Chapter Three •

RUSSIA, 1959 — STARK REALITY

Thirteen years passed between my second visit to the Soviet Union and my third, in 1959. It was another period of great change, more fundamental change, perhaps, than in the period preceding my second visit, which had included the Second World War. The years since that war are already being described as the beginning of the Atomic Age. If mankind manages to avoid disaster and universal suicide—if man lives to see the benefits of the new sources of power and knowledge—these years may also come to be remembered as a period of good fortune which opened the gates to universal peace and plenty and good will to all.

For the generation that lived through it, however, this period had none of those blessings. On the contrary, it was an era of anger—angry men in literature, angry people in social and political life, inciting one part of the world to hate against another part. An era of fear—fear of war, of atomic bombs, of atomic fall-out, and of ideas; fear of Communism in the West and of bourgeois thought in the East. An era of insecurity, helplessness, and frustration. People felt they had lost their hold on the basic elements of existence. Nobody knew how great the danger of total destruction was, or what was being done to prevent it. Nor did they have the means of finding out. The matter was both technically complicated and secret. The preservation of the human race, of life on earth, lay in the hands of several tired old men, quarreling among themselves. One false move and all would be gone. People pondered whether any humans would remain to continue the race after another war, and whether any possible survivors would be able to propagate normal human progeny.

On the over-all world scene, the basic fact of the period was the emergence of the Soviet Union as the second greatest power.

Backward and bankrupt twenty-five years earlier, wrecked and all but in ruins fifteen years before, Russia at last outdistanced Britain in industrial production and scientific advancement, and now rivaled the United States. Her Sputnik and Lunik were carrying the Hammer and Sickle around the sun and the moon. And on this earth she held, in addition to her own vast area, a big bite of Europe, and kept a tie-in with the greater part of Asia and a finger in political pies all over the globe. Sparing at home, she was generous abroad, extending loans and credits, offering trade and arms, constructing dams and bridges, building and equipping plants and factories—for all takers from Argentina to Ethiopia and from Iraq to Burma.

The old tyrant conveniently died just when he became a deadly peril to his aides and heirs, and was twice buried: once gloriously, embalmed and placed on view beside Lenin in the Red Sepulcher outside the Kremlin wall, and then most ingloriously, in a speech of indictment that shocked even those who had believed the worst. The man who had been exalted as a god was unmasked as a devil. The ground was thus cleared for mere humans, who wanted to live and might let live. At long last the Soviet man would be given the benefits of the Revolution. He would have more, fear less, and enjoy peace.

The world watched the rise of Russia with mixed feelings. There was admiration for the industry of her people and astonishment at their achievements. There was gratification in seeing a long-suffering, destitute people turn the corner to a better life. There was also the inevitable envy for and contemptuous antagonism toward the parvenu—a Socialist, to boot. Above all, there was uneasiness as to what the Red Goliath would be up to next. He was already pushing the little Davids around. But there was also hope. Now that the proletariat had something to lose besides its chains, its leaders might not risk their own destruction in a hazardous attempt to destroy others. The world anxiously grasped at every peaceful gesture emanating from Moscow, despite apprehension about the Soviet competition that would follow. The world was tired of fear and contention.

In the Jewish world the central event was the rebirth of the State of Israel. It came into being just fifty years after the resurgence of political Zionism, which gave the ancient dream of the Return to Jerusalem a concrete form, a national striving through colonization and political action. The father of this reality, Dr. Theodor Herzl, was then regarded as a visionary, by some as a dangerous Utopian. His terms of reference were still the historic dream; his contribution was his insistence that the realization of the dream lay in the will of the people. "If you will it, it will not be a dream," he inscribed in his book about an imaginary Jewish state. A quarter of a century later, the dream was underwritten by a promise of Great Britain indorsed by the League of Nations. But fulfillment lay beyond the horizon. In fact, realization seemed to recede with the advance of the Jewish readiness for statehood in Palestine.

Then a miracle happened. Gromyko said yes! For the first time in the history of the United Nations, Moscow and Washington agreed on a matter of major policy. The State of Israel was born, and was immediately recognized by the United States and the Soviet Union. Immediately, also, the neighboring Arab states defied the decision of the United Nations and went to war against Israel. Scarcely out of the womb, the new state had its baptism by fire. Although handicapped by lack of arms and by administrative chaos organized by the British before they left, the new state came out victorious. The Great Powers, so slow to react when the Arab armies marched against Israel, now scurried to demand an end to the fighting—to stop the advance of the Israeli forces. The State of Israel was at last in existence on its own account, by its own right, through sweat and blood, like other states. The miracle of the United Nations decision had been doubled by the miracle of the military victory. Still a third miracle would take place in the next several years: the admission of two immigrants for every one in the land, the building of a sound national economy, and last but by no means least, the creation of a genuine free democracy, the only one in that part of the world.

The world was relieved by the creation of the new state—relieved of an immediate and vexatious problem: hundreds of thousands of homeless Jews, mostly innocent Nazi victims, with no place to go. There was relief also from the sense of guilt toward the Jewish people that was felt by moral Christians, who saw in the gas chambers the horrible consequence of cen-

turies of Christian hatred and persecution. The State of Israel was an expiation of the Gentile conscience. There were other reasons, too, for favoring the new state: the redressing of an ancient wrong, ending an anomaly in the community of nations, providing a permanent haven for Jews subjected to discrimination or otherwise unhappy in their lands of exile.

For the Jews of the world the birth of Israel was, of course, an occasion of great rejoicing. Whether they ever went there or not, they were personally involved. The symbolic saying in the Talmud that every Jew owned four ells of soil in the Land of Israel now had a new relevance. For two thousand years all Jews had shared in the dream; now they were to share, directly or vicariously, in its realization. Some might actually come to settle there, and not necessarily because of persecution or dislike of their native land. Their motive might be a desire to live a complete Jewish life, in a single rather than a dual culture, even though they would remain well-wishers of the land of their birth and would promote its influence in their adopted country. Others might never see the Jewish state, being too deeply rooted elsewhere. Yet the mere existence of the state had a deep meaning for them—it normalized their status. They were no longer sons of a homeless people. Like others, they could take pride in the achievements of their kindred elsewhere. And the further development of their historical spiritual heritage, which was bound to come with the growth of the Jewish state, would also enrich their lives.

There was no direct connection between the two great events of the period—that is, the emergence of the Soviet Union as the second greatest power, and the rise of Israel. They came about through different historic processes in different parts of the world. But their interrelation was of deep concern to Jews. The glory of King Cyrus, who ended the Babylonian exile, was reflected on Gromyko, and the Jews of the world were grateful to the Soviet Union for his speech in the United Nations in November, 1947, which broke the impasse on Palestine. Before long, however, Jews everywhere were distressed to see the Soviet Union taking an increasingly hostile attitude toward the new state. Like other people, Jews differed among themselves in their attitude toward the Soviet Union as a Communist state.

And like most other reasonable people, most Jews accepted the fact that the Soviet Union was not to be excluded from the Near East and that it was up to her to choose her friends in that region. Yet, like all people of good will, they hoped that as a Socialist state the Soviet Union would be a constructive force there, her influence tending toward conciliation, peace, and social and economic progress, rather than toward increased tension and an arms race, and that Khrushchev would come forth with a plan for a neutralized and unarmed Near East.

But the comfort the Jews of the world were deriving from the progress in Israel was overshadowed by their concern over Soviet Jewry.

For the Jews of the Soviet Union, this period began rather promisingly; the three years (1946–8) looked like the good old days of 1941. The Jewish masses of the Soviet Union proper, as well as of the new territories, had become Jewish-conscious, and hungered for Jewish substance. The Yiddish writers, having found during the war years the eternal springs of Jewish creativity, were now in closer rapport with their readers than ever before. The substance of their writing was of vital interest to the masses. Where they could not treat a subject directly, they reflected on it in the circuitous manner of historical theme. Old taboos seemed to lift. Among the literary projects was a translation of the poems of the nationalist Hebrew poet Chaim N. Bialik. Note was duly taken also of those who knew little or no Yiddish. With no Yiddish schools to speak of, two textbooks in Yiddish made their appearance. One of them, an *Alef-Beis*, a charming abecedary meant for children, could be enjoyed by grownups as well, and they could thus learn the Hebrew alphabet. A Russian biography of Solomon Mikhoels in 1948 contained much detail about Jewish practices and folklore (to explain various events in Mikhoels' life and career), presented respectfully and sympathetically. According to an evaluation by Professor Shmeruk of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 80 per cent of the Yiddish publications of this period were of "good Jewish content."

The Yiddish readership responded with enthusiasm. The sale of books and periodicals soared. Literary journals, of which

there were several, had circulations of about 15,000. Books by Sholom Aleichem, Peretz, and noted living authors enjoyed a sale well above that figure, and an ordinary work of prose easily sold about 10,000. Indicative of the state of the literary market in 1948 are the available figures of several localities: Odessa—a volume of Sholom Aleichem, 1,500 copies; Quitko's *Alef-Beis,* 300; Mikhoels' biography (Russian), 400. Kiev—a sale of Yiddish books brought 67,000 rubles. Vilno—a book on the Kovno ghetto, 800 copies, sold in a few days. Zhitomir—a representative of a highbrow literary journal picked up 320 subscriptions for that publication in four days. Summarizing the Yiddish literary situation in the Soviet Union on its thirtieth anniversary (1948), Professor Nusinov of Moscow wrote: "Further evidence of the great amplitude of Soviet Yiddish literature is the wide distribution of Yiddish books in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Yiddish book sells in numbers beyond the dream of the Yiddish writer in the United States, with its many millions of Jews." Another indication of the lively interest in Yiddish literature was the many literary evenings held in public halls, factory clubs, and collective farms, where Yiddish writers met their readers. In short, there was considerable ground for pride and confidence. A young Soviet Yiddish literary critic, Rivka Rubina, proclaimed her faith in the future of Yiddish literature in these words: "No obstacles in its way will halt its growth. It will continue to bloom and grow even as our people, sorely tried in suffering and struggle, will continue to bloom and grow."

Rivka Rubina was a poor prophetess. A few months after she had written those lines, the very life of Soviet Yiddish literature was snuffed out at one blow. Its resuscitation has been refused under the pretext that there is no public for it!

Activity in other cultural fields and the communal sphere was no less vigorous during that period. Four Yiddish theatres were functioning in 1948, in Moscow, Minsk, Odessa, and Chernovtsy (the Kiev theatre). All went on tour as well as played to their home audiences. Every Jewish community of consequence had the opportunity to see good Yiddish theatre. In addition, there were so many Yiddish amateur acting groups that supplying them with suitable material became a problem. The leading

dramatic critic, J. Dobrushin, discussed this in the very last issue of *Aynikite.* Jewish music was another vital cultural endeavor. The favorite composers, S. Polansky and L. Pulver, were honored. Concerts were frequently given and were well attended in all cities and towns where there were Jewish choral societies.

The search for the inner spirit reflected itself in an impulsion toward physical proximity. There was an urge to get closer to other Jews, to live in a Jewish atmosphere, to be in contact with Jews everywhere. This led to an unprecedented influx of Jews to Birobidjan, some 25,000 in less than three years, which stimulated cultural activity there.

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee began to think of playing a part on the world Jewish stage. Fefer suggested calling a world Jewish conference to discuss three issues: the continued struggle against Fascism, steps to be taken against anti-Semitism, and the problem of Palestine. The consideration of all three of these issues would have redounded to the interest of the Soviet Union. The first two would have set the Soviet Union in the vanguard of the struggle; the third would have "invited" the interest of the Soviet Union in the affairs of the Near East. Whatever its motive, such a world conference would have made the Soviet Jews part of world Jewry. Ten days after the Yiddish *Aynikite* reprinted from *Pravda* Ilya Ehrenburg's article forswearing any relationship between Soviet Jews and Jews elsewhere, Fefer was still claiming special Jewish interest in the new State of Israel. He took issue with Dr. Nahum Goldmann's contention that the State of Israel was not the concern of the World Jewish Congress, which represented the various Jewish communities, but of the Zionists. Fefer wrote in *Aynikite*: "This is a false and pernicious conception. The State of Israel is a matter that concerns the entire Jewish people, and not the Jewish people alone. The entire progressive world followed with sympathy the birth of the new state, and no progressive person can remain indifferent to what is happening on the soil of that state."

Such, then, was the situation of Yiddish culture and the mood of Soviet Jewry at the time the curtain fell. The date was November 20, 1948, the same as that of the last issue of *Aynikite,* the suppression of which marked the beginning of the black

years of Soviet Jewry, five long years of fear and degradation from which they have not yet fully recovered. Soviet Jews felt as though their world had suddenly crashed upon them.

Today, in retrospect, it appears that the change did not come about suddenly. There had been many straws in the wind, but at the time these were hardly noticeable and were subject to different interpretation. They were regarded as natural or insignificant. For example, after the war only one of the three Yiddish publishing houses was reopened. This was the *Emes* in Moscow. Those in Minsk and Kiev were not revived. This could have been interpreted as a design to reduce the importance of Yiddish, undercutting its roots, placing it in an exposed position in the capital, where it could be nipped at any time. But it could also have been taken merely as an administrative procedure in the interest of efficiency under the exigencies of postwar reconstruction. Similarly, the great publication plans somehow failed to materialize. The 119 Yiddish books that appeared during this period were a small portion of the list that had been announced in advance. This reduction in the list could be regarded as a constrictive measure, but also as a reflection of the general condition of uncertainty and hesitance following Zhdanov's speech that laid down the new line, the return to the old orthodox Socialist realism.

Today, there is no doubt that Ehrenburg's article was "inspired" to lay the ideological ground for all that came after in respect to Yiddish culture. Yet, at the time, it did not appear so sinister. Fefer would not have written about a Jewish people in the same *Aynikite,* ten days after the translation of Ehrenburg's article appeared there, if he had grasped the implication of the Ehrenburg piece. Possibly Fefer considered Ehrenburg's article as another eruption of its author's assimilationist tendencies, or at most as a trial balloon by certain Party leaders, but not a Party decision.

Similarly, today we know that the violent death of Solomon Mikhoels on January 13, 1948, was part of the conspiracy against Yiddish culture and the Jewish people. He was not killed in an automobile accident, as commonly reported, while in Minsk to present the Stalin Prize in dramatic art to the Byelorussian State Theatre. He was treacherously and brutally murdered—invited for a drink by the local Party secretary, who sent his car for him. Mikhoels' body was found later—shattered, his head partly severed, his cane broken. A member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Sheinin, who had been a sleuth and subsequently had written some crime yarns, undertook a serious investigation of the murder. He disappeared, and was not heard from until eight years later when he returned from a prison camp. Although no mention of the murder was made either in the press or in the speeches at the funeral, some people knew about it, and Peretz Markish referred in his eulogy poem to the marks of brutality on Mikhoels' body and included him among the Nazi victims. Still, whatever suspicions the murder may have aroused, no one at the time could definitely connect it with official policy. Mikhoels was given an elaborate state funeral, like a Soviet dignitary, and his memory was honored by naming the theatre after him.

The closing of *Aynikite* was therefore a surprise to all involved. Thereafter, they felt, as one of the victims expressed it, as if the ground were burning underneath their feet. They realized that a storm was coming, and that they were trapped without an avenue of escape. Many of them stoically awaited the fatal knock on the door in the middle of the night. The mills of the Secret Police began grinding the Jewish community —slowly but exceedingly small.

The Black Years

Today the facts are known:

Right after the closing of *Aynikite,* a few days after November 20, 1948, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was liquidated. Within two months the arrests began, reaching literally many hundreds and embracing all who had any connection, however remote, with cultural or communal Jewish life, from Leningrad to Birobidjan. The net caught even Rabbi Shlieffer and the president of his synagogue, Chabrutsky, a controversial character often charged with collaboration with the Secret Police. Apparently their arrest came as a result of their communal role, for they were looked up to as leaders of Soviet Jewry. The design seems to have been to extirpate all Jewish intelligentsia

active in the Jewish field, to decapitate the Jewish community.

Next came the turn of Jewish intellectuals in the general cultural field. They were to be eliminated as a distrustful, disloyal element. The campaign against them was conducted under the guise of an action against Cosmopolitans, i.e., internationalists—among the Soviet intellectuals; they were branded as "gypsies," and "homeless," without attachment to their native soil and people and hence incapable of loyalty. But by pointing the finger primarily at Jews and pouring all the vehemence against them, unprecedently disclosing the original Jewish names of Jews who had made great careers under assumed Russian names—as though this were a crime or only Jews had done it (Stalin, in fact, had done just that)—and harping on the designations of "homeless" and "gypsy," the Soviet press identified Cosmopolitanism with Jewishness. Every Jew in the Soviet intellectual world was suspect by the mere fact that he was a Jew. By implication, the shadow of suspicion fell on all Jews in all important positions. Even a Jew estranged from his own people and as imbued with the spirit of Russian tradition and mysticism as the late Boris Pasternak was a marked man. His personal secretary, a Gentile, was arrested, along with the Jewish writers, and pressed to testify that Pasternak had communications with the Zionist enemy abroad. The basic premise of anti-Semitism—ascribing to the Jewish race imaginary evil qualities and imputing these to the individual Jew because of his belonging to the Jewish race—was now for the first time publicly accepted.

