the oppressed minorities in the U.S.A.

"To build the Communist Party among the Jewish masses, the Party in the vanguard of the struggle for socialism, which alone will fully and completely solve the problems of all national groups."

Jewish Life has now been published for a twelvemonth. Its first year's output constitutes a promising initial effort toward fulfilling these tasks. By its very coming into being it has succeeded in stirring interest among sections of Jewry in what Communism has to say in regard to the Jewish question. Its continuous publication demonstrates that the magazine fills a need. It has, above all, contributed considerably in breaking down the national nihilism which has in times past pervaded many Jewish and other Communists, and against Dimitroff spoke at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International.

A survey of the principal contents of the year shows considerable range. The largest single category of articles is devoted to the discussion of anti-Semitism-in Germany, Poland, Ru-Austria. mania, Hungary, Latin America, and the United Prominent, too, is the topic of Zionism, with the closely related Palestine Partition Plan. A number of articles and editorials treat of current campaigns and their reflection in the various American Jewish organizations, as well as the International Congress Against Racism and Anti-Semitism.

The position of the Communist Party in relation to the Jewish question is dealt with in several articles and statements. We get surveys of the status of Jews in the Soviet Union; the relation of the Jewish question to the general issues of peace and democracy—with considerable stress on the conflict in Spain. In several of its issues, the magazine engages in struggle against Trotskyism. Every number contains reviews of books which cover, in the main, topics among those here listed.

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In the important sphere of combatting and exposing enemy ideology the magazine has brought forward a number of valuable contributions.

Thus, the editorial, "The Situation in Palestine," in the January issue is a clarifying picture of the role of Zionism, British imperialism, and Italian fascism on the Palestinian scene today. Particularly effective is its refutation of the argument advanced by Zionists that since Mussolini has a part in fomenting Arab discontent against Britain, the Arab national movement is fascist, and that therefore the Communist support of that movement constitutes support of fascism.

The editorial points out the error of confusing the reactionary Arab effendis—native oppressors of the Arab peasant—with the people themselves. Furthermore, the editorial reasons, the Communist Party's advocacy of Arab-Jewish unity coincides with a definitely existing sentiment among the two oppressed peoples for such cooperation—a sentiment that both

Britain and Italy are insidiously endeavoring to undermine, since each envisages a growth of its own strength in consequence of Arab-Jewish antagonism.

Excellent, too, showing up Zionism as an agency of British imperialism, is "A Letter From Palestine," by Yehuda Almoni, in the November issue. The writer demonstrates how enterprises carefully made known locally as Jewish are under the economic control of "imperialistic capitalists clipping their coupons in London clubs." He points out too that, notwithstanding some support for British imperialism by the clique of semi-feudal landowners and other curriers of favor, the great mass of Arab workers and peasants stand solid behind the Arab national leadership, fighting against the partitioning of Palestine.*

The article points to the declarations of the Arab leaders assuring the Jewish community equal political rights, full protection of their minority status, cultural autonomy, under a democratically-elected regime. The charge of insincerity advanced by the Zionist leaders, obviously to prevent discussion of these proposals, is here effectively blasted.

Their objection that the proposals do not provide for continued Jewish mass immigration is shown to have no validity; the economic crisis and the attendant mass unemployment suffice to make impossible the Zionist program.

The writer takes to task the reactionary leadership of the Histadruth (Jewish Labor Federation) which offers to lessen the crisis by means of its notorious plan for "Conquest of Labor," namely, the replacement of Arabs working for Jewish employers by Jewish workers. This displacement has been carried out through ominous violence. It has done little to solve the unemployment among the Jewish workers; but it has gone far toward inflaming Arabs against Jews.