Out of the hundreds arrested, twenty-five were singled out for trial; this took place between July 11 and July 19, 1952. Those chosen were the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, famous writers, and others regarded as key people in Jewish life; some of them had been directed by the Party to join the committee. They were charged with being Nationalist Bourgeois Zionists, agents of American imperialism, who wished to separate the Crimea from the Soviet Union and establish there a Jewish National Bourgeois Zionist republic, which would serve as an American military base against the Soviet Union. They were cruelly tortured during a long period before the trial in an effort to break them and extract confessions. It is

not known whether there ever was any intention to present them at an open trial like those of the 1930's, or whether the confessions were wanted merely for inside-Kremlin consumption. The prisoners, however, could not be broken. There is a rumor of only one, broken by torture, collaborating with the authorities. They maintained their innocence to the end, throwing the fantastic charges in the face of their fabricators. They were executed on August 12, 1952, the manner and disposition of their remains being still unknown.

Five months later, January 13, 1953, the Doctors' Plot was unrolled in *Pravda*. Nine doctors of the highest repute in the land, six of them Jews, were charged with being in league with American, British, Zionist spies with the macabre design of poisoning the leaders of the Soviet Union, two of whom, Zhdanov and Shcherbakov, they had already done to death. They were accused of being the "paid agents of the Joint," a "creation of American Intelligence," whose contact man in the Soviet Union had been Mikhoels, "the well-known Jewish National Bourgeois." It was just five years since Mikhoels had been murdered in Minsk and buried with Soviet honors in Moscow. By "Joint" was meant the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, organized three years before the October Revolution to distribute funds for Jewish relief abroad, which had been collected in America by Jewish religious groups (Zionist and non-Zionist, Orthodox, Reform) and non-religious groups (Republicans, Democrats, and Socialists). The Joint therefore had no politics either Jewish or general, and it had distributed several hundred million dollars in scores of countries without any complaints against it. In fact, it distributed $16,000,000 in the Soviet Union with the appreciative approval of Lenin and Stalin, from the outbreak of the Revolution to 1938, its representative, Dr. Joseph Rosen, signing relief agreements with President Kalinin.

Anti-Semitism was now out in the open, worse than during the war. Then it had been an upsurge from the bottom, the little Gentile man against the little Jewish man, while the police were presumably not looking. Now it came as a dispensation from on high, a new line which every bureaucrat felt constrained to implement. A story told by Sholom Aleichem's hero,

Tevyeh the Dairyman, that seemed too droll for the Czarist Russia it reflected, now appeared all too realistic for Stalin's Russia of the early 1950's. Tevyeh's Russian peasant neighbors came to tell him that they "must do something to him"—not that they had anything against him personally; on the contrary, they regarded him as a good man, albeit a Jew; but everywhere pogroms were being made on Jews, and they could not just abstain. . . . Under Stalin, Jews were being removed from top central positions, often by their own old friends, as a matter of policy. The purge began in the cultural field, passed into the economic, and caught fire inside the Party machine. There were so many removals that a halt had to be called for fear of disorganization.

If horror struck the wolves, would not the lambs shiver? No Jew felt secure in his job, however modest it was. Jewish youths took their entrance examinations to institutions of higher learning with heavy hearts, as though they were attempting to sneak in where they did not belong. Jews burned the Yiddish books they had in their homes, lest they be charged with having a connection with the Yiddish writers and their plot. They kept to their houses, avoiding contact with their Gentile neighbors. Some resourceful Jews "lost" their passports and, for a price, obtained new ones under Gentile names. Ugly rumors were spread by word of mouth about a planned expulsion of all Jews from European Russia and about concentration camps being already constructed for them.

The atmosphere began to feel like that of Germany in 1933, after Hitler took over. As happened in the early years of Nazi Germany, professional organizations considered expelling their Jewish members. This was to be carried out not on the basis of race nor specifically because an individual was Jewish. The procedure was—it was done this way even at the Union of Soviet Writers—to read the names of people regarded as unfit to be continued in membership, the names being all Jewish and no one questioning the reason or challenging the suggestion. At the Union of Soviet Writers, the move was stopped by Ilya Ehrenburg's asking why his name had been omitted from the list.

In the queues, one woman could be overheard advising another to beware having her medical prescription filled by a Jewish druggist, since he might mix in some poison, or telling a friend of her neighbor's death as the result of a deliberately false diagnosis or wrong treatment by a Jewish physician bent on "guiding our good people to the world beyond." Such libels were reminiscent of the medieval charge that Jews poisoned the wells.

Then a miracle happened. Two months after the Doctors' Plot was recounted in *Pravda*, preparing the ground for worse to come, the old tyrant unexpectedly died. Millions of people breathed more freely, among them the Soviet Jews. There is an old Jewish saying: Never pray for a new ruler—he may be worse. But no new Soviet leader could possibly be worse. Another month passed, and then *Pravda* declared the Doctors' Plot to have been a despicable fabrication by enemies of the state. Soviet Jews regarded it as another Purim—their Haman had died, and now succor and comfort would come for them. They waited for the wheel to make a complete turn. They had no idea what had happened to the Yiddish writers and other intellectuals beyond the fact that they were missing, which meant arrest or worse, but they looked forward to their return and the restoration of the former cultural institutions. They went on waiting—nothing materially changed in that sphere. In the general easing of tension, the situation of the Jews likewise generally relaxed. The run on Jews ceased. Those who had happened to survive the purge retained their positions. But new promotions of Jews became a rarity. The ambition of the young Jewish generation dropped several degrees. Now they did not dare aim too high. They began to "know their place." None of the Yiddish leaders returned from banishment, not a single cultural institution was reopened. It was 1955 when the voice of the turtle was again heard in the land—a feeble cooing, a casual concert containing Yiddish songs with a hesitant reading of a Yiddish story by Sholom Aleichem, a "safe" author. This might be balm for the wounds, but it was not a cure for the disease. It was a promise of more and better, at least it was so regarded by Soviet Jews. But fulfillment did not come.

One by one, the lesser Yiddish writers and intellectuals, who had not rated the death sentence but had received terms of im-

prisonment, returned from confinement. They had been officially released for "insufficient" evidence against them, not absolved. They still needed clearance by the authorities in their place of residence. This did not come automatically; some had to reside outside their cities for long months before receiving permission to return to their former homes. It was nearly the end of that year (1955), a few months before Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, before the families of the executed writers were allowed to return to their homes. They received whatever was left of their furnishings, sums of money for replacement of the rest, and additional small sums. Then they were called in by a military official and regretfully told that the arrested person had been unlawfully sentenced to capital punishment, in a conspiracy of anti-state criminals who had already received their due punishment. That was how they finally learned what had happened to the kin torn away from them seven years before.

On February 25, 1956, came Nikita Khrushchev's sensational speech unmasking Stalin. He told of Stalin's crimes against entire peoples, like the Ingus, Kalmiks, and Gabardins, small national groups in the Northern Caucasus, but had not a word for the crimes against the Jews or the case of the Yiddish writers. Mention of these seemed to be taboo. When *Pravda* reproduced from the New York *Daily Worker* an article by the secretary of the American Communist party, Eugene Dennis, on the significance of Khrushchev's speech, it omitted entirely his reference to "the destruction of the lives of more than twenty Jewish cultural workers" and added a footnote to his reference to the "plot against the Jewish doctors," to the effect that "along with the Jewish doctors, in what is called the 'trial of the doctors,' were illegally arrested important Russian and Ukrainian doctors." Presumably nothing special happened to Jews during the last years of Stalin's life, and nothing was to happen now to change the situation. Between 1956 and 1959, poems and stories by the rehabilitated Yiddish writers appeared in translation in literary magazines and books, but no books in Yiddish appeared except one volume by Sholom Aleichem. Two more books have since appeared, both of them classics, one by Mendeli and the other by Peretz, and more recently a book on Birobidjan, on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary. No Yiddish work originating in the Soviet Union since 1948 has appeared.

These are the hard facts, spare and fragmentary, strewn over more than a decade. Simple as they are, the world outside the Soviet Union was hard put to get at them. For years there was an absolute blackout of news about Jews; then came deliberate efforts to mislead and confuse and lie. It was sad to see spokesmen for a great nation stoop so low in so tragic a situation.

In the absence of printed or broadcast news and of replies to inquiries, however friendly, information on the situation of the Jews could be obtained only by indirect methods, surmise, and sifting and checking rumors. That *Aynikite* had been discontinued was assumed when it failed to arrive as customary, the assumption being verified by visitors returning from Moscow—they reported that the publication was not obtainable there either—and by the failure of Communists outside the Soviet Union to produce a copy in refutation. The dissolution of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was surmised a priori on the basis of the closing of *Aynikite*, and corroborated by a Moscow visitor who went to its address, 10 Kropotkina, to see whether there was a lock on the door. There was. The discontinuance of the *Emes* publishing house was taken for granted when Yiddish books ceased to come from the Soviet Union and Soviet Books Trade Notes, which had formerly listed Yiddish books along with books in other non-Russian languages, dropped entirely the entry for Yiddish. A sad commentary on the situation was the action taken by the Soviet books agency in New York, managed by a Yiddish literary man. He found it necessary to call in a Jewish book trader and have him take away all the Yiddish books he had in stock. Even Yiddish books that had appeared in the Soviet Union prior to the deluge were now not welcome alongside Soviet books in other languages. The closing of the Yiddish theatre was presumed by its omission from the list of the current shows in the Moscow newspapers, and verified by a tourist visitor's going to the address of the theatre to check. There was little glory for the mighty Soviet Union in these clumsy efforts to keep such facts from an unhappy people.

The situation was worse yet in regard to arrests. Rumors that

leading Yiddish writers were under arrest became current right after *Aynikite* failed to arrive late in 1948. These were soon followed by rumors that the writers had been executed. The rumors came from professional anti-Soviet sources that often circulated fabrications as well as authentic news. This time they happened to be right, but they anticipated the fact by three years! Those who could not believe, or did not want to believe, or were just wary of anti-Soviet propaganda, did not accept the rumors as truth. With Moscow in deadly silence, the anti-Soviet propagandists had a field day while the friends of the Soviet Union and those who advocated friendly relations with the Soviet Union were on the defensive. Hoping against hope and grasping at every possible straw of refutation, they refused to join the Red-baiters, or to parallel their action with open protest against the Soviet government. They were governed by a dual rationalization: first, that there was, after all, no substantiation of the rumors, and their source was suspect; second, that if any arrests had been made, public protests would only aggravate the situation and increase the already grave danger of the persons involved. Opponents of the Cold War, liberals oriented toward friendly relations between the East and the West, intervened in the fate of the writers and Yiddish culture in their own way.

The American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists was on the spot. Created to promote contact with the Jewish intellectuals of the Soviet Union on matters Jewish, it had been without any contact with the other side for some time, and now there seemed to be no one left to get in touch with. It was the head of a bridge leading nowhere. The first impulse was to dissolve the organization, but a second thought rejected such drastic action. Perhaps this was the time the committee was needed most. It might be the last link—the only non-Communist Jewish body that could approach the Soviet authorities as *amicus curiae*, whose interest in Soviet Yiddish writers and Yiddish culture was genuine and friendly, untainted with anti-Soviet propaganda. It had not escaped the Soviet information services that some of those who were now vociferous in defense of the arrested writers, demanding reports on their whereabouts, had had only abuse for these same writers in the past

and had refused to join the committee of welcome for Mikhoels and Fefer when they visited here during the war, heaping on them insult and contumely instead. At least some leaders of the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists felt that although it might be embarrassing for them to remain on the committee and to expose themselves to misunderstanding, the continued existence of the committee itself was a service in a great cause, the cause of world Jewish unity and of moral support to the Jews in the Soviet Union in this dark hour. Serious people would understand their position now, and history would justify it.

The American committee endeavored to ascertain the facts in its own way. It sent letters to the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, to VOKS (the Soviet organ for cultural relations with foreign countries), to the Union of Soviet Writers, and to individual writers with whom it had been in touch before, avoiding new individual contacts lest the letters get the recipients into difficulties. The net result was a note on a letter returned from Moscow, a personal letter that had been sent to the poet Peretz Markish by a friend who used to correspond with him, a writer not connected with the American committee or with any organization which might be regarded as political. The letter had been sent registered, and was returned with the envelope stamped that the addressee was unknown at the address given. Obviously Markish was no longer at his place of residence, and had left no forwarding address—a fact that could be taken as corroboration of the rumor that he was under arrest, but might also mean he had moved away and left no forwarding address—perhaps just to avoid receiving communications from abroad in these difficult times.

The next step by the American committee was to get in touch personally with Soviet representatives at the United Nations and in Washington. These people generally appeared friendly and sympathetic, but they professed no knowledge of the situation and regarded the rumors as mere anti-Soviet propaganda. However, they promised to send inquiries to Moscow and to communicate with the committee when information arrived. They never "communicated." Subsequent reminders simply brought the reply: "No word from Moscow."

Characteristic were my own meetings with representatives of the Soviet Union. Accompanied by the secretary of the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, Joseph Brainin, I called upon Ambassador Panushkin in Washington. We told him of the concern our committee and the Jewish community in general felt over the fate of the Yiddish writers. He acted deeply offended by our request for information. It was an insult to his country. Did we think for a moment that people in the Soviet Union were arrested without good reason? If any one of the writers had been arrested, it must have been for due cause. And if we thought those writers could not be guilty of a crime, then we had no reason for thinking they had been arrested. We called on the Soviet foreign minister, Gromyko, when he came to New York to attend a session of the United Nations. I had met him before, when he first came to the United States during the war and was interested in the work of the American Russian War Relief. He also knew of my connection with the American Committee for Birobidjan. I spoke very frankly to him, and he did not mind. His reply was supposedly equally frank. He knew Mikhoels and had met Fefer, but he had not seen either of them in years. He was too much involved in other fields. He did not know whether *Aynikite* had ceased publication or not. Even if it had, it would have no significance—some journals closed, others opened, for a variety of reasons, generally technical. He would not know whether any member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee had been arrested. Would the American ambassador in Moscow know whether a particular person in Chicago had been arrested? If anyone had been arrested, it would have been for a good reason. In his country they did not arrest people just so. To my remark that if such a query were made to the American ambassador in Moscow, he—or anyone—could write to the chief of police in Chicago and get the exact information at once, Gromyko replied that I could do that too—that is, write to the police department of Moscow. He did not go through the motions of promising to send on an inquiry. As far as he was concerned, there was nothing to inquire about.

Indirect inquiries channeled through Communist sources brought less than negative results. Communists, Jews and non-

Jews, who had an interest in Jewish culture, or in friendly relations with Jewish cultural circles, were approached to use their connections in securing information. They took a long time obtaining replies, which invariably ran about as follows: No one had been arrested; the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee was dissolved because it had outlived its purpose, or on account of the Cold War; *Aynikite* had been closed, but another publication would soon appear, as would Yiddish books. In fact, preparations were already on foot.

Other Jewish organizations in the United States and several Western countries were also anxious to know the exact truth about the Jewish cultural situation and the fate of the Yiddish writers. They sought reliable information through interviews with Soviet officials or highly placed individuals visiting abroad, or by having Western visitors to Moscow inquire of officials there, all through friendly Soviet intermediaries. The replies they managed to elicit depended upon the amount of information the inquirer seemed to possess and on the degree of his sophistication in respect to the Soviet Union.

When a British Innocent Abroad, Laborite Esther Seager, visited Moscow as a guest of VOKS, and asked the question, she was given an evasive answer. The *London Jewish Chronicle* reported her saying she was informed that there was much activity by Jewish writers. Upon asking for names, she was given those of Grossman, Pasternak, Ehrenburg, Inber, Aliger, Marshak, Svietlov, Slavinski, Antokolsky and a few others. Then she added her own deep observation: "Whether these are writing in Yiddish or on Jewish subjects I am not qualified to determine, since I have no knowledge either of the Yiddish literature or the Russian. But it seems that some of the names mentioned should calm those people for whom the late news of the murders in the days of Stalin was so painful."

For more knowledgeable people, it was Ilya Ehrenburg again, as in 1948, who laid out the line, or the lie. In London, in 1950, he stated that the old Jews who were dependent on Yiddish literature had been annihilated or had died, and the young generation, those who survived, no longer had need of it since they had been assimilated. He repeated this untruth in 1956 in Sweden and again in 1958 in Brussels. It was the theme of all

the statements, explanations, and justifications made by Soviet officialdom, high and low. In other words, the blame belonged to the Soviet Jews themselves; they had become assimilated.

As for the Yiddish writers, all efforts to discover even a hint about their fate failed completely—that is, until the Soviet authorities were good and ready to release the news. Dogged by questions wherever he went, Ilya Ehrenburg simply denied knowing such names as Fefer and Bergelson; he had known Mikhoels, who was dead of course, as all knew. Soviet officials knew of the names Fefer and Bergelson, but could see no cause for concern or reason for inquiry about them. Only in the middle of 1955 did they begin to accept the issue and presume to give a reply. In July, 1955, at Geneva, the press representative of the Soviet delegation, Ilitchev, told inquiring reporters that "something unclean" had gone on at the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the implication being that the committee had been closed for good reasons. In an effort to dispel the rumors of executions, he said that he had met the poet Peretz Markish in the street only recently—he knew him well from the days his poems ran in *Pravda*. He knew of Bergelson, too, but Bergelson was an old man, and probably dead by now.

Two months later, in New York, the Jewish Labor Committee of the United States, a Right-wing anti-Soviet Socialist body, sent a memorandum to Molotov, who was then attending a United Nations session, requesting information on the fate of sixty-eight listed Yiddish writers and of Yiddish culture generally. Instead of throwing the memorandum in the wastebasket, as the Soviet authorities had done on previous occasions, Ambassador Zarubin agreed to see representatives of the Jewish Labor Committee, and received them in the presence of Molotov. This was the first unhostile encounter between the Jewish Labor Committee and a high Soviet official. Molotov suggested that the delegation visit the Soviet Union and check for themselves on the sixty-eight writers and the state of the Yiddish culture. The implication was that nothing had happened to the writers and all was well with Yiddish culture.

One month later—in August, 1955, three years after the execution of the writers—a delegation of Soviet writers headed by Boris Polevoy, an official of the Union of Soviet Writers, visited the United States. In answer to the inevitable question about the fate of the Yiddish writers, Polevoy said that he knew definitely Bergelson was dead, for Bergelson's son had come to him, as an official of the Union of Soviet Writers, about the funeral arrangements. (To this day no one knows how the remains of the martyred Bergelson were disposed of or where!) A writer named Gribatchev added that Markish was dead. At a private gathering with American Communist writers, in the presence of Howard Fast, who subsequently disclosed the incident, Polevoy denied all rumors about the execution of Yiddish writers as mere anti-Soviet propaganda, and when the name of Quitko, the poet, was mentioned, Polevoy said that he had seen him just before he left for the United States; Quitko lived in the same apartment house he did. (Quitko had been executed along with the others three years earlier!)

It was about the time of the Twentieth Party Congress, in February, 1956, that the news of the tragic end of the Yiddish writers was leaked to the outside world. Just as the Khrushchev speech itself found its way into a Capitalist newspaper in New York before the world Communist press had an inkling of it (the Soviet press has not yet had part of it), the news about the Yiddish writers was broken in a strongly anti-Soviet Yiddish daily newspaper in New York. The late Leon Crystal, United Nations reporter for the *Jewish Daily Forward*, went to Moscow during the winter of 1956, and although shunned by all the press people he had met at the United Nations, managed to come out with verification of the sad rumors. He set the date of the execution as August 12, 1952, and named at least six of the martyrs—Fefer, Markish, Bergelson, Quitko, Hofstein, and Lozovsky. The news was corroborated semiofficially, not in Moscow but in Warsaw, by an article in the Communist Jewish daily *Folkshtime*, supplementing the Khrushchev speech. Naming Jewish communal and cultural leaders liquidated by Stalin in the early and latter thirties, and referring to the liquidation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the article used the phrasing "and its leaders sentenced to destruction." Thus ended the macabre mystery of the Yiddish writers. At long last the world learned the facts, but not the Soviet world, except the Jews

therein, who heard them in a whisper—a whisper that may go from generation to generation.

All through the years of anxiety a pacifier was passed out from time to time to soothe the pangs of suspicion and despair. Reassuring word came that what had happened under Stalin could not repeat itself under the rule of Khrushchev, who would soon right the wrongs. Encouraging rumors never came from an official Soviet source, but from another country, from people supposedly in the know—a Yiddish literary journal was just about to start publication; a theatre was being organized to produce plays in Yiddish; they were already assembling a staff for a Yiddish publishing house. The doses of this balm of Gilead increased after the confirmation of the tragic end of the Yiddish writers. Hope dies hard, and people grasped at the least straw. It took long to break the faith in Stalin. People now pinned their hope on Khrushchev. He could not bring Stalin's dead to life, but he could revive Yiddish culture. And he would. One had only to be patient.

This was the situation when I arrived in Moscow on my third visit to the Soviet Union in the early summer of 1959.

Realities—1959

There was much of the old, but also a lot of the new, in the Moscow I saw that summer. The new struck you first.

The area from the Vnukova airport to the city, a distance of some fifteen miles, had formerly been all forest and field. Now it was being developed into a modern industrial-residential district; when you reached the Lenin Hills, you found an ultra-modern university city. The industrial plants were of the newest type—horizontal, airy and many-windowed, surrounded by lawn and shrubs, with a center for transportation—apparently they did not expect workers to drive to work in their own cars. Everything seemed to be geared to the new age of electronics and automation. The residential area could well serve as a showplace almost anywhere in the world. Nowhere else would you find such lavish use of free open space, or less concern for expense in construction.

Immense boulevards, a good three times the size of similar

thoroughfares elsewhere, were planted with four rows of trees and islands of flowers. The buildings lining the boulevards were equally spacious—eight and ten stories high, with elevators, incinerators, and central heat, and with bath and toilet in every apartment. The latter would be taken for granted in other countries, but need special mention here. Between a boulevard and the next parallel wide street were similar houses built around square parks.

What these apartments meant to the Russians I learned from a driver for Intourist, who lived in one of them. "It's heaven," he said, "just heaven. Imagine—you come home from work and the wife is not angry, does not scold and curse, because now she has a kitchen all to herself. No sharing a kitchen with three other women—my burner, your burner; I cook now, you cook later; you let the borsht boil over on the stove; no, it was your soup. No wonder she lets it all out on her husband. And for myself, I come home and get into the shower, hot water galore, any day, any time, instead of dragging myself to the public bath once a week."

At the Lenin Hills, Moscow University towers over the entire city. It's a monstrosity, some say. Yet it was modeled on the tower of the University of Pittsburgh, except that this is one time that the Russians caught up with and surpassed the United States. The university is one of the four giant skyscrapers in Moscow that stick out like sore thumbs, all adaptations of the Woolworth Building with considerable embellishment. The Soviets boast that the building was constructed by the students themselves, and in record time. You can easily believe them—the building shows it. The wings and the tower do not correspond, and what is the eighteenth floor in the tower may be the fifteenth, or close to it, in the wing. If you need to transfer from one to the other, you must pass through a labyrinth of corridors and steps. But once you are inside, anywhere inside, it is most comfortable and well-appointed.

The high, vaulted ceilings, the hand-carved woodwork on the walls, the indirect lighting, the artistic decorations, the roomy chairs and tables, and apparently the service as well are superior to what we are accustomed to find in such buildings back home. The library contains millions of books and has special reading

rooms for special fields of study; it carries all the important magazines in all languages, and quite a number of current daily newspapers, among them five leading papers from the United States which are not to be found in many American universities. The rooms in the dormitories are in units of two, off a small vestibule of their own, which contains all the conveniences. There are also housekeeping rooms. The campus is larger and more elaborately landscaped, and kept in better trim, than any other one abroad. Around the campus are grouped small villa-type buildings which serve as special quarters for academic research and laboratories and as housing for the teaching staff.

Within the city proper, the change was not so marked except for the traffic and the crowds in the streets. A number of side streets had been cut through or eliminated to create thoroughfares which would facilitate getting through the city and bring many of the so-called alleys within easier reach. Fantastic "rings," circular boulevards around the city, are much too wide for comfortable, or safe, crossing. Lined with new structures, these lend a new aspect to Moscow. But the heart of the city, like the Kremlin, retains the old Muscovy character. The old houses were now in good repair, most of the courtyards having been cleaned up also. Where a new building has been erected, it blends well in color and style with its neighbors. Moscow architects seem to have made a synthesis of the old and new.

Yet the very old, the unbelievably primitive, is still there. I met a lady in Moscow who had been born in the United States and had come to the Soviet Union with her parents on a visit when she was in her teens. Deciding to throw in her lot with the Russians, she had remained. Now, in 1959, she was living in an old house only a few subway stops from the heart of the city. It had no conveniences save electricity. She carried water from a well in a courtyard about a block away, shared a common kitchen with three other families, used the single privy for the entire house, heated her apartment through the cold Moscow winters with a small, circular iron stove that filled the place with the smell of kerosene. Like the others, she had to go to the public bathhouse to bathe, but being something of an athlete, she went instead to an open-air swimming pool the year 'round. Imagine open-air swimming in Moscow in winter!

Even more remarkable was the change in the people. No longer could you tell a Russian by his shoes. His footwear looked as good as the tourists'. You could still tell him by his clothes, but only because of their style; they were no longer frayed, ragged, patched, and wrinkled. Everyone was dressed in clothes that were whole, clean, and neat. But the men's trousers looked like smokestacks, and their coat sleeves ran down to the fingers; the women's jackets were too long and too wide, even for their bulges; every woman in the street looked as though she were wearing her husband's or older brother's jacket. Some dresses had style and frills, but such frivolity had only recently been decried in the Soviet press as symptomatic of bourgeois decadence. People walked briskly, preoccupiedly, crowding at the corners to cross, pushing, and pressing in herds. Automobile traffic filled the streets, cars attempting to pass one another with little consideration for pedestrians. At some points the scene looked almost like home.

There were other symptoms of "bourgeois decadence," evidence of comparative prosperity. All sorts of manufactures heretofore regarded as luxuries and varieties of food that had been regarded as delicacies beyond reach were on display at the *univermags* (universal magazines, department stores) and *gastronoms* (food shops): ready-made clothes on sophisticated mannequins, in several different styles and at various prices; all sorts of shoes; a large assortment of household wares and gadgets; radios of all sizes, television sets, washing machines, and pieces of furniture; sporting goods—long rubber boots and rods and lines for fishing, tennis rackets, white balls, badminton sets. Music stores were as common as beauty parlors. And *mirabile dictu*, automobiles were on display. You actually could go in and order the Russian equivalent of a Ford or Buick. You would have to pay the lifetime earnings of an average worker, and wait a year or two, but eventually you would get it. There were no queues anywhere, but there were crowds at every place where things were sold, even at the innumerable book stalls on the sidewalks.

The stalls, or pushcarts, were an amazing part of the Soviet scene. Mostly they were state enterprises, belonging to the big stores near which they were stationed. Others were quixotic

spurts of individualism in defiance of the super-colossal state—a woman flaunting the social system by setting up her own shop at the very steps of the entrance to the universal magazine, and selling at a higher price. In a laundry basket and on a small folding table she kept lingerie, trinkets, or gadgets in general demand that she had purchased at an early hour at the same univermag, when there was no difficulty in getting to the counter or in making a choice. Later, outside, she sold her purchases at several rubles above the store price.

I happened to witness a characteristic scene at one such stall. A tall, thin woman, with rather delicate features, was selling *lifchiks* (Russian-type brassières) and notions outside the entrance to the Gum, the largest department store in Moscow, on Red Square. A squabby middle-aged woman with a big flaxen head and almost no neck stopped at the stall, and in a shrill voice began scolding the huckster, denouncing her as a profiteer and a cheat. How did she dare stand there selling the same articles as the store—and at a higher price? The huckster ignored the diatribe completely, keeping her eyes fixed on the hands of the cluster of women examining her wares. Then an elderly gentlewoman came to the defense of the huckster, shaking her finger at the screaming woman: "Don't you abuse this poor woman! She's only trying to earn a few rubles to help support her family. How do you know how badly she needs them? People gladly pay her a little more to save themselves the bother of shopping up there." The eternal conflict between law and order and forbearing compassion.

The food shops seemed to be well stocked. Prices were moderate; they had been substantially reduced since the war, although wages remained at their fixed level. Especially striking was the large variety of processed food in jars and cans. The can opener had arrived. Now a varied diet was possible and seasonal food could be obtained all through the year. In all the homes I visited, many of them unexpectedly, there was an ample supply of food, drinks, and sweets. More significant perhaps was the fact that food no longer was a topic of conversation. It seemed to be one problem they had licked, and forgotten about.

There was no doubt about the rise in the standard of living. It had been brought about by two factors: an increase in the production of consumer goods and food supplies as part of the new economic program, and the increasing exchange of goods within the Soviet world itself. In Moscow, you could buy men's shirts and delicate soap from China, shoes and luggage from Czechoslovakia, radios and musical instruments from Eastern Germany, silks from Bulgaria, and innumerable other manufactures for personal use, or home furnishings, from these and other countries in the Soviet sphere.

You could get almost anything in Moscow in the summer of 1959. But the prices were high in relation to income. The price of many articles in the shop windows represented several months of the average wage. I turned to a Russian friend: "Tell me how it is that people earning so little spend so much?" He laughed, and then repeated a story about Mikoyan on a visit to the United States. Mikoyan, supposedly, asked an American friend how much the average American was earning a month. The friend said about four hundred dollars. And how much did he spend during the month, Mikoyan wanted to know. About three hundred, the friend thought. And what did he do with the remaining hundred, Mikoyan inquired. To this, the American replied: "This is a free country. Nobody asks." Then the American asked about conditions in the Soviet Union. How much did the average Soviet worker earn a month? Mikoyan said about eight hundred rubles. And how much did he spend in the month? Mikoyan figured about a thousand. Where did he get the extra two hundred? Mikoyan replied: "Ours is a free country. We don't ask."

Another Russian warned me that Moscow was not Russia. Speaking of the supply of consumer goods, he explained that there were three zones. The first zone had almost everything available abroad. The second zone had far less. The third had little indeed. "Get off the beaten track," he said. "Go to a small town, and see what the stores have to offer there."

I tried to get off the beaten track, but did not succeed. There is a story of an Irishman who told a house-painter he did not mind what color the painter made his house as long as it was green. In Russia, in 1959, you were free to travel anywhere you wanted as long as it was on the Intourist itinerary. The list of places you could visit was considerable, to be sure, but the small

towns, the locales off the beaten track, were not on the list. I managed to visit a good part of the list, west and north, south to Georgia, east to Samarkand. And I must say that although consumer goods were not available in such variety as in Moscow, there was nowhere a dearth of the basic necessities. Food, clothes, or shoes were no problem, and there were books, magazines, and records galore. Prices were everywhere the same. To the visitor who had been there before, the improvement in the standard of living was undeniable and striking. The striving now was for what had heretofore been regarded as luxuries; even the Asians now wanted the "better things of life"—comforts taken for granted in the West.

The Moscow pattern seemed to be followed all over the land. Everywhere there was new construction on the road from the airport to the town. The boulevards were not as wide, the houses not as tall (three or four stories instead of eight or ten), and the decorative design was in keeping with local tradition. But they were situated at relatively the same location, served the same purpose, and were basically of the same type. Everywhere, too, the university and other higher schools received the greatest consideration, the Academy of Science acquiring a sanctity akin to the Kremlin's. There were no skyscrapers, but the buildings were new or newly remodeled and money had not been stinted for equipment or the needs of their votaries. Everywhere, again, there was pressure for higher education, especially in the practical fields of science and industry, which were the road to preferment and a better life. The whole country was characterized by energy and ambition, a consuming passion to get ahead. It seemed that after long prodding by whip and spur, the Soviet horse had now taken to galloping on its own. There was something darkly familiar in this personal orientation on the material and this drive for physical comfort and easy living.

The spirit of enterprise permeated the length and breadth of the land, Asiatic as well as European Russia. In Soviet Asia, it was the Great Russian people, as Stalin would have said, who supplied the push and pull power for the leap into advancement. The Slavs—primarily the Great Russians, but with a sprinkling of Ukrainians and Byelorussians, as well as Jews—

were now scattered all over the non-Slav republics, filling their major cities, putting up their industries and running them, establishing and directing their institutions, organizing and teaching in their universities. In a sense, it was the Socialist big brother come to take the local people by the hand and lead them out of the Middle Ages right into the heart of the twentieth century. Left to themselves, the Tajiks, the Kazaks, the Uzbeks, the Kirghiz, and various other nations living in their own territories within the Soviet Union would never have made the advance. Even in 1959, the Europeans living in an area seemed to be more ambitious to develop it than the Asian natives. A visitor got the impression that the Slavs were living to work and the Asians were working to live.

The development of these outlying districts and republics created a national problem for the Soviet leaders, and it may have had some bearing on their attitude toward the Jewish problem.

Take the republic of Turkmenistan, located in the hottest, driest part of Central Asia. In its vast, mostly desert area—171,000 square miles—had lived about a million people engaged in raising sheep and camels. Of industry there had been none. Of its natural resources, only some oil had been extracted, about 129,000 tons; its agricultural possibilities had been realized only to the extent of growing a little cotton at a favorable spot, 18,000 tons a year. Since Turkmenistan became a Soviet republic, close to 16,000,000,000 rubles have been invested in land improvement and industry. The water problem is being solved by a system of canals running to 600 miles, and by the tapping of newly discovered subterranean waters, using helioboilers to distil the brackish water. Already a large area is under irrigation. Long-fiber cotton has become a major product (some 500,000 tons), serving as a basis for an expanding textile industry, which now produces 22,000,000 meters of cotton fabrics a year. Turkmenistan has become the third largest oil producer in the Soviet Union, and the foundation has been laid for a chemical industry based on this mineral. There are well over 600 modern industrial enterprises in the republic, both heavy and light industries, including footwear (a million pairs a year), sugar, glass, and cement. Before Turkmenistan became a Soviet

republic, 99 per cent of the people were illiterate. Today, the republic has its own Academy of Science, as well as scores of colleges and research institutions and a large number of elementary and high schools. Education is compulsory, and in the native tongue.