The article concludes with the program of the Communist Party of Palestine, which alone provides a basis of a unified struggle against the perfidious policies of division conducted by British imperialism, against the intrigues of fascist Italy, against the misleadership of the Zionist pawns of British imperialism, and against the oppression by the effendis. We repeat here the three-point program as cited from Kol Ha'am ("Voice of the illegal Communist People"), the Hebrew organ:

- 1. "Formation of a democratic representative government with a guarantee of equal rights to the Jewish 'Yishub' (community) together with the abandonment of all Zionist policies of 'conquest.'
- 2. "Maintenance of the present relative numerical strength of the Jews and Arabs.*
- 3. "Enactment of effective land laws guaranteeing the land of the peasants and the rights of the tenant farmers."

A fine, clear note is struck in the

^{*} The article "What Next in Palestine?" by "British Resident," is an excellent critical evaluation of Britain's plan for partitioning Palestine. It appeared in the June issue, being a reprint from the (British) Labor Monthly for April.

^{*} Point 2 is designed to meet the objection of the Arab population to the Zioniststimulated and Zionist-controlled immigration aimed at creating artificially a Jewish majority.

July issue by Maurice U. Schappes in his review of John Haynes Holmes' Through Gentile Eyes. Proceeding from the thesis suggested in the subtitle of the book, A Plea for Tolerance and Good Will, Dr. Holmes makes of the Jew an object to be tolerated—the good Christian's heavy burden:

"If the Jew is aggressive, cunning, unscrupulous, materialistic, worldly, it is largely because Gentile persecutors have made him so. These familiar features of Jewish life . . . are evidence also, in the higher sense, of the failure of the Jews as well as the fault of the Gentile."

(Really, the liberal minister, certainly a friend of the Jews, writes here almost as one, some of whose best friends are Jews. If this is his image of the Jew, then surely be carries tolerance too far and is a spendthrift of good will.)

Schappes hits at this patronizing self-righteousness by pointing out that evidently, "the appeal cannot successfully be made to the generosity of the Gentile—it can and must be made to the self-interest of the Gentile workers, farmers, and middle class people."

Actually, involved in this discussion is the basic attitude back of Dr. Holmes' thesis, that anti-Semitism is chargeable, not to social antagonisms deriving from the fundamental contradictions of capitalist class society which find their acutest expression in fascism, but to a subjective factor—the original (yet acquired) sin of "Jewish traits." In this he plays into the hands of fascism, which likewise charges anti-Semitism to the Jew—to his blood, and inherited traits inseparable from it!

In the same issue Comrade H. I. Costrell, Secretary of the New York State Jewish Bureau of the Communist Party, presents the Party's position on this matter in words that deserve repetition:

"Our Party must combat every tendency to place responsibility for anti-Semitism upon the Jews. The Jews have no apologies to make. As long as there are bankers and exploiters we refuse to make a special campaign to drive out Jews from being bankers and exploiters. The Jewish masses cannot be held responsible for the existence of their exploiters. It is capitalism that is responsible, and against it our struggle must be directed. The same approach must hold true toward the Negro people. We cannot and must not place responsibility for the wiping out of white chauvinism and discrimination upon them by telling them to be 'good' Negroes. Anti-Semitism, just like white chauvinism, is a means by which capitalist reaction tries to divide the people and foist its rule upon them. No concessions must be given to this evil practice and ideology."

An outstanding contribution is Comrade M. Katz's "The Jewish Press and the Moscow Trials," in the April issue. A satire upon the bourgeois and pseudo-Socialist Yiddish dailies of New York for having taken Trotsky to their bosoms since his expulsion from the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, the article concludes with a trenchant analysis of the degradation of the Jewish Daily Forward. We miss here, however, what the subject calls for-the positive side of the picture, a mention of the Communist Party organ, The Morning Freiheit, and its role of clarifying the issues of the trials for the Jewish masses.