No miracle happened in the Turkmen Republic. The Turkmen cameleer did not become an atomic scientist at the buzz of a button in the Kremlin. Neither have the Turkmen shepherds turned into engineers at the blow of a Party whistle. The fact is that the scientists in the Turkmenistan Academy of Science are not Turkmen—not yet. The 25,000 "specialists," the experts directing the colossal metamorphosis, are not Turkmen. The engineers, technicians, administrators, and supervisors are not Turkmen either, although they may already have Turkmen assistants. Most of the teachers, storekeepers, and qualified service men are also not Turkmen. More than 20 per cent of the population in Turkmenistan are Slavs and Jews, and they are concentrated in the urban areas. They are the people who are pulling the Turkmen nation up the hill of modern civilization. With large-scale planning and absolute control, ample capital and all necessary equipment, experienced specialists and experts in the various fields, and tens of thousands of highly skilled workers, the result—admirable as it is—is not surprising. The credit is the Russians'; the Turkmen deserve recognition for accepting the proferred assistance, falling into line, and applying themselves to learn to take over.

The taking-over is developing into a problem for the Russians, and perhaps even more so for the Jews involved. For what has been related here about the Turkmen Republic could be said, with variations due to local conditions, of the other twelve non-Slav republics in the Soviet Union. Everywhere outside the three Slav republics, to some extent also in the Ukraine and more so in Byelorussia, the Russians and Russian-assimilated peoples have been the prime movers in mind and muscle. That is why so much Russian is spoken in Kiev and more Russian than Byelorussian in Minsk. In Georgia, one gets the impression that the Russians there are the only ones who care for any advancement in any field, even in Georgian culture. The Georgians themselves seem to be satisfied to do their chores and return, as soon as possible, to their wines at the café tables.

The Russians went in to develop these national republics not for Moscow but for the local populations. Many of them have stayed on to become part of the local populations. Necessarily, they assumed all the top and important secondary positions in all the local undertakings. Necessarily, also, the indigenous people will one day rise to the cultural and technical level to fill those positions themselves. The Russians will have to make room for the local aspirants or expose Moscow to the charge that the Russians are "occupying" these countries. And the Asians are tough people. They will not be scared by a Marxian encyclical on chauvinism or easily silenced by force. In fact, the more a country is developed, the richer its resources and the higher its standard of living, the more conscious and proud of their patrimony the indigenous people are bound to become, and the less inclined to share it with others. Indeed, there was a case of two constituent Soviet republics in Asia contesting the ownership of the underwater oil in the river between them.

Present Soviet policy tends to encourage this frame of mind. Officially, each Soviet republic is on its own, a full and equal partner in the Soviet Union, free to secede at will. (It would, of course, be extremely hazardous even to think of secession.) The Russians are there only as trustees for the native people, managing the estate for the heir while training him to manage it himself. The new native generation is manifestly being pushed up the social ladder. At some national universities, like the University of Kazakstan at Alma-Ata, one half of the admissions are reserved for the indigenous applicants; all the other nationals, even if born in the country, must compete for the other half. The native intelligentsia is flattered on every occasion, urged to qualify for and seek positions of leadership and authority in their homeland. Moscow has thrown in its lot with the indigenous intelligentsia. Its own Russians there are expendable. They are the Moors who did the work. But the Russian Moors are not ready to go. They want to remain in the lands they helped to build up. And they want to hold on to their jobs. No one anywhere is anxious to step down in prestige and income just because someone else is hankering after his position.

There is no such conflict as in Algeria, of course. But in these republics two racial groups do exist, and there is variance between their interests. The resultant antagonism is submerged under a wave of *druzhba narodov* (friendship of nations) and billows of Soviet brotherhood. Someday the conflict may rise to the surface, for no solution is in sight. There is no prospect of expanding the economy to make room for both. The indigenous intelligentsia is growing much too fast, and hungers for position and self-expression. Intermarriage is not the answer, since there is not enough of it. Besides, the indigenous partner in a mixed marriage is likely to become Russianized himself, and hence not completely acceptable to many natives. One of the grievances against the Russians is their role, unwitting perhaps, in the Russification of the country. Although some of the indigenous intelligentsia are ready to accept the "basic language" of the Soviet Union, which is the key to All-Union posts, by far the larger number of them are very sensitive to lingual assimilation. They want their national tongue to prevail in all phases of life. Few Russians adopt the local language as their own.

At the root of the trouble is a condition that is developing all over the Soviet Union: The intelligentsia is increasing at a greater rate than the number of administrative and specialized positions in the economy and the government. It is getting crowded at the top, and the pressure from the climbers is mounting. When Nikita Khrushchev addresses his own people, he salutes them as Comrades Collective Farmers, Workers, and Intelligentsia, as though these were three estates. There is plenty of room for collective farmers, many millions of acres of virgin soil to turn. And there is a serious shortage of workers, which necessitated a reform in the educational system. But the third estate is too large, and is still increasing in the new psychological climate of the land.

To some Western observers, the Soviet man is beginning to look very much like the bourgeois man. He seems to be after the same things and to go about with the same set of values. Soviet intellectuals enter a general denial but no bill of particulars. Actually, they have the same complaints about their new generation as we have about ours. We decry the materialism of the new age, the lack of interest in things spiritual, the absence of true religious feeling, the mad race for material success with its rewards of physical comfort and petty social prestige. They in the Socialist world charge their youth with taking no interest in Socialist ideology, giving no thought to the transition from Socialism to Communism, having no concern for the common good, being infested with a consuming careerism, trying to get ahead by means fair and foul to a higher, more remunerative position that will afford ease and comfort. Lip service is still being paid to the Socialist ideal and the upbuilding of a new society. But in everyday life the *homo Sovieticus* has returned to the ancient bourgeois verities. Somehow, individualism has learned to function within the collective society.

Again and again on my travels in the Soviet Union, I was struck by the similarities to our own society. I thought of our transition from Puritanism to our present philosophy of life. Calvinism, or its spokesmen in America, sowed the wind by making acquisition a virtue and a measure of one's status in the hereafter. Now we are reaping the whirlwind. In the Soviet Union, the exigencies of rapid industrialization under difficult circumstances compelled the approbation of individual gain and inequality of income, the measure of one's salary—and, inescapably, his personal comfort—becoming the measure of his contribution to the building of Socialism. One Soviet cynic—they have that breed, even as they have their own variety of beatnik—said to me: "You Americans have a rotten materialistic, individualistic greedy system, and by Marx, we will beat you there, too."

I had a serious discussion about this matter with a Russian engineer I had known as a youngster twenty-five years earlier in Moscow. Let us call him Peter Ivanovich. I spent an evening with his father, Ivan Aleksandrovich, and the family back in 1934. They were a privileged family even then. The father was an engineer on a very important construction job. The mother was a physician at a hospital. The family had four modern rooms with a private bath, and a car and chauffeur. Two chauffeurs, in fact, for the father might need to use the car longer than the seven hours the chauffeur worked, and also on Sundays. Ivan Aleksandrovich was a happy man, proud, secure.

Certainly the Revolution had done well by him. It had made him all that he was, and he was now giving his all in return. The children were playing a new European phonograph, an unheard-of luxury at the time. Someone had brought it from Germany.

Twelve years later I revisited the family, and the picture was not pretty. They had moved to simpler quarters in an old house—still comfortable, but without private conveniences. On my appearance the young people left; their mother told me that her husband was serving time, actually doing the same sort of work he had been doing before, but as prison labor. She was still at the same hospital; the children were studying at the Institute. Peter was about to become an engineer like his father. I did not ask why the father was in prison. In Russia you asked only for how long. The colloquial term for imprisonment was "sitting," and the saying went that everybody had either "sat" already, was "sitting" now, or would "sit."

In 1959, it was difficult to find the family. The name was no longer in the telephone book; the neighbors had no idea where they had moved, or were wary of telling. The City Address Bureau located the mother of the family. She lived with her son, Peter Ivanovich, in a modern apartment house in a new development in the outskirts of Moscow. She looked much older, but was more relaxed and rather cheerful. Her husband had been released soon after Stalin's death and rehabilitated, restored to a position similar to the one he held before his arrest. A few years later he had died of natural causes. She had retired from her post at the hospital and was now living on a comfortable pension. Peter had a good job in a new plant, was married to a teacher; they had two children, and this apartment was where they lived. It was furnished simply, but in good taste. There were two original paintings on the wall.

Peter looked much like his father—not as proud as his father had been a quarter-century ago, but harder, I thought, with a touch of acerbity. We talked of many things, and I brought up the issue of the new generation, idealism, ideology, Socialism. This seemed to strike a tender spot, for he assumed a professorial air and began expostulating, as his father had been wont to do.

"You bourgeois liberals are hard-boiled when you consider your own Capitalist system, but you turn into romantic Utopians when you come to Socialism. What do you expect our new generation to do? Stand at the barricades for the sake of the barricades? We have made our social revolution, we have built our Socialist society, and now we are living in it and with it. This that you see here *is* Socialism. And our Socialist society is growing richer, stronger, better. My grandfather paid with his life for the Revolution; my father suffered for it, or because of it. Now it is my turn. Worry about where we go from here? I am not going anywhere—this is good enough for me. The next step, Communism, will come in time, in due historical process. I am working, not getting anything for nothing, or exploiting anybody; I am just getting back according to what I put in. What's wrong about that? What do you Capitalist dreamers want of me?"

I really wanted nothing of him, or his generation. I only wanted to understand. I saw incongruities, contradictions, shadows of the dark past, in their social system. And now there were no alibis, as there had been in 1934 and 1946. As Peter Ivanovich said, this was it. This was Socialism, or the Soviet brand of it. It should be judged exactly on its own present merit, with no credits for past or future. But I was disturbed to find there many of the negative social phenomena we are used to in our admittedly imperfect society—doubly disturbed, because some of these negative social phenomena had a direct bearing on the situation of the Jews.

The Jewish Situation in 1959

In 1959, I found the Soviet Union the only country in the world with no other Jewish address listed but that of the synagogue.

In every other country on the globe that has a sizable Jewish population, including the Peoples' Democracies, there are other Jewish addresses listed, such as those of communal organizations, cultural institutions, social and welfare societies, community newspapers, publishing houses, theatres, museums—all basic elements of a national existence. In the Capitalist world,

a major Jewish community has hundreds, and, in some countries, thousands of such addresses. But even the lesser Jewish communities of the Socialist world outside the Soviet Union have quite a few Jewish addresses.

In Hungary, with a Jewish population of about 80,000, I found listed in the same year (1959)—in addition to the sixty religious congregations—a rabbinical seminary, a Jewish college, two religious high schools, schools that taught Hebrew after the regular school hours, summer camps teaching Hebrew and religion, a Jewish library, a museum, a weekly newspaper distributed on the general newsstands, a publishing office issuing Jewish scholarly books, a culture bureau arranging some three hundred Jewish lectures a year, as well as social institutions like several homes for the aged, two orphanages, ten soup kitchens serving 3,000 meals a day, and a Jewish hospital with a hundred beds, serving kosher food.

In Poland, with a Jewish population of some 30,000 (again in the same year, 1959), I found—in addition to the twenty congregations—fifteen religious schools and eighteen secular Yiddish schools, a Central Committee for Yiddish Culture with twenty-five branches in as many cities, many cultural centers where reading rooms are maintained, lectures given, and amateur theatrical groups sustained. There was also a Yiddish newspaper appearing four times a week, a literary monthly, a publishing house issuing both Yiddish classics and recent works by local writers, and a theatre of international repute. There were even eleven Jewish co-operative societies with 760 members.

There are similar Jewish organizations and cultural institutions in Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. But there was not a single non-synagogue organization or institution, nor a semblance of one, listed in the whole of the Soviet Union in 1959. There was not a sign of Jewish life outside the synagogue. The sole possible exception was the concert given for the general public featuring "Jewish songs and musical miniatures," with occasional short readings, mostly from Sholom Aleichem. Formally, these concerts were in the same category as other international programs, like the concerts of American Negro songs and musical miniatures, which were

given by artists specializing in that field, except that there were no Negroes in the audience at those concerts. But in the case of the concert of Jewish songs, Jews overfilled the hall everywhere, receiving the performers with long, rousing applause, applauding wildly at the close of each number, many in the audience weeping for joy or in self-pity at hearing again a Yiddish word in public.

By fiat, the Jews of the Soviet Union had become merely individuals of a certain religion—a little less than a sect, for all other religious sects had their central bodies, synods, federations, or unions of churches. The synagogues had no such bonds, each being completely by itself. There was no law against their combining; presumably they had a right to organize. But one short visit to a synagogue, one look at the scared, harassed faces of the leaders, was enough to make it plain that no one would dare come forth with any such thought. In 1959, if you wanted to meet Jews you had to go to the synagogue, or stop Jewish-looking people in the street, or use "flypaper," a method of inviting the attention and approach of Jews in public places by the casual display of a Jewish newspaper from abroad. I also had the advantage of the contacts I had made on my two earlier visits, and there were in addition the people to whom I was bringing greetings from their relatives or friends in America.

At the synagogues, the striking phenomenon for me was not the paucity of worshipers. Indeed, attendance was not unlike what I had seen in many synagogues back home: barely a quorum for prayers on weekdays, several times that many on Saturday morning, but quite a full house on holy days and other special occasions when the cantor gives a complete performance. The strange fact here was the presence among the worshipers—particularly at the evening services and on Saturdays—of non-participants, Jews without prayer shawls or prayer books, who made no effort to join in the service. They were looking on and seemed to be patiently waiting for an interruption in the prayer to exchange a word with their neighbors in the pew. On Saturdays, these people were the first to head for the corridor when the reading of the Scroll began. This is the time when quite a few leave their seats for a breath of fresh air in the corridor, actually for a snack of sociability.

"Who are these people?" I asked one of the worshipers in full regalia.

He looked at me intently and answered, "Jews."

I talked to one of them, a man neatly dressed, with a fine, intelligent face, who could have been fifty or sixty years old. He could not speak Yiddish, but understood the language a little; he had had no religious education, his father having been an atheist, but his mother had lighted candles on Friday nights and bought matzoh for Passover "so the children might know they were Jews." He was not religious himself. A modern, educated man could not believe in a god, he told me categorically. He was a modern, educated man, an engineer on a pension.

"So, what are you doing here?" I asked him.

Well, he had lots of time on his hands, and came to thinking about Jews. After all, he was a Jew himself. His wife and children did not know they were Jews; that is, they had not known until recently—he presumed I knew what had happened there. So, he wanted to know what was going on with Jews in the world. The news in the press was scant, and obviously slanted. Here in the synagogue he could pick up bits of news about Jews. Besides, it was nice to be with your own people once in a while.

Years back, I would have suspected him of being a stool pigeon. But I had been assured by intelligent Russian friends that the authorities no longer wasted precious manpower on petty spying. They no longer cared which one said what. Besides, now no one could be seized without a reason and proper warrant, or sentenced without a formal trial in the presence of defense counsel. What sense could there be in having stool pigeons in a synagogue? The people in the synagogue had heard of these changes, but were not sure. In their parabolic language, the weather could be cold even when the sun shone, and winds changed direction.

The eagle eye of the president of the synagogue spotted the foreign visitor the moment he appeared at the door, and he rushed out to meet him and have him placed in the seat of honor next to his own, where no one dared to approach. At one synagogue I insisted on taking a back seat, but the president led me firmly by the hand to the place next to him. It was his

duty, he said, to see that a guest received the fullest courtesy. Some brave souls came over to my seat of glory and isolation to shake my hand. But when one of them began asking me a question, the president stopped him angrily: "Why annoy a stranger?" I had to return in the evening, when the president was not there, to have a talk with the people.

In the absence of the president, the people at the synagogue were less restrained. They encircled me to hear what I might have to tell. Occasionally one asked a question, but it was in cryptic language, as though he were merely suggesting a topic for me. In one city the group around me was considerable, all pressing to get closer so that they would not miss a word. Then one man in the group, who stood right by me, said *sotto voce* in Hebrew only two words: "Unnecessary to talk." Presumably they were meant for my benefit, but some of the others overheard, and began to leave. In a minute the crowd had melted away and I remained alone with the man.

"Look here," I said to him, "why did you break it up? There was no reason whatever. First, I was telling nothing wrong; second, people are free to talk now—'they' don't bother anybody for talking; third, we were by ourselves, Jews in a synagogue."

The man replied in broken Hebrew phrases clipped from the prayer book—you never could tell who was listening. Had I heard the story about the man and the mirror? A man was standing opposite a mirror, and observing his own image in the glass, pointed to it with his finger and said: "One of us will squeal." I was to encounter this cloud of fear time and again.