Not so effective, in fact an example of inadequate treatment of enemy ideology, is the manner in which Jew-

ish Life reacted (rather, failed to react) to the fascism-furthering article on anti-Semitism by the Trotskyite Sidney Hook in a recent issue of the Menorah Journal. In that article, Hook proceeds to sabotage the whole movement for combatting anti-Semitism by counseling its severance from the people's movement against fascism, on the grounds that the antifascist People's Front was inspired by the Comintern. Hook is, of course, following in his "learned" way the entire Trotskyite camp in endeavoring to weaken the forces against fascism and anti-Semitism.

The Hooks have suddenly taken to writing as Jews. For Trotsky, desperately clutching at any and every contention, demagogically exalts himself to the role of "Jewish martyr," by claiming that the Soviet government (by implication, Gentile) set out in the trials "with the almost open object of making the internationalists appear as Jews without ideals and law." This, of those whose internationalism was that of international espionage; this, of those who would turn Birobidjan over to the tender mercies of Hitler's Japanese allies!

As the gathering counter-anti-Semitic consciousness courses into the general anti-fascist stream, as the realization grows among all Jews that there is no "good fascism" (witness Italy), but that fascism is by its very essence anti-Semitism, the Trotskys and Hooks rush into their labor of sabotage.

For who but a political degenerate could couple the socialist state, which has eliminated anti-Semitism from what was once the classic land of pogroms, with the barbarous Nazi "Aryanism"; who but such a traitor could presume to counsel his fellow Jews "that they must avoid Stalinism as an evil only one degree removed, if at all, from Hitlerism"?

Reference is made to this article in an all-too-brief editorial paragraph in the March issue of *Jewish Life*. Aside from stating that the consequences of Hook's advice would be passivity for the Jews in the face of anti-Semitism, it does little but restate his position.

This method of stating the enemy's viewpoint with but a scornful expletive of our own all too often does duty in our journalism for effective, painstaking refutation. At bottom, of course, it means a sectarian approach, taking the agreement of all readers for granted so that cogent reasoning is not considered necessary; it means reckoning without the ideological speciousness of the enemy.

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Linked to this shortcoming in rebutting the enemy is the magazine's weakness in presenting the Communist position, *conclusively*, in regard to the vital questions of the hour, as they affect the Jewish masses.

Of course, it was not to be expected that within one year's time the magazine should have coped fully with all the tasks it assumed. The newness of the undertaking; the limitations of space; the lack of participating forces; and, it should be added, insufficient support by the Party as a whole—all are circumstances which we must consider.

In keeping with its formulated program, the magazine set out to "educate the membership of the Communist Party and the Jewish masses gen-

erally in the fundamental aspects of the national and Jewish questions."

Although there are a number of articles dealing with issues of the day affecting American and world Jewry, it has not yet presented a single expository article setting forth the Leninist-Stalinist position either on the national question as a whole, or on the Jewish question, whether in its world aspects or as related to the American scene.

This is clearly a serious omission, if we bear in mind that one of the main purposes of this magazine is to warn the Jews who have been misguided either by nationalism and Zionism, or by theocratic exclusivism and the political indifferentism which they foster. Both ultimately lead to cowardly, hopeless retreat before the waves of anti-Semitism in the U.S.A. as in other capitalist lands. Obviously the magazine Jewish Life cannot expect to lead the Jewish masses in the direction of their true interests until it fully equips the Jewish Communists, and its other readers too, with the ideological weapons of Marxism-Leninism in the sphere of the national question.

Closely related to this aspect of the question is the influence of nationalism upon the American Jewish youth. For, especially since the advent of Hitler, a defensive and retaliatory Jewish consciousness has sprung up among large sections of Jewish youth, which is being channelized increasingly toward nationalism, Zionism, and chauvinism. One is therefore surprised that not a single article has appeared in Jewish Life dealing with any section of American young Jewry. Here are so many organizations of

Jewish young men and women—the Y.M.H.A., the Y.W.H.A., the Young Zionists, the Jewish college fraternities, the youth societies of temples and synagogues, cultural organizations, the youth auxiliaries of predominantly Jewish trade unions and benevolent organizations, etc. Precisely from these organized sons and daughters American Jewry must the forces of the Jewish sector of the democratic front be gathered, amongst them must the guiding principles of Lenin and Stalin on the national question be disseminated.*

Similarly, the specific appeal to Jewish women is not sounded, although the important Council of Jewish Women and the various Jewish women's organizations and auxiliaries provide broad avenues of approach toward unified progressive action.