We arrived at the Moscow synagogue after the morning prayers. The people who lingered gave us a cordial welcome. They were deeply moved and, as they said, highly honored by the visit of my wife, a daughter of Sholom Aleichem. I asked to see the yeshiva students—the first yeshiva under Soviet rule had been opened two years earlier. I was told that it was upstairs in a wing of the women's gallery, but I had better go up by myself, as women did not go there.

The lady remained below with the men. They brought a chair for her, and surrounded her admiringly, each telling what he knew about her great father. Then she happened to look about her, and remark: "So this is where Golda Meir came to

pray, and—" She could not finish the sentence. Panic struck the people about her; strange, hoarse voices croaked: "We don't know anything—we have not seen anything—we haven't heard anything," the speakers retreating with lowered heads. Only two younger men remained standing beside her. "You see?" one of them remarked to her with a motion of frustration. Yes, she had seen, and she pitied the poor, scared souls.

The persistence of fear, especially in meetings with foreigners, despite the definite let-up in the reign of terror was manifest also in other, and more enlightened, circles. There were brave people who did not hesitate to meet me, even at my hotel, and talk freely. But most were still afraid of their own shadows. In one city I wanted to meet a fairly well-known Yiddish writer with whom I had talked on many occasions on a previous visit. Not knowing whether he belonged to the brave or the scared, I hesitated to get in touch with him, but a mutual friend urged me to visit him—he would be happy to see me.

"Are you sure he would not be afraid?" I asked.

The friend laughed. "Afraid? Now? Ridiculous! Besides, it's you. Go right up." He gave me the address.

The writer lived in a new apartment house on a fine boulevard. His wife came to the door, recognized me, and invited me inside. Her husband had just left for the office of the Writers' Union, she said. He had gone there to make final arrangements for their vacation—they were going to spend the summer at the Union's country home. This was true. I had found her in the midst of packing. If I telephoned the Writers' Union in about half an hour I would be sure to reach her husband there. Perhaps I should arrange to meet him at the office of the Union. It would be better that way, he always met foreign colleagues there.

I returned to my hotel. In about three-quarters of an hour, I telephoned the Union and asked for him. The young lady at the other end wanted to know who I was and where I was calling from. After a few minutes' wait, she said she was very sorry to tell me that the writer was dangerously ill in bed at his home and could not be visited.

There was a marked difference in spirit among the various Jewish communities, and considerably less fear was apparent in the synagogues of the new territories, like the Soviet Baltic republics, Moldavia, and other parts of Eastern Ukraine. Ceremonies involving the religious indoctrination of the young, like bar mitzvahs, practically extinguished in Russia proper, were still the practice there. And a certain defiance was in the air, a determination to hold on to the ancient faith. This was even more striking in the non-Slav republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. There, on any day before the evening service, you were likely to find the synagogue courtyard filled with people old and young, and children running about, giving the impression of a club, if not a picnic. They might still be wary of the foreigner, particularly in the type of questions they asked him, but there was no inhibition at the service. This difference may have been due partly to the greater general levity of the atmosphere and partly to the hardihood and doggedness of the local Jews.

At the Moscow synagogue I saw a copy of the prayer book the late Rabbi Shlieffer had the Ministry for Cults print for him, the first Hebrew prayer book to be published under Soviet rule. As related in an earlier chapter, the Minister for Cults had told me in 1946 that the Jews could have a prayer book printed, and could open a yeshiva, too. Why did Rabbi Shlieffer wait so long? Certainly the need was great, and money was no consideration. Poor as the religious Jews were, they always managed to raise enough money for their synagogue needs. I gained the impression that the initiative had come from the "authorities." Perhaps it was a matter of new public relations in the spirit of Geneva; possibly it was a consolation prize to the Jewish community for its continued cultural bereavement.

The prayer book was published in an edition of 5,000, which sold out at once. The scarcity of prayer books continued. In every synagogue in every town I was asked if I did not have a prayer book to spare—they would pay any price, and I could get another on returning to my country. The Soviet prayer book was all-inclusive, Rabbi Shlieffer having aimed to make it serve for all occasions. It was printed by offset from pages of old prayer books, and he had made his own selection. It included one prayer, however, that really belonged in the mahzor or book for holy days, and rarely, if ever, appeared in the gen-

eral prayer book. This was a prayer for the Ten Murdered by the State. The Ten were leading talmudic scholars in the days of Emperor Hadrian in the second century. They defied the Roman decree forbidding the study of the Law, and continued to teach surreptitiously. They were caught, cruelly tortured, and done to death. I wondered what Rabbi Shlieffer had had in the back of his mind when he included this prayer. Jews always read into this chapter of ancient martyrdom a relevancy to their own time and life. Would they think of the murdered Yiddish writers, likewise murdered by the state, when they looked at this prayer?

The Plot Against the Writers

What about the Yiddish writers and other Jewish intellectuals who had been murdered by the state here?

In 1959, I knew what had happened to them, but not the reason why. How could the same state, the same regime, the same ruling persons, who had done so much for the advancement of Yiddish culture turn about and exterminate it all with one blow? What could have been the driving madness that compelled such cruel, drastic action against the entire intelligentsia of a whole nation—and in a time of comparative peace and improving conditions?

I asked this question of all the people with whom I talked about the writers. Strange to say, nobody had a satisfactory explanation. I discussed the matter with one of the victims, who had been arrested with the others and tortured to confess like the rest of them, but had escaped the death penalty by a hairsbreadth. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, which meant a hard labor camp. Along with the others who survived, he was released and rehabilitated after Stalin's death. How did he account for it all?

"Honestly," he said, "I can't understand it. You've heard the 'devil' theory—Stalin becoming mentally deranged, Beria turning into a Mephistopheles. But neither Stalin nor Beria acted like madmen in other respects. One thing I can tell you—when we heard Stalin's speech glorifying the 'Great Russian people,' we felt as though the ground had slipped from under our feet.

It was the first time one nation had been singled out of all the nations in the Soviet Union for special glory. Great Russian chauvinism, Lenin would have called it. To us Jews it was a voice from a past we thought was buried, a voice from a nightmare."

And what could have been the reason for that speech?

He did not know. People had said Stalin was apprehensive of his hold on the peoples of the Soviet Union. Large numbers had become restless following the war, and they had learned to use firearms and risk their lives; some of the Soviet family of nations had been disloyal even during the war. Therefore Stalin was courting favor with the Great Russians, the majority nation, giving them a special stake in his rule. They would stand by him and help him hold together his empire for the sake of Mother Russia, even as some liberals had upheld the Czar for the same reason. This motivation was not quite in keeping with the generally accepted measure of Stalin. It made him out to be a man who scared easily and faltered in his reliance on brute force. However it was, it did not explain his new turn against the Jews.

Although no one in Russia had an acceptable rationale for this irrational act, quite a few offered bits of relative information which, fit together, might reveal the patchwork-quilt mentality that was behind it. Here, then, is an eclectic story of how it came about:

In his meetings with Churchill and Roosevelt, Stalin had come to believe that the Soviet Union could live in peace with the West after the war. The abrupt cessation of Lend-Lease right after the war came as a shock from which he never recovered. Thereafter, he feared that a third world war, between the Western powers and the Soviet Union, was inevitable. His lieutenants were sharply divided on this issue, Molotov leading the pessimists, Malenkov the optimists. The controversy was not just an exercise in prognostication. It had a direct bearing on current policy both abroad and at home. If a third world war were avoidable, Russia might join in the Marshall Plan, co-operate in easing tension in Germany and other parts of the world, put an end to the Korean war, and concentrate on light industry and consumer goods at home. If, on the other hand, a

third world war were inevitable, every ruble available and every ounce of energy must be diverted into the war potential, not toward ease and comfort. Yielding an inch here and there to temper the winds would only play into the hands of the future enemy, free him for the preparation for war and expose the Peoples' Democracies to the illusion of peaceful coexistence, which would encourage their dissident elements. Political effort must therefore be directed toward creating a chain of crises in all possible places, thereby handicapping the future enemy and laying the foundation for a second front, if not several fronts, in a future war, and creating an atmosphere for purging the Peoples' Democracies of leaders who might have a different view of the world situation or were suspect of independent action.

As on other occasions when the Kremlin leaders were divided, two factions contended for the mind of Stalin. In this struggle for policy—and also for power—the contenders used against each other the same methods (prevarication, conspiracy, *provocateurs*) they had used together against their common adversary in the Revolution and used in subsequent oppositions to Stalin's rule. Psychologically, Stalin was inclined to side with what could be called the war party. There was the ill omen of the discontinuance of Lend-Lease. There was the speech by Winston Churchill at Fulton. Besides, a hostile world full of intrigue, conspiracy, subversion, and war was more in keeping with Stalin's social philosophy and habits of thought and operation. But wishful thinking called for peace. Whatever the outcome, another war would preclude the realization of Stalin's ambition to leave Russia a united, mighty, and highly industrialized state. Stalin's Russian heroes were Ivan the Terrible, who cruelly reduced the feudal boyars and created the centralized autocratic Russian state, and Peter the Great, who modernized the autocratic Russian state by arbitrary crude force a century later. Now, two centuries after Peter the Great, the great Stalin would remake Russia in his own likeness, and tower high above them. This contradiction of motives was at the root of Stalin's long indecision; it finally turned him into a mid-twentieth-century Ivan the Terrible.

Again, as in other internecine struggles, one side created a

situation to force Stalin's decision in its favor. Here, too, the hand was the hand of the Secret Police, which always had a stake in tension and internal insecurity. In 1934, the murder by *provocateurs* of Sergei Mironovich Kirov, Party secretary of Leningrad, Stalin henchman, laid the ground for the bloody purges that followed. It was calculated to convince Stalin that the Opposition was resorting to assassination in its final desperate struggle for power, and that he had better destroy his opponents before they destroyed him. Now plots of treason, the formation of a fifth column, conspiracies of bizarre design, were concocted to prove to Stalin that the United States, drunk with the power of atomic monopoly, had already penetrated within the Soviet Union, had selected strategic locations for clandestine military bases to be operated by a fifth column, and was now reaching out to poison the leaders of the Soviet Union. This most dangerous situation called for the liquidation of all traitors, the arrest of their associates, a renewed reign of terror in the land, all-out preparation for war, and a foreign policy based on the inevitability of war.

Jews were cast in the weird role of villain in this fantastic, macabre play. To be sure, other nationals were assigned similar roles, but those were of minor character and only local significance, and were limited to the individuals involved. Those fabrications were built on a personal and geographic basis, not on race. The charge against certain Georgian intellectuals, racial brethren of Stalin, that they had plotted to detach Georgia from the Soviet Union and unite it with Turkey was as fantastic as the charges against the Jews. But the arrest and execution of the Georgian intellectuals did not affect the cultural institutions with which they had been connected. The national cultural life of Georgia continued as before. Neither did this plot affect the status of Georgians in important positions in other parts of the Soviet Union. In the case of the Volga Germans, their cultural institutions were closed and the people transported to other parts of the land, but there is no record, or rumor, of a run on Volga Germans who happened to be living in other parts of the Soviet Union; and the German cultural institutions were revived in due time. Nikita Khrushchev saw fit to refer derisively to the Georgian plot in his speech at the

Twentieth Party Congress. He has not yet mentioned the plot against the Jews. And the Jewish cultural institutions are closed still.

By 1959, various reasons were being cited for the selection of Jews as the perpetrators of the spurious plot. Some blamed Stalin's growing personal anti-Semitism. Stalin, they maintained, had never completely freed himself of the prejudice against Jews he had absorbed in his childhood and during his years in the theological seminary. This dormant anti-Jewish attitude had subsequently been activated by his long and bitter struggle with his Jewish colleagues, Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and the others. It had been hardened by venomous opposition to his regime on the part of Socialist leaders abroad, many of whom were Jews, and of some Jewish Communists abroad, who challenged his authority over the Communist movement in other lands. In proof of Stalin's attitude were cited unflattering remarks he had made about Jews in a conversation with President Franklin Roosevelt at Teheran, as reported by Edward R. Stettinius, then Under Secretary of State, who was present at the meeting. Other evidence was Stalin's agreeing to the plan of the anti-Semitic General Anders of prewar Poland to exclude Jews from the Polish army then in formation (December, 1941) among the Polish refugees in the Soviet Union, Stalin seconding Anders' disparaging statements with such remarks as, "Jews are poor fighters," "Jews make miserable soldiers"—as reported by Stanislav Kot, ambassador of the Polish Government in exile, who was present at the meeting. The machinators thus presumed Stalin would lend greater credence to their concocted plot if it involved Jews.

Others absolved Stalin and placed the blame on Beria. Stalin, they argued, might have had a prejudice against Jews, but he did not permit this to affect his policies. In 1931 Stalin had said, in reply to an inquiry by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency of the United States, "Anti-Semitism is a most dangerous vestige of cannibalism . . . Communists cannot be but irreconcilable sworn enemies of anti-Semitism. . . . In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics anti-Semitism is strictly prosecuted under the law as a phenomenon deeply hostile to the Socialist system. Active anti-Semites are under Soviet law subject to capital punishment." This statement was published in *Pravda* five years later, on January 30, 1936. And besides, there was no record of any public statement by Stalin that could be regarded as anti-Jewish. Beria, who was blamed by his former colleagues for most of the evil in Stalin's last years, was therefore blamed for this anti-Semitic policy as well. And Beria's rise to top power seemed to coincide with the increasing suppression of Jewish cultural activities.

However, to give the devil his due, Beria had been rather friendly toward Jews. In Georgia, old Jews still retain a soft spot for him. They tell you that Lavrenti Pavlovich was half-Jewish himself, and when he was Party boss there he was big brother to the Jewish community. He was, for instance, instrumental in the founding of the Jewish Museum, in which exhibits indicated the close connection of Jews with that area for many centuries before it came under the rule of the Russian Czars. (The Jewish Museum has since been closed, and its exhibits distributed among the related divisions of the national museum.) It was Beria, also, who had recommended sending Mikhoels and Fefer to America to establish contacts between Soviet Jews and Jews elsewhere, in the interest of the war. Moreover, the Doctors' Plot, like the Georgian Plot a year earlier and the so-called Leningrad Plot, seemed to have been concocted by enemies of Beria rather than by him. The intention could have been to show the inefficacy of the security department under Beria's hand. Beria, of course, would not have hesitated to sacrifice the Jews if he needed to, nor would anyone else. As Khrushchev said at the Twentieth Party Congress, Stalin was bent on a new bloody purge of his immediate assistants, and the struggle among his lieutenants was not merely for the great stake of power, but also for their very lives.

Realistically, then, the Jews became a pawn in this supreme struggle for power and survival. Anti-Semitism played a major part, but it was a general hostility toward Jews of the masses and a prejudice against Jews in the upper echelons of the ruling circles, rather than the whim of a single individual. The plotters knew that it was easy to arouse the masses against the Jews. They would readily believe—indeed, they were anxious to believe—the worst about Jews. Many of them believed in the

Doctors' Plot even after it was officially declared to have been a fraud and frame-up. Harrison Salisbury tells in his *To Moscow —and Beyond* of the reaction of the driver of his taxi on the day in April, 1953, when the Doctors' Plot was declared a fraud. Rather than express sympathy for the innocent victims, the driver said, "Those *svolochi*! They got away this time. But their day will come. We will get those yids." The Soviet leaders and Party activists saw in these plots, however they regarded them per se, an opportunity to get rid of the Jewish nationality and normalize the position of the Jews—in simpler words, to get rid of the Jewish problem and put the Jews in their place.

The ingredients for a Jewish plot were ready made. The United States was the enemy, of course. Jews were conspicuous and reportedly influential in American life. Some Jews were prominent among the anti-Soviet spokesmen. Soviet Jews and American Jewry had established contact during the war through the visit of the Soviet emissaries, Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer. The contact was continued thereafter by the same individuals and their associates in the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. In America, Mikhoels and Fefer had met with a couple of top Jewish plutocrats. After the war, two American Jews who had had meetings with Mikhoels and Fefer in America came to visit the Soviet Union, and saw much of Mikhoels and Fefer in Moscow, as well as of some of the others on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. A certain memorandum involving a territorial project for Soviet Jews was presented by that committee to the Kremlin. All you needed was to mix these items, delete a bit here, add some there, misinterpret, and sprinkle falsehoods over all—and you had a devil's brew strong enough to damn the Angel Gabriel.

The murder of Solomon Mikhoels in Minsk on January 13, 1948, may have been the "Kirov murder" of the plot against the Jews. Mikhoels was too prominent in Soviet cultural life and too highly respected by Stalin to be summarily picked up and tortured into confession this early in the plot. But done away with in a presumably accidental manner, he left his colleagues exposed and unsuspicious. The plotters could freely weave their net, enmeshing their innocent, trustful victims, and destroying the reputation of the man they had killed and given a state funeral.

In the hindsight of thirteen years, a letter from the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee written to me on February 11, 1948, barely a month after Mikhoels' tragic death, assumes a ghostly aspect. It was signed not by Fefer alone, as the earlier letters were, but by him and a Grigori Heifetz, who may have been imposed as a commissar over the committee by an authority other than its sponsor, Solomon Lozovsky; it was written in a nervous tone. The letter began: "We are writing you this first letter, both of us, without our Mikhoels. What his loss means to us you will understand, and what it means to you and our friends abroad we felt in your cable from Peru. . . . Now we are thinking only of how best to immortalize his memory, how best to realize all that of which he had been dreaming, and he dreamt of a better world, of world peace, and of the regeneration of our people." The term "our people," in the sense of international world Jewry, was bound to plague Fefer at the trial he could not yet have contemplated at that time. Then the letter requested all clippings, data, and memorabilia relating to Mikhoels on his visit to the United States five years earlier—material that could have been of good use to the plotters. This material was not sent to Moscow for technical reasons, but the plotters had enough of their own to pervert into a charge that Mikhoels had been an agent of American imperialism.

Specifically, the various plots were interrelated into one grand scheme and unraveled at different times as the occasion required. Parts of them may have been meant primarily for Stalin's benefit, for intra-party consumption in the Kremlin and also in the Peoples' Democracies; parts were definitely intended for public demonstrations in a monstrous campaign against Jews. The Jewish intellectuals of Moscow, grouped around the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, were charged with conniving to have the Crimea designated as a Jewish autonomous region in order to convert it into an American military base. The Jewish intellectuals of Birobidjan were charged with a dual conspiracy to impose Jewish rule over the non-Jews of the region and to turn it over to Japan as a base against the Soviet Union. Various Jewish personalities were charged with an attempt to

poison the Soviet leaders in order to have the Soviet Union leaderless and disorganized at the outbreak of hostilities.

The plot against the Jewish intellectuals was intended to go beyond the Soviet borders. It was to be the basis for purges in the Peoples' Democracies. Publicly, it emerged in Hungary as early as September, 1949, at the trial of Laszlo Rajk, and as late as November, 1952, in Czechoslovakia, at the trial of Rudolf Slansky. The oracle in this was the ubiquitous Ilya Ehrenburg. He was quoted by the Hungarian Jewish weekly, *Uj Elet*, of December 11, 1947, as saying that "American Jewish Capitalists [his erstwhile *brider yiden*] support a policy which is preparing a new Auschwitz . . ." The design was to identify American Jewish capitalists with anti-Sovietism and warmongering. Jews in the Soviet world could be tied up with them and stamped as traitors and enemies of the people. This was the theme; the variations depended upon local circumstances and timeliness of detail. They spelled out "Zionism" in one country and "Joint" in another.

The plot against Jewish intellectuals boiled down to something like this: The United States began planning a war against the Soviet Union while still fighting side by side with the Red army against the common Nazi enemy. This move was decided upon right after the victory at Stalingrad, which marked the turning point of World War II. For the future war the United States sought to develop a possible fifth column within the Soviet Union, and turned the job over to American Jews, who were to use Soviet Jewry to that end. Their arm of operation was to be the Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). Agents of the Joint maneuvered the visit of the officers of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Mikhoels and Fefer, to the United States right in the midst of the war. In New York, Mikhoels and Fefer met with the leaders of the Joint, and agreed to enter their service. Upon returning to Moscow, they recruited into the subversive net other leading members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and the committee became the paid agent of American imperialism. American military strategy called for a secret base on the Crimean peninsula to be occupied the moment the war broke out. The Joint was given the task of procuring the base, and accordingly, ordered the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to prevail upon the Soviet authorities to turn the Crimean peninsula into a Jewish autonomous region, in place of Birobidjan, where the leaders of the committee would control the local officials, and hence be in a position to set up the area as an American military base. In Birobidjan, this charge was modified to fit the local conditions—it became a conspiracy to make Birobidjan Jewish Nationalistic and convert it into a military base for Japan. (Birobidjan does not border on Japan, but on Communist China.) Any effort to further Jewish cultural life in the Jewish Autonomous Region, outside the narrow limits set by the local authorities, was identified with the conspiracy of treason, just as intervention on the part of officers of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee with local authorities in behalf of a Jewish person, be it only to help obtain living quarters, was adduced as sinister evidence at their trial.

Named as intermediaries between the Joint in the United States and the committee in Moscow were the editor of a Jewish Communist newspaper in New York, who had visited the Soviet Union in 1946 and was "demasked" at the trial as an "American spy," and the president of the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists (the present writer), the "Bourgeois Nationalist emissary of the Joint." It was through these two that the Joint relayed orders to the committee, the plot asserted.

The same apparatus was used for the second plot, the Doctors' Plot. Here a special role was assigned to Solomon Mikhoels, the president of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. He was to recruit his relative, the noted physician Dr. Vofsi (Mikhoels' original name was Vofsi), to inveigle fellow medical specialists who treated top Soviet leaders in a complot to poison them through their medical prescriptions. The medical specialists had already succeeded in murdering two Soviet luminaries, Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov, who died in 1948, and Aleksander S. Shcherbakov, who died in 1945. All at the order of the Joint to Mikhoels in the interest of the American imperialists!

This was absurd, fantastic, nightmarish, of course. By the same token, could there have been an iota of truth or reason in the charge that Leon Trotsky was a paid agent of international

imperialism? Yet that absurdity is still in the books and official histories of the Soviet Union.

To give an indication of the methods of prevarication I can cite the following from my own knowledge: The visit of Mikhoels and Fefer to America was not maneuvered by anyone in the United States, but by Moscow. The suggestion to invite them came to the Executive Committee of the Jewish Division of American Russian War Relief from a prominent American Communist who, as the general secretary of a large Leftist Jewish fraternal organization, was a member of the Executive Committee. He reported that the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee wished to send a delegation to the United States. Even the personnel of the delegation to be invited had been fixed in Moscow. Scholem Asch, the famous novelist, who was also a member of the Executive Committee, took strong exception to inviting Fefer, who had once written a scurrilous poem against him. Asch wanted the invitation to go to David Bergelson, which made better sense generally inasmuch as Bergelson was much more widely known and respected in America and elsewhere. But the American Communist insisted Fefer must be invited, since that was the desire of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.

Here we had a case of pure invention. What follows next is an example of a half-truth soaked in falsehood:

Mikhoels and Fefer did meet with two Jewish leaders in America, members of the American Jewish Committee who were also members of the Joint. One was an ex-judge and a prominent Republican, the other a multimillionaire philanthropist. But the meeting concerned raising a huge sum of money for Russian relief, $25,000,000. The American Jewish leaders were interested in extending relief to the Jews in the Soviet Union. Realizing that under the prevailing terrible conditions Jews could not be singled out for relief, they were willing for the relief to go to all the inhabitants of a locality, but wanted to select localities with a considerable Jewish population. The Russian authorities refused to accept this condition, and nothing came of the offer, which represented a large sum, considering that the entire amount raised by American Russian War Relief was about $60,000,000. The Joint never entered into the

picture, for it was taken for granted that the distribution of the relief would be done entirely by the Russians themselves, and the Joint could not possibly have had anything to do with raising the funds.

The editor of the Communist daily never had any connection or contact with the Joint, and of course was no American spy. He is still apparently in good standing with the Party. He visited the Soviet Union in the spring of 1959, was an acceptable guest to the authorities, and returned to the United States to sing the praise of the Soviet Union, depicting everything in glowing terms, including the situation of the Jews. For myself, I naturally had no orders to carry to Mikhoels and Fefer, and I may add that I had no difficulty in obtaining my visa to the Soviet Union in 1959, and was treated correctly and often in a rather friendly manner all through my stay. If my feeling that I was under a cloud in some quarters was justified, it might have been more due to my recent critical columns on Khrushchev than to my past connection with Mikhoels and Fefer. The two Americans named as accomplices have thus, indirectly, apparently been cleared of the charge.

The strange thing about the denouement of the plot is that although all who had been incriminated were acquitted, the plot itself has not been denied, as the Doctors' Plot was.

What was the significance of the Doctors' Plot?

In their talks with the delegation of the French Socialist Party in May, 1956, the Soviet leaders attempted to pooh-pooh the matter. As reported in *Réalités* (Paris, May, 1957), the conversation on this subject ran as follows: Mikoyan had denied any persecution of Zionists as Zionists, and Deixonne said: "And yet, do you recall the Doctors' Trial?" Mikoyan replied: "There was no trial, only an investigation. Besides, it was not directed against the Jews only. The majority of the doctors were Russians. They were accused of activities harmful to the state. The investigation was framed in all points by Beria's gang. All have been rehabilitated after 'revision' of the investigation."

Khrushchev, always more outspoken, was a bit more frank here too. He remarked: "The majority were Russians or Ukrainians, such as Vinogradov, Vassilenko, Yegorov—all honest men, who have been rehabilitated. This affair was given a

Zionist, a Jewish hue. It was one of Beria's machinations. After having accused them, at the outset, of medical sabotage against Zhdanov and others, they were then accused, as Zionists, of American espionage. This was an absurdity. Besides, it was not a Jew who had treated Zhdanov; it was Dr. Yegorov."

Why did Beria have to identify the doctors as Zionists in order to accuse them of American espionage? Could they not be American spies without being Zionists? This was one of the blanks Khrushchev did not care to fill out. But in Moscow and Leningrad one could gather much detail and various reasons—at least, according to how intelligent Soviet Jews saw the situation. All was hearsay and surmise, however, for no one except the authorities involved had seen the secret records.

It was in Leningrad that I obtained the best analysis of the Doctors' Plot. I must say that I found people there more knowledgeable, more sophisticated, and more outspoken than in Moscow, and for once the non-Jews were even more so.

According to a non-Jewish professor of history in Leningrad, the Doctors' Plot had a triple purpose. First, it aimed to alarm the people about the immediate danger of war, for the plot was a form of subversive intervention no less perilous than the military intervention after the Revolution. Second, it was a form of "changing of the guards." The case cast a shadow on all Jews in high executive positions, and no further hint was necessary to get Jews removed from top positions or demoted to lower ones, thus effecting the change of a considerable proportion of the administrative personnel of the economy. The man who would make the appointments for the vacated positions would thereby enhance his hold on the country—much as a new administration in Washington changes all the appointive heads of departments. Third, the plot was designed to create an atmosphere of fear and distrust in which it would be easy to impose stricter controls without arousing expressions of disaffection, and also to eliminate the Jews from western and southern Russia by relocating them in the Far East, partly in Birobidjan, partly elsewhere in Siberia—and presto! to solve the Jewish problem.

It was strange to hear the non-Jewish professor refer to the Jewish problem as a matter of fact, as though its existence was

taken for granted and he was unaware that it was not supposed to exist in the Soviet Union. Other conversations in Leningrad lent substance to the professor's interpretation. I met a Jewish engineer through his mother, an elderly woman whom I had overheard speaking Yiddish rather loudly to another woman on a principal boulevard. The son was a man in the fifties who looked younger than his age. He could not speak Yiddish, although he understood it, and seemed to have no interest in things Jewish except curiosity about whether there was anti-Semitism in the United States. He told me of his experience in the "dark days" of the Doctors' Plot.

He was then the head of a large engineering department in a huge state enterprise. He had been there for nearly a quarter of a century, having started at the bottom. When the radios began blaring away about the Doctors, Zionists, Jews, the director of the enterprise called him in and said: "You've heard about the Doctors. Now, tell me yourself—can you people be trusted? My advice to you is to resign."

The engineer was stunned. He had known the director for the greater part of his service in the engineering department, and had always been on cordial terms with him. The engineer said: "What do you mean 'you people'? Since when have I become 'people'? I am just myself. What has this affair to do with me? You have known me for many years, we have worked together all through these years—have you anything against me?"

The director's mind was closed. "No, you people cannot be trusted. Take my advice, resign. I will give you another job where you will not be so much in the front. It will not pay as much, but you will be better off. You will avoid unpleasantness and trouble."

The engineer took the hint. He resigned, and was assigned to some small, inconspicuous job in his own department. He was earning considerably less than his former salary, he told me with a wry smile. But he was still there, and treated fairly well. He was looking forward to going on pension.

I had not realized how far the plan for the evacuation of Jews into the Far East had gone by 1953 until I talked to a Jewish doctor in Leningrad. When the news of the plan had reached

the West, coupled with rumors that concentration camps were already being prepared, the story seemed too fantastic to believe. It was taken as a yarn of the de-Stalinization, going beyond reason just as the glorification had during his lifetime. But it became plausible after the publication of Salzberg's interview with Khrushchev.

J. B. Salzberg, a leading Canadian Communist and member of the Provincial Parliament, went to Moscow to check on the status of Jews and Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, and discussed the matter with Khrushchev. (It was for his stand on the Jewish issue that Salzberg was later expelled from the Canadian Communist party.) When Salzberg touched on the Crimean affair; Khrushchev told him "that he had agreed with Stalin's opinion that the Crimea, which was uninhabited at the end of the war with Hitler, should not be made into a center of Jewish settlement, since in case of war it could form a bridgehead against the U.S.S.R." Now, why should the Crimea be a bridgehead against the Soviet Union if it was a "center of Jewish settlement"? How would it be safer for the Soviet Union to have other people living there? And if Jews might be a security risk when concentrated in the strategic Crimea, it would require only one further step to say that Jews were a security risk in other strategic places, and in all places. Stalin might have taken that step. He would have followed, and outstripped Czar Nicholas II, who deported the Jews from the Baltic provinces during World War I. Nevertheless, the plan was so preposterous—this was peacetime, and the deportation was to be from all European Russia—that people thought it could be no more than a flitting idea, not an actual design for action.

But the doctor told me differently.

This doctor had participated in the evacuation of one minority nation during the war. His job had been to check on the sanitary conditions of the evacuation trains. No train could leave without his written approval. He was a tough man. Once he had withheld approval in the face of serious personal threat, until the sanitary requirements were complied with. The unfortunate people then had not been forewarned, but had been given only forty-four hours to prepare for deportation. In 1952, he received tips from friends that the hour was about to strike

for the Jews, and rather than be caught unawares, he ought to begin preparing for the exodus before panic started. This meant selling whatever could not be taken along. The doctor thought the deportation was intended to be along the same lines as that of the seven nations deported during the war: the Volga Germans, Karachai, Kalmucks, Chechens and Ingush, Balkans, and Crimean Tatars. He credited the rumor about the preparation of concentration camps to mean not permanent ghettos but transfer centers. It was characteristic of Stalin's disregard of human values, the doctor said, to put the deportation of the Jews on the same plane as that of the Tatars and Karachai, cruel as that had been. Being primitive agricultural people, they could be lifted, along with their society and economic organization, and transferred to another locality. Imagine urban professionals, administrators, and educators torn out of their social contexture and packed away in some unsettled corner of the land, with only agriculture and mining as a means of livelihood!

After the death of Stalin, it was easy for his heirs to disown the Doctors' Plot. They wanted none of the ends it had been meant to serve. They would not think of uprooting any people in the country, much less such a socially complicated, scattered people as the Soviet Jews. They did not wish to increase the terror, but on the contrary to give the people a feeling that life would be easier now. And they wanted no increase of tension in international relations, needing a breathing spell to consolidate their regime and improve living conditions. Moreover, the disclosure and repudiation of the plot was now an advantage to them in their intraparty struggles, even as its concoction had been part of a scheme for their destruction.

Disowning the plot against the Jewish writers and other intellectuals was for Stalin's heirs another kettle of fish. The Soviet people had not known about this plot, and denying it now would be shoving the skeleton out of the closet onto the porch. Repudiation in this case would call for more than a statement and rehabilitation of the victims. It would, in addition, commit them to a future line of action, such as the reestablishment of the institutions suppressed in the wake of the plot. And it would also, indirectly, clear the Joint and the Zionists, especially the latter, who had become the Soviet whip-

ping boy in their Arab game. In other words, Stalin's heirs would not have done what he did, but they refused to undo it because of what they regarded as accruing benefits. At first it had seemed that they would go to the logical consequence of their new turn. But on the second thought they halted, and remained suspended in puzzling silence.

In a Polish retraining center for repatriates from Russia, in 1959, I met a woman who had worked for the Moscow Yiddish publishing house, *Emes*. She told me that back in 1956 she had been summoned by the former director of the publishing house and offered her old job back. He had been arrested with the others of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, but his status as an Old Bolshevik had saved him from their fate. Given a prison sentence, he had been released after Stalin's death along with the other survivors. Shortly thereafter, he had been called in and asked to reopen the publishing house. He was then (1956) getting up a staff of workers, and he said the ex-secretary would hear from him soon. There were also serious, authoritative plans for the reopening of a Yiddish newspaper, and for issuing a literary Yiddish quarterly and organizing a traveling Yiddish theatrical troupe. But the publishing house never reopened, nor have any of the other cultural plans materialized. Whatever the motives for the good intentions—sense of justice, pressure from Communist leaders abroad, the "Spirit of Geneva"—they were not powerful enough to overcome the inner aversion of the leaders.

The often-heard excuse that the cultural institutions could not be revived because the surviving intellectuals refused to undertake the task cannot be regarded seriously. The survivors may have had good reasons for declining—the narrow limits of the supposed offers, lack of faith in the duration of the enterprises, above all, perhaps, fear of another reversal of policy and consequent penalization. But it is doubtful that personal freedom had reached such a stage by 1956 that a Soviet citizen *could* refuse to undertake a job the state needed done.