Particularly serious is the absence of reflection of Jewish trade union life. Workers in organizations like the United Hebrew Trades, the decisive leadership of which is reactionary—reformist and bound up with the corrupt Jewish Daily Forward, need the guiding principles upon which the program of Jewish Life is founded. The Jewish Communists in these organizations need direct stimulus from Jewish Life.

This failure to deal prominently with the struggles and aspirations of Jewish trade unionists denotes, it must be said, a basically insufficient recognition of the place and role of the working class in developing the American democratic front and thus forwarding

^{*} It is gratifying to note that the August, 1938, issue, beginning the second year of publication, features an article "Jewish Youth in the United States," by Phil Schatz.

the interests of the national group as a whole.

All these omissions indicate a tendency to an abstract approach to an abstractly conceived audience. One cannot think of the democratic front of the American people as one undifferentiated generality; it must be rallied through appeal to concrete living classes, groups and categories. The publication that calls these forces together must always behold them as they exist. They are not just Jews; they are Jewish garment workers, carpenters, bakers, housewives, small businessmen, professionals, students, and the magazine, in the course of its month-to-month appearance, besides presenting generalized articles, must also include topics which embrace the specific problems of these various groups. This is how the democratic front will be built.

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A reflection of this abstract approach is the magazine's insufficient functioning as organizer. A good beginning was made by presenting, in the second issue, the appeal for unity addressed by Comrade Earl Browder to all workers who have been influenced by Zionism. This signal article by the General Secretary of the Communist Party presented in sharp outline the common ground upon which, notwithstanding political differences, the Jewish people in America might meet for joint struggle against fascism, reaction, and anti-Semitism. But subsequent numbers of the magazine have not resounded this keynote vigorously, nor made it a basis for a plan of concrete action.

Consider the issue of Poland. A

highly informative article, "The crisis in Poland," by Comrade M. Katz, appeared in the October number, sketching with admirable analysis of social forces the historic background of anti-Semitism in Poland. It is followed by a declaration of the New York State Jewish Bureau of the Communist Party, "Pogroms in Poland must be stopped!"-a stirring summons to action, repeatedly urging united efforts by all American Jewry, for solidarity with the baited and pogromized Jews in Poland. This appeal is vital, coming at a time when the wave of pogroms encouraged by state anti-Semitism in Poland was rising alarmingly, when the American Jewish masses were exercised over the fate of their Polish fellow-Jews. But to have been fully effective, it should have concluded with specific proposals for immediate action, around which to rally the American Jewish people-and the non-Jews of America. But the manifesto offers no specific proposals around which to unite. Let us note especially that Poland is not just another country with a Jewish problem, but that it harbors a fifth of the world Jews; that their heinous oppression arouses waves of passionate sympathy among the American Jewish masses. Let us note that the struggle for the ending of anti-Semitism in Poland is inseparably bound up with the struggle for the decisive defeat of the semi-fascist regime which has brought the politics of that land increasingly into alliance with the socalled anti-Comintern triangle.

Hence, the definite organization of solidarity of American Jews with their Polish brethren becomes of paramount importance for the New York State Bureau of the Communist Party and its organ.

Why does not our press bring forward and emphasize certain glorious democratic precedents in American history?