Parade of Shadows

The days were bright and sunny practically all through my stay in the Soviet Union. I walked in sunshine most of the time.

Yet I always felt shadows around me when I came into contact with Jews—shadows of the dark past, shadows of the beclouded present and the uncertain future.

In the absence of any Jewish institutions, of any person who could speak authoritatively for Soviet Jewry or who might, on grounds of personal esteem, be regarded as a spokesman for the Jews, whatever information I was able to gather could come only from chance meetings with individuals who, for obvious reasons, must remain nameless. But I can assure the reader that the people referred to in these pages were real people, and that the ideas ascribed to them were their own. Some detail in the identification may have been changed merely to spare the person involved possible embarrassment.

One shadow of the days of horror was cast by a man who has a shadowy existence himself. When a writer is arrested in the Soviet Union, the members of his family are dismissed from their jobs and exiled to distant places in Eastern Siberia or Central Asia—not only his wife and dependent children, but also the married children and their families. In the case of one leading writer, his married daughter sent off her little boy to his paternal grandparents, who lived out in the country, rather than take him on the long trek to the unknown place, where conditions would be hard and primitive. But the authorities demanded that the mother take along the little boy. The writer's daughter protested. Whatever happened, she told the official, this little boy was the third generation. Why was he to suffer? The official shouted at her: "The third generation? The tenth generation will suffer for this horrible crime!" She appealed to the highest authority—a suave, polite gentleman. He told the mother that he agreed that future generations should not be punished, but Soviet law was humane and especially considerate of children, and could not countenance the separation of a child from his mother. The little boy must therefore go along with his parents.

Another shadow of the past: An old Jewish actor in Moscow told me that when the Yiddish theatre closed early in 1949, he was too young to die and too Jewish to live. He was speaking figuratively, professionally. He was only about fifty years old then, but had had some thirty years on the Yiddish stage. He

was just an ordinary actor, good enough in his own medium, but not wanted by a theatre in another language. Besides, by then there was no dearth of actors anywhere in the Soviet Union.

"What happened to the Yiddish theatre?" I asked him. "In 1946, I know the house was continuously sold out in advance. In 1948, I'm told, they were playing to empty houses. The Yiddish theatre public could not all have died out within two years."

"No," he said, "the public did not die out. It's still very much alive. Just open the door, and they will pack the house. But the theatre they killed. Took a knife and slaughtered it."

"You mean to say they just closed it?"

"That would have been the more honest way of going about it," he answered. "They did it in a sly, cunning manner, although obvious enough to us in the theatre. The trick was to create a financial crisis artificially, and then say the theatre had no reason for existence."

His story ran as follows: Financially, the Soviet theatres had been operated as a unit by the Theatre Trust, the losses of one being covered by the profits of another. In 1948, a new rule provided that each theatre was to be on its own, managing its own financial affairs without subsidy from the Theatre Trust. Exception was made for the theatres of the national minorities, which never did, nor could, carry on without subsidy. These were to continue to have their deficits covered by the Theatre Trust. But the Yiddish theatre was excluded from the exception. It was just another Russian theatre left to shift for itself, the apparent reason being that since the Jews were not a nation, their theatre could not be regarded as a national minority theatre.

The Yiddish theatre took the blow heroically. It retrenched heartlessly, eliminating not only the frills and luxuries but also the old mainstays of the group, old actors, artists, and musicians whom the theatre could do without, and managed to keep its head above water. But other blows were to follow. None of the plays written by authors under arrest could be produced, and those were the drawing cards of the repertory. The theatre fell back on the classics, but many of these were likewise unsafe to

produce, since they might be characterized as "nationalistic chauvinistic" and bring trouble on all involved. It was safer to produce translations of plays running in Russian. Even with these serious limitations, the Yiddish theatre still managed to survive. Then the finishing stroke came. Strange people were seen hovering on the block where the theatre was located, and rumors were spread that all entering the theatre were being photographed. People began to fear being seen near the theatre.

"So you see," the actor concluded, "when they tell you that the Yiddish theatre died for lack of a public, it's true . . . "

It took even worse trickery to kill the Kiev Yiddish theatre. This theatre was not permitted to return from evacuation to its home base. It had to put up at Chernovtsy, formerly a city of Romania, where the Yiddish theatre was born. The Jewish public there had always been noted as ardent theatregoers. Unexpectedly, the theatre was ordered to go on tour of a number of towns. This necessarily called for a considerable outlay of money—for the purchase of various necessities, shipping the scenery, the transportation of the members of the troupe, and commitments to the houses on the road. The income, however, ceased, since regular performances were discontinued in preparation for the tour. But the intake from the tour would cover everything, of course. No sooner did the troupe arrive in the first town than it received orders to return to Chernovtsy. No reason was given for the cancellation. Now definitely in the red, the theatre was given no time to recoup its losses. It was ordered to close after three farewell performances. The Jews of Chernovtsy realized what was happening, and they flocked to the theatre for tickets. All three performances were played to capacity houses.

Symbolically, the last performance was of *Shining Stars*, a dramatization of Sholom Aleichem's novel *Wandering Stars*. It deals with a troupe of early Yiddish actors, who began performing in Romania, then went on the road, which was all of Eastern Europe. It is a tragic story, humorously told, of unschooled young people driven by the urge of native talent, both improvising plays and acting as they went along, performing for audiences who had never seen theatre before and regarded an actor as a shade above a gypsy. Yet the rising enthusiasm of the simple

audiences carried these actors to heights of comparative success both materially and artistically, though not without personal tragedy.

In the book and play, Hotzmach, the comedian, is a sort of Harlequin whose personal life has been sad; as he is about to reach the top of the ladder and also taste a bit of happiness, he contracts the then deadly disease tuberculosis. The Chernovtsy audience saw in the fate of Hotzmach the lot of their own theatre, and also of themselves as a Yiddish theatre audience. When Hotzmach says: "The doctors say that I will be cured if I go to Switzerland, or to the sea, to breathe fresh air. But what is life, sun, light, or air to Hotzmach without the theatre, without the Jewish stage?" the audience broke into tears. In the last scene Hotzmach dies, and audience and actors alike felt as though everything had died for them. The last curtain of the last Yiddish theatre fell on the lines: "The Shining Stars were late, too late to meet." Actors and audience never met again.

Another shadow was cast by the beclouded, disturbing present. After I exchanged a few words in Hebrew with an old man sitting in a public library reading a Hebrew book, he invited me to his house. He lived in a small, dark, shabby, cluttered apartment of three rooms, the third a partitioned corner of the second, with his wife and unmarried son. He had been an accountant, but was now living on a pension. His wife was not happy about my visit. She greeted me coldly and retired to the kitchen, which was also the entrance corridor—apparently to ward off a possible visitor. The son kept to the small room for a while, then seemed eager to join in the conversation.

The old man did not complain about his lot, or the government, or the social system. He was taking all of them stoically, as Laocoön did the snakes, as a fate one cannot dodge. His pet peeve was the lies about the Soviet Jews being spread by the Jewish Communist press abroad, and the lies about Israel in the Soviet press and through the Communist daily in Israel. He displayed little interest in the Jews of other lands, including the United States. At a moment when we were alone, he handed me a handful of scribbled sheets, and said, "Slip these into your pocket." Returning to my hotel, I examined them curiously and found he had been keeping an account of the lies

and his refutations on long, thick sheets of paper, which he had covered with tiny handwriting in Russian. The paper was ruled in two columns, one for the lies, the other for his refutations.

It was naturally easy for him to refute the lies about the Jews in the Soviet Union. All he needed to do was to cite contrary facts from his own knowledge. But how was he able to refute the lies about Israel when he saw only the Communist press? Perhaps he listened to foreign radio broadcasts; or possibly, by deduction and analysis of the Communist comments, he was able to figure out the truth. It was the pathetic document of an intelligent and educated man, living in absolute spiritual isolation and engaged in an interminable one-sided polemic with Communist writers.

The old man spoke haltingly, as though in conflict with himself as to whether he should speak, his words coming in whispered explosions. Occasionally he shook his forefinger for emphasis. He was most exercised about the denials of the existence of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. How could they tell such lies? Why, there was lots of it anywhere. His son nodded approval to these words.

I observed that the issue was not the existence of anti-Semitism. Wherever there were Jews in a considerable number, there was also some form of anti-Semitism. The issue was the extent, the degree. Anti-Semitism was a large umbrella covering all sorts of phenomena, important and unimportant, real and imaginary. I told him I had heard a lot about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, but I also had heard a lot about Jews in top or near-top positions. I brought up several names from a list I had compiled—Mitin, a member of the Central Committee of the All-Soviet Communist party, heading its educational department; Kazhdan, vice-mayor of Minsk; Kodertzov, director of an automotive machinery plant in Kiev; Damsky, director of the Vibrator factory in Leningrad; some Jewish vice-ministers, and many Jews in the arts, of course.

The wrinkles in the old man's face deepened. He shook his forefinger at me: "Thirty names, sixty names, six hundred. There are three million Jews. How do they live? Ask them!"

The son bolstered his father's argument. He understood Yiddish but spoke it with great difficulty. I asked him to speak

Russian, but he preferred his broken Yiddish. It was not so much what "they" did to you as how they made you feel. They made you feel as though you did not belong there with them. You were different, and on sufferance. You should be thankful they let you alone and didn't beat you up, and you should have no fancy ideas about advancement.

"Are they all that way?" I asked him.

He tried to explain. "No, not all. Some are friendly enough, and do not differentiate between Jew and non-Jew. But it is the general atmosphere, the spirit, that carries the poison. You have to be there with them, work with them, live with them, to get the feel of it."

The father patted the son's hand, and returned to the start of the discussion. "Jews in top positions? Left over from before, indispensable. How about the young Jews of today? Take him [he pointed to his son]—has he a chance to get anywhere near the top? He stays put. You heard him—thankful to be let alone."

The son nodded. Like his father, he was a beast driven into a corner.

The professor in Leningrad was a different man in a different world. In his seventies, he looked at least ten years younger; he was well groomed, relaxed, oozing self-satisfaction. All was well with his world. Formerly the head of a special field of medicine, he had had to retire because of his age, and was now living on a comfortable pension—and quite likely also on some saved-up capital. The entrance to his house was depressing, but his apartment was in good repair and very comfortably furnished. His study and living room were much like those of an American professor.

When I telephoned him he insisted that I visit him as soon as possible, and when I called he wanted me to stay on and on. I had regards for him from a close relative of his in the United States, a renowned person. But he was more interested in the current conditions in the United States, and in a number of individuals he had known years before. He had emigrated from Russia to America, worked for a while in various establishments, and finally studied medicine in a Middle Western university. After the October Revolution he had returned to his native land and made a career in medicine.

When I managed to break away from answering his questions, I asked him one. I wondered how he felt about the stories I was being told in regard to the position of Jews in the Soviet Union. These were to the effect that Jews in top positions were not being fired, but when one of them died or resigned, a Gentile, not a Jew, was appointed to fill his place. I had also been told that Jews were the last to be promoted, and that Jewish graduates of the ten-year schools had difficulty in getting admitted to the universities, which are the gateways to the top. They were the last to be admitted, except in the case of the unusually able student. As in other parts of the world, a Gentile could afford to be average but a Jew must be exceptional. But in such fields as diplomacy or the military—these are said to be *Juden-rein*—even being exceptional is of no use.

His reply surprised me. He said, "Look here, on my faculty I had fifty-seven professors and forty-six of them were Jews. Do you think this was natural? Was this good for the Jews? Would you want the Soviet Jews to become a nation of professors? We want fewer Jewish professors and more Jewish plain workers. Why should they all go to the university? Let them go into the pits, into the foundries."

It was easy for him to talk. His academic career was behind him. His son was already a professor, and a daughter was a professional musician. But what about the Jew in Kharkov whose son has just graduated from high school? The boy has done well at school, and wants to become a professor. Is his father to say to him: Son, there are too many Jewish professors already. You had better forget about an academic career and become a miner.

I told the professor in Leningrad the issue was not how many, but how. Whether a Jewish boy was to be a professor or a janitor should be decided not on the basis of his national origin but of his capacity to learn and his ability. Not the Jew or the Christian should become a professor—but the young man with the highest qualifications. The best student, the one who will profit most from his education, is the one who should be admitted to the university, regardless of his nationality and race. That is what we are fighting for in the United States, and mak-

ing considerable progress toward. Actually, the professor was accepting the philosophy of *numerus clausus,* a percentile for Jews, which prevailed in the most reactionary regimes in Europe.

The professor was impervious to my reasoning. He insisted that the Jewish economy had gone "cockeyed" (he liked to use Americanisms), and it was better for all concerned to "straighten the line." He did not realize that he was thereby admitting the existence of a Jewish peculiarity, a Jewish problem, in the Soviet Union.

Some weeks later I happened to meet a Soviet Jewish scientist, and posed the same question to him. He had come from a distant part of the country to attend a convention of the scientific workers in his field. He looked so much like a prosperous American businessman that I mistook him for a tourist. I told him what I had heard about the situation of Jews in the academic field. He listened attentively, and I could see the color of his face rising to a reddish pink. I waited for his reaction—he was finishing his dessert. Finally he spoke.

"This is not the issue. The issue is more fundamental. Listen, I attended school under the Czarist regime. I went to a gymnasium together with children of Czarist generals. Yet until the Beilis case (a celebrated ritual murder trial fabricated by the Czarist police to incite the masses against the Jews), I never heard the word *zhid.* But my children now hear it every day." He rose abruptly, shook hands with me, and quickly left the dining room.

As on my first visit to the Soviet Union twenty-five years earlier, the saddest impression I carried away with me was of the synagogue in Kiev. This time it was perhaps even sadder because of the general feeling of well-being in the city. The worshipers were now better dressed, and gave no indication of insufficient diet. But they seemed to be more afraid than ever.

I visited many synagogues on this trip, and as a rule, found them in better repair than before, none of them in financial straits. The attendance was also better, at least than it had been right after the war. The general aspect of prosperity in the country seemed to have penetrated the synagogue as well. But the spirits were lower, and the fear greater. The sheep had

sensed the coming storm. Why? I asked. There was a trend toward liberalism—live and let live—in the land. Yes, the reply came, but not for religion. It was getting tougher for believers. Too many of the young people had begun attending services—among the Christians, that is—and so the authorities had revived the anti-religious propaganda. Again they were heaping abuse on those who practiced their religion, accusing the clergy or the church leaders of all sorts of crimes. This was the other side of freedom of conscience—the disbelievers had the right to express their attitude toward religion. But there was only this "other side." The believers could not come out openly to counteract the anti-religious campaign. They could not campaign in favor of religion. They could not even defend themselves. They just had to accept the beating and thank the good Lord that it was no worse.

But was this not a general situation? Yes, but by the time a general situation reached the Jews, it became specific. "They" would never abuse their own church quite as odiously as they abused the synagogue. Nor would they molest their own religious leaders as they did the Jewish. There was an additive of contempt, crudity, and brutality in the case of Jews. At least this was the feeling of many Jews in the synagogues.

At the Kiev synagogue there were a few people who remembered me from my two earlier visits. Many more recalled I had addressed them during the intermission of the prayers, in 1946, to tell them of the Nazi ravages in other lands. Even the women in the gallery knew that I was "back." Now, they were going to honor me by calling me for the reading of a portion of the Scroll. Mine was to be the last section, which is followed by reading also a related portion in the Prophets. This is known as the *maftir.*

I was given a prayer shawl, and called to the rostrum. All eyes were on me as I read the blessings before and after the reading in the Scroll. Then it was my turn to read the portion of the Prophet. It was a chapter in Jeremiah, with a strange, symbolic timeliness. The background was the struggle for world dominion between the two great powers of the time, Babylon and Egypt. The little Kingdom of Judah found itself in between. The royal house was determined to cast its lot with Egypt; the

prophet Jeremiah foretold the victory of Babylon, and called for alignment with that power to escape destruction. For this he was thrown into prison, from which he escaped to Egypt. But his prophecy was fulfilled—Judah was destroyed, the land laid desolate, the people driven into exile in Babylon. In the portion I read, Jeremiah was sending a comforting word to the exiles in Babylonia. He advised them to settle down there, to build houses, sow fields, plant gardens, have children and raise families, and take root in the land of their exile. But also to hope and believe that the time would come when the God of Abraham would remember them and liberate them and lead them back into the land of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I doubt if many of the congregants knew enough Hebrew to understand the meaning of the portion of Jeremiah I read to them, or if those who knew Hebrew grasped the connotation. For me it was touchingly meaningful.

At the end of the service the worshipers remained standing, apparently waiting for me to leave. But the president of the synagogue politely kept me back, involving me in a conversation with the rabbi, while he motioned to the worshipers to leave. They did. Half an hour later I left, accompanied by the president. Outside the synagogue we found two long rows of Jews waiting for me to pass between them. They did not speak, merely stared, and mumbled, *"Gut Shabes,"* the ordinary Sabbath greeting.

Although the greeting was ordinary, the way they said it was not. Nor was the expression in their eyes. They were speaking, not to me, but through me, to all Jews in the world—their brethren in Jeremiah.