It was at the time of the Kishinev massacres in tsarist Russia, pogrom after pogrom. Theodore Roosevelt was President, and John Hay Secretary of State. As an expression of the American people's loathing for that horrible barbarity, a petition was drawn up by American citizens for transmission by our government to the government of Russia. Realizing that it lacked a diplomatic basis for submitting such a document unless the tsar would consent to receive it. our State Department cabled the tsar that such a petition was in preparation and sought to know if he would accept it. Of course, the tsar declined. But the progressive purpose was served by the action of our government in sending, and publishing, the cable. The whole country approved. and the shame of tsarist Russia was emphasized in the eyes of the world. No one said that this act of stern reproof would "bring about war."

And let us remember that the year before, utilizing the opportunity of a proposed convention for a naturalization treaty, State Secretary Hay, at the request of the President, forwarded to the Government of Rumania a vigorous protest against the persecutions of the Jews in that country. When the Rumanian government answered defiantly, our State Department sent the famous "Hay Note to Rumania"—a circular letter of protest to the signatories of the

Berlin Treaty of 1878—Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Austria, and Turkey. Thereby the United States brought worldwide attention to Rumania's violation of the well-known Section 44 of that treaty, designed to guarantee the safety of the Iews.

The American tradition of siding with the oppressed must be kept alive; incidents recalling it must be treasured and made a part of common, popular knowledge—and precedents to action.

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Let us take, as another major instance of neglected opportunity, the treatment of the Jewish People's Committee. Repeatedly, in various articles and editorials, we find this organization cited for its struggle to unify the centralized Jewish mass organizations, for common action. But so far no article has appeared giving a full length portrayal of the J.P.C., its program, its development, the struggles it has led, the achievements it has to its credit. This would have been pertinent, especially in connection with the National Unity Convention which that organization called for March 12-13.

We find in the March issue of Jewish Life an editorial devoted to the convention; but neither in that issue nor throughout the year do we get a "build-up" article in behalf of the J.P.C. We do not get a report of the convention as a main feature in the April issue. The article of G. Golden, "Views of American Jewry," speaks in passing of the convention, telling us that 846 delegates representing 963 organizations embracing

over a quarter of a million Jews "participated in the broadest convention that the Jewish People's Committee has yet held." All the more reason—the Jewish People's Committee being plainly, then, the solidifying force in American Jewry today, the organization offering the clearest and most consistent program in the interests of the Jewish masses—all the more reason for its convention being accorded a report in the columns of Jewish Life—and the J.P.C. a recruiting appeal.

One must note the absence of a clearly formulated program of demands as a basis for rallying the Jewish masses. It is true, as the editorials and articles repeatedly declare, that the Communist Party furnishes a program for struggle for the rights of the Jews. This program is implicit in the general program of the Party in behalf of all of America's oppressed. It is particularly brought forward in the vigorous emphasis given by the Party's recently held Tenth Convention to the need for guiding the struggles of the national groups, for economic betterment and against the imposition of social and political disabilities.

In the magazine itself, in the April and May issues, appear two statements, both by the New York State Committee of the Communist Party. The October issue contains an article by Comrade I. Amter, "The Communist Party and the Jews." These are ringing declarations of the need and the existing basis for united struggle of all sections of the Jewish population together with all the progressive

forces against fascism and Judophobia. Particularly devastating is their attack upon the cowardly hush-hush policy of certain bourgeois Jewish leaders, making clear that "passivity to the struggle against anti-Semitism and the fight for the rights of the Jews is objective support to fascism."

But these notable documents do not end, as they should, with the concrete aspects of this program in terms of the special needs and demands growing out of the actual struggles of the American Jewish masses as a national group.

Indeed, these special demands have still to be worked out. Every issue of Jewish Life should contribute something to their study and formulation. Nothing better comes out of any Party periodical than an effective slogan, activating united protest and struggle.

It becomes necessary, in other words, to state what Communism in action proposes, and to state this in terms of a program with concretely formulated demands—demands which, taken together and pressed through to victory, in unison with the other forces of the democratic front, would end all discriminatory practices against the Jewish people. And it is necessary to demonstrate how the Party leads in the fight for the fulfilment of these demands, day by day.

Then, indeed, will everyone who reads be convinced of the declaration that the Communist Party is the leader in the struggle for Jewish rights.

It is in order here to offer a few remarks on the style of the magazine.

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If we are to admit that style is the man, then our style must be the militant, challenging man. Thus viewed, the tone and method of the magazine must in themselves be alive with the dynamics of our movement. With a more buoyant, vigorous presentation, the generally adequate substance of the issues under review could have attained far greater usefulness. Much of the solid material is weakened by stodginess in treatment, by a certain lack of self-confidence, which lessens the magazine's authoritativeness and appeal. Nor can we separate this formal aspect from the abstractness which has hampered the formulation of concrete, fighting demands. take, for example, the article "The Road to Jewish Unity" (July issue), which gives a sound analysis of the necessary steps to unity for the Jewish organizations. In it, Comrade J. Arnold writes thus of the stricture on admission of new organizations, adopted by the recent Pittsburgh Convention of the American Jewish Committee, B'Nai Brith, American Jewish Congress, and Jewish Labor Committee, which excluded the Jewish People's Committee, representing a quarter of a million Jews:

"In this connection the necessity of a fivesixths vote for the inclusion of additional organizations smacks of a tendency to limit the participant bodies. In the interests of true unity this clause should be liberalized."

True, we should welcome even the one-sixth margin as a victory for the democratic front forces and as a step from which to press further for unity; but to say that this huge five-sixths boulder in the doorway "smacks of a tendency to limit," smacks, we would be inclined to say, of an understate-

ment that can only have the effect of leaving the boulder there for some time to come. Here is a place to speak more lustily, backed by the dignity of our position and the consistency of our work for unity.

This same mildness is evident in regard to the treatment of the sabotage on the part of the American Jewish Congress leadership of President Roosevelt's efforts to facilitate the admission of Austrian refugees. What is more scandalous than the surreptitious letter of the A.J.C. leadership to Congressman O'Toole urging him not to introduce his bill in behalf of Austrian refugees on the grounds that such admission of Jews would lead to anti-Semitism here?* But the magazine merely complains editorially that "Jewish leaders are slowing down this plan to aid the Austrian and German Jews and no other constructive and practical program is brought forward." (May issue.)

Here was a real opportunity to expose the efforts of the A.J.C. leadership to make hay for Zionism while the Nazi sun shines by deflecting the refugee stream to Palestine, and incidentally relieving the rich Jews of America from the burden of financial aid for their poorer "co-religionists" from abroad. Really, the Spanish couplet holds:

"Entre Dios y el dineiro

Lo segundo es lo primero."**

And we would be justified in letting fly a few sparks in our treatment of this question.

^{*}The text of the letter appeared (in translation) in *The Morning Freiheit*, May 8, 1938.

^{** &}quot;Between God and money
The second is the first."

Having rendered, by its first year's effort, a distinct contribution to the study of basic and current Jewish issues, Jewish Life has need to improve toward greater scholarship and authoritativeness, on the one hand, and toward a more attractive, lively, and popular style, on the other. Leading Marxist authorities, Gentile as well as Jewish, should come forward as contributors to the magazine. Cultural features could be introduced, giving the magazine more variety of material, and more sparkle-some short stories, poems, a theatre and motion picture section with mature, well-considered discussion of anti-Semitism as manifested in these fields; some of the exciting material on the revolutionary and progressive traditions of American Jewry might be the basis for absorbing short biographies of leading figures in our country's life and letters.

Freed from the constrictions above noted, clear-eyed with the Marxist-Leninist view of the Jewish question, consistently guiding and advancing in the forefront of struggle, and with the support and active assistance of the leading Party committees and functionaries for its wide distribution, Jewish Life can see a broad and ever broader path stretching before it.

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