"Next Year in Jerusalem"

No serious effort to depict the inner state of the Soviet Jews in 1959 can ignore the impact of the rebirth of Israel.

It would be absurd to suppose that forty years of existence under Soviet rule (not entirely happy years, to put it mildly) had made Russian Jews indifferent to the rise of a Jewish state in the ancient homeland. For two thousand years the national

dream of the Return to Jerusalem had been engraved on the hearts of Jews. Sixty generations had been repeating, on many occasions each year, the oath of the Psalmist: "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, may my right arm be forgot." Thrice a day throughout the generations Jews had been saying in their prayers, "And may our eyes see Thy return to Jerusalem in Mercy." No joyous celebration on a holiday ended without the ceremoniously expressed wish: "Next year in Jerusalem." Whatever all this meant to the individual Jew, even if divorced from reality and contingent on the coming of the Messiah, it established a complex that did not easily dissolve.

The complex persisted within non-religious Jews as well. Some of them translated it into a national purpose, devoting their lives to its realization. Others opposed recasting the ancient mystic dream into a modern program of action because it might possibly be detrimental to their present status. Still others rejected it on the grounds of impracticability. But awareness of the dream and an emotional attitude toward it, positive or negative, were well-nigh universal. The Soviet Jews were no exception.

Like their brethren in other lands, Soviet Jews were thrilled by the unexpected realization of the ancient dream. It was gratifying to them that their own country, despite its suppression of the promoters of the dream, was instrumental in its fulfillment. But they could not give vent to their emotions as Jews did in other lands. In New York, London, Buenos Aires, and Johannesburg, ardent Jewish youths danced in the streets for joy. There was hardly a Jewish community in the Western world that did not mark the event by enthusiastic public demonstrations. Only the Jews in the Socialist world were mute on that historic day. But there were many private parties, presumably family affairs, at which the success of the new state was toasted with vodka, and at some synagogues the Hallel prayer, reserved for festive days, was recited for the occasion.

It seems symbolic that the State of Israel opened its embassy in Moscow just when the Soviet authorities were about to close the Jewish cultural institutions, and the run on Jews that came thereafter had already cast its shadow. (The embassy opened in September, 1948, and in November of the same year *Aynikite*

was closed.) Soviet Jews were being made to feel their own Exile worse than ever just when the white and blue flag of Israel, the symbol of Redemption from Exile, was unfurled from the mast of the Metropole Hotel, within close range of Red Square.

No mention of the Israeli flag on the pole at the Metropole appeared in the newspapers or was made over the radio. Yet the Jews of Moscow learned of it, and literally thousands of them passed by it, on the sidewalk along the hotel or across the street, wanting to see the flag with their own eyes. Among them were parents who raised their children to their shoulders to give them a better view of the flag, and talked to them about it. Pathetic was the demonstration for the first ambassador from Israel, Golda Meir, when she attended the Jewish New Year service at the Moscow synagogue. It was so overwhelming, in fact, that naïve persons cite it as the cause of the change in the Kremlin's policy toward the Jews, which had been decided, of course, long before.

The Moscow synagogue is always filled on high holidays, with an overflow praying in the courtyard. In 1948, in anticipation of the lady ambassador from Israel's coming to the services, many more thousands turned out, packing solidly not only the synagogue and courtyard but also the streets, and overflowing into the side streets. No house of worship in the Soviet Union had ever had so large and fervid an attendance. Within the synagogue the atmosphere was charged with frenzied emotion. The praying was impassioned, yet necks were craned to catch a glimpse of the lady in the women's gallery. Her presence imbued the devotion. When it came to the prayer, "And thus impose Thy fear upon the nations," the association was not, as customarily, with the sense of terror, but with national pride and exaltation. During the service, and especially on the way out, people pressed to get as close to the lady ambassador as possible. Hands reached to touch her sleeve or dress; those who got close enough kissed the edge of her sleeve or the fringe of her shawl, as though these were sacred objects. Even the secretary who accompanied the lady had her clothes touched and kissed. The adoration was meant not for those two women, of course, but for the Jewish state they represented. It was an outburst of elation long pent up. Then came a manifestation such as Moscow had never seen before. The two ladies from Israel walked to their hotel by themselves, on one side of the street, while a thick mass of humanity flowed on the opposite side, on the sidewalk across the street and on the pavement, all the way to the hotel. They had the right to walk in the street, did they not?

The Israeli embassy soon moved from the Metropole to quarters of its own. Moscow Jews had the right to walk in that street, too, naturally. But few ventured to pass the Soviet guide at the entrance. After a time the lady ambassador returned to Israel, and a man came to fill her place. He made it a point to attend services, accompanied by his aide, on all special occasions. The Israeli representatives became familiar figures to the congregants of the Moscow synagogue, but as marked men they were hardly ever approached by any save the officials of the synagogue, who were their hosts.

Meeting Young Israelis

It was nine years later before Soviet Jews found another outlet for their feelings about Israel. The occasion was the International Youth Festival held in Moscow in the summer of 1957. Some 30,000 young men and women gathered there, delegations from nations in all parts of the world, under the slogan Peace and Friendship of Nations. Each national delegation was given the opportunity to present numbers on general programs of entertainment, and also an entire performance of its own at some hall, to display its national art. The youth of Israel had been invited to the Festival and were represented by about two hundred young men and women in two separate groups: One of about a hundred was composed of members of *kibbutzim* of the three Labor parties, Mapai, Mapam, and Ahdut Hoavodah; the second, of about the same number, came from the Israeli Communist movement. There were Arab youths in both groups. The young people from Israel participated in a number of entertainment programs and had their own complete program at Ustankino Park.

To talk to the youthful foreigners, to make them feel wel-

come, to attend their performances and applaud enthusiastically, was now good Soviet behavior. Secret agents were sure to circulate in the crowds, checking on the contacts, of course. But friendly, innocent talk was encouraged. The Moscow Jews and the Jews from other cities and towns who came to Moscow for the occasion took the Israeli young people to their hearts. They swarmed in droves wherever an Israeli was expected to appear. The timid stood at a distance, staring, exchanging a meaningful glance. The daring came close enough to speak, to slip a note into the hand of an Israeli, to ask for a memento. The brave invited Israelis to their homes. Whenever an Israeli number was on the program, Jews came early to fill the place and to applaud fervently.

A misunderstanding arose about the location of the special Israeli performance. It had been scheduled to take place at a theatre in the heart of the city, but when people arrived they were told that it had been transferred to Ustankino Park, on the outskirts of the city, more than half an hour by subway or autobus. The audience had to rush to get there. Some people said that the shift was made deliberately to prevent too large a turnout. The officials declared the change became necessary at the last minute as the result of unforeseen circumstances. I happened to find out, however, that the officials had known all along the performance would be given at the park. A lady who was called upon to mix with the crowds around the Israeli delegation, overhear conversations and report, was given admission cards and directed to Ustankino Park at least a week in advance. The continued announcement that the performance was to take place at the theatre was therefore an intentional misdirection. Surprisingly, when the Jews who first called at the theatre reached Ustankino Park, they found the place already overfilled —and mostly by Jews. The performers were given an overwhelming reception.

A young Hebrew writer, a native Israeli of a leftist Mapam kibbutz, Nathan Shoham, was a member of the youth delegation. In a booklet *Encounters in Moscow, 1957,* he graphically describes his meetings with Soviet Jews. Some were totally ignorant about Israeli matters. For instance, one Jew said to him, "I know where Israel is, but where is Zion or Palestine? Is it in Jerusalem or outside?" On the other hand, some were so conversant with Israeli conditions as to have read the annual report of the National Bank of Israel and to know the terms of settlement of the Ata strike.

Nathan Shoham also tells of a tall old man approaching the window of an autobus filled with Israeli youths, and looking in. One young man asked him in Yiddish, "You're a Jew?"

The old man replied in Hebrew, "Yes, but not a Zionist." Then the dialogue went on.

"Where from, Jew?"

"From Moscow. But a Zionist—no. I have always been against Zionism, and am now opposed to it. Well—and how are things in Israel?"

"Fine."

"Fine, eh? But no immigration to Israel, none."

"People do as they please."

"Yes, yes, that's true. But Zionism is very bad for Jews. I have always fought against Zionism—that's the truth."

"Very well, then. Why do you stand at this window? Let other Jews get to us. You can see they want to meet us."

"Yes. Yes. Won't you give me a calendar?"

The old man grabbed the Israeli calendar with a trembling hand. Slipping it into his pocket, he repeated: "Not a Zionist, not a Zionist."

"We have heard this before. Why don't you get away from the window?"

"Maybe you will give me some memento—an Israeli flag?"

"Here you are. Anything else?"

"An Israeli pencil? I have a little grandson in the house. He'd be so happy."

He took the pencil, and withdrew, tears running from his eyes.

Shoham tells of still another encounter. A young boy, ducking through the crowd to get to the window of an automobile carrying Israeli delegates, was stopped by the surging mass of people in the street. When he finally shook hands with the Israeli at the car window, he left a note in his hand. The note read: "My name is . . . I am in . . . grade of . . . school. My address is . . . I want to learn Hebrew, do something for me. Mother and

I want to go to Israel. Peace to you, dear brothers, we are proud of you."

One more encounter. A mother brought her twelve-year-old son, and their problem, to an Israeli youth. The boy's name was Israel, and he paid dearly for it. The radio heaped abuse on the State of Israel, and the children at school took it out on little Israel. His mother had explained to the boy that his schoolmates were young and did not understand; that the thing to do was to change his first name for the time being, until the storm blew over. But the boy had stubbornly refused—his dead father had given him the name Israel, and Israel would be his name to the end of his days. He was bearing the brunt for Israel, and was willing to suffer. But she was a mother and could not bear it. She wanted the Israeli youth to tell her son that the Israelis would not be angry with him if he changed his name. The son looked so determined, however, that the young Israeli could not accede to his mother's request.

I have dwelt at length on the Youth Festival for the reason that its effects were still felt in 1959. I met Jews in Moscow who talked of their meeting with the Israeli young people as one of the great events in their lives. It was to them almost like going to Israel and seeing it all with their own eyes. Golda Meir had been a symbol; these youths from Israel were the concrete reality. I can say without exaggeration that Soviet Jews were more interested in Israel than in any other Jewish community. Quite often I would find only limited interest in American Jewry, just a shade more, perhaps, than in America generally, and merely perfunctory interest in other Jewish communities. But faces lighted up and eyes twinkled when I began telling about Israel.

Some Soviet Jews began their discussion of Israel disparagingly. One Jew in Odessa said to me: "What do you say to the nasty mess our Jews made of the State of Israel?"

"What mess?" I asked.

"What mess? Could there be a worse situation? No agriculture, no industry, no food, no work, no roof overhead. Poor people dragged in from all parts of the world, left to burn in the heat during the day and to soak in the rain at night. All thought centered on attacking innocent Nasser, and all ambition to serve the bloody American imperialists."

Instead of arguing with him, I replied, "Well, what can we do? We haven't got better Jews."

With a sly look, the man laughed and asked, "And how are things there really?"

He was not pulling my leg. He was poking fun at the anti-Israel propaganda in the Soviet press. I was amazed to find that many Soviet Jews were quite well informed on the real situation in Israel. I asked one man how he arrived at the facts, since he depended on sources of misinformation. His answer was: "Here you learn to read the opposite way. . . ."

A Frank Discussion

In Moscow I had an unusually frank discussion with a very intelligent Soviet Jew, a literary man. He knew no Yiddish, and had never taken an interest in Jewish affairs there or abroad. But there was no cant in the man, nor fear, nor subterfuge.

Anticipating a question I might be asked in some Jewish quarters outside the Soviet Union, I inquired whether he thought Soviet Jews would go to Israel if they could. His reply to this question, and his thinking on Israel and the Soviet Jews generally, ran about as follows:

Some Soviet Jews would definitely go to Israel if they could. Others would as definitely not go. For still others, going would depend on the circumstances prevailing at the time. There were people in the Soviet Union, he said, who would go anywhere abroad, if they could. They were displeased, or disillusioned, with their life in a Socialist society, and they believed they would have a better life in the Capitalist world. Their illusions about Western life were derived from what they had seen in American movies or in popular foreign magazines, or had heard from tourists coming to the Soviet Union. They took these things as the reality of Western life, which, of course, they were not. If these people did emigrate most of them would be disappointed and want to return. They would not be ready to pay the price for the ease and comfort of the Western way of life. They had been conditioned to a society that had no

problem of unemployment, that provided free education and medical care, pensions, and other social benefits, and they would tire of the struggle for existence in what Westerners call a "free society."

In the case of Soviet Jews, additional motives entered the situation: their being Jews, and not always happily integrated into Soviet society; their having relatives and friends abroad; their attachment to their religion or culture. For these reasons, more Jews might be willing to leave than non-Jews. Even Jews not disillusioned with the Socialist society might leave for some specific reason of their own. If Jews did leave, they would be less likely to wish to return. Their first choice might be America, although for many of them Israel had a greater attraction since it was a Jewish country—they would not care to go from one sick bed into another. If they left because of what they regarded as the "Jewish problem," they would naturally desire to go to a place where there was absolutely no Jewish problem. Those who might want to go to Israel were more likely to be young than old. The older Jews were too deeply attached to the fatherland—children, grandchildren, job, old age pension. The young men were the adventurous spirits—they still had their lives ahead of them. The young generation was also more sensitive about being Jewish, and being regarded as different from non-Jews. They might go because their pride was hurt, but prefer to call it a "national awakening" instead.

What could Israel mean to such a Soviet Communist Jew as this literary man? We talked about it at various levels and from different angles. The following roughly summarizes his ideas on the subject:

He had never been a Zionist, of course. He had always regarded Zionism as a utopia. He still did. The State of Israel had come into being through the fortuitous coincidence of several historical social forces. It was a lucky break for the large number of Jews who found themselves homeless at the end of the Second World War, and also for those who felt an external or internal compulsion to leave their native land. But not all Jews would go to Israel, nor would Israel have room for all of them. Hence, Israel was no solution for the Jewish problem where it existed. The problem must be solved on the spot, he insisted.

Was there a Jewish problem in the Soviet Union?

Well, yes and no. The Jewish problem was rooted in the objective situation, in the social stresses, and in the attitude of the Jew himself toward assimilation. The Jew did not want to turn Gentile; the Gentile needed a scapegoat. In the Soviet Union the roots were still alive, but they were embedded in shallow soil. When did the trouble for the Jews begin? When Beria momentarily obtained a free hand—that was a social stress. Such moments were not going to recur. And the Jews were becoming increasingly assimilated. Soon the roots would be out of the ground completely, and there would be no Jewish problem.

Did he propose solving the Jewish problem by dissolving the Jews as a people? Was that not the solution proposed by all enemies of the Jews? And had it not failed all through history?

Well, yes and no. When a man was due to die in the near future, there was a difference between feeding him poison and making him comfortable until the end came.

Was it not heartless of him to talk so nonchalantly about a man's death? Why, the man was his own father! For two thousand years Jews had struggled, suffered, and undergone martyrdom in order to survive as Jews. He was a Jew himself! Had he no qualms about the end of it all?

Well, no. Happily, there was no end: Israel would continue the historic strain. He said "happily" because the existence of Israel relieved the others, like the Soviet Jews, of a sense of guilt. They had not left their nation in the lurch. Two million —in time, maybe three million—Jews living there under normal national conditions—they would be the Jewish people of the future. Soviet Jewry would just fade away.

Suppose they did not wish to fade away?

Well, that was up to them. Eventually, they would. If not those of today, then their children or grandchildren.

I did not accept the pessimism of this literary man as to the future of Soviet Jewry, nor the limited position he assigned to Israel in their lives, although it was more than Jewish Communists would admit. I had met too many Soviet Jews myself,

young men and women who were heading in the opposite direction. Rather than fading away, they were moving toward the rising sun. They had just become conscious of being Jews, and their new awareness was leading them to search for meaning, to grope for substance. They were asking themselves: What is Jewishness? How did it come to be? How is it related to our personal lives? The answers were not easy to come by, particularly in their world. So they were turning to Israel as the essence and source. However they regarded the state politically, its very existence became a factor in their lives.

Another Soviet Jewish intellectual, with more Jewish background, said to me: "You can't imagine what Israel meant to us in 'those days.' The trap door closed, the sky came down, we were on the spot. Then came the gleam of faith and hope from the East. Not for us, perhaps; not even for our children; but for the Cause. We have been taught to live and die for a Cause. Here was our own Cause, for which some have paid with their lives and many of us been made to suffer. But the Cause would survive, and carry us along into the future. There is a poem—by Heine, I believe—about a fir tree wrapped in snow in the winter cold of the north, dreaming of a palm basking in the sun of the south . . . "

Chapter Four •

BIROBIDJAN — THE DREAM THAT FAILED

" . . . The Bira is not the Jordan. It never was the Jordan and it never will be."
—Dominik Horodynski, in *Swiat,* Warsaw, December 7, 1958.

The project of Birobidjan caught the fancy of Jews in all parts of the world. For next to the dream of the Return to Jerusalem, there was always the Fata Morgana of territorial concen-