

Jewish Problems in New Poland

An approach to several aspects of the serious situation

By DR. DAVID SFARD

From Dec. 2 to 6, 1956, the administrative executive of the Communal-Cultural Union of the Jews in Poland held an enlarged meeting, the first since the October events in Poland. Following are portions of an address delivered on that occasion by Dr. David Sfar, secretary of the organization executive and poet, on the impact of recent developments on the Jews of his country. The outlook for Polish Jews has improved since this was written, following the overwhelming endorsement of the Gomulka regime at the polls on Jan. 20.—Eds.

Anti-Semitism in Poland

The Jewish population of our country has recently felt distinctly nervous and uneasy as a result of the general situation and of the increase in anti-Semitic occurrences. Jewish people ask us: What is the way out? Where is the voice of the leadership of the [United Workers (Communist)] Party and the government? Can they secure the life and existence of the Jews?

These fateful questions must be considered with calm deliberation in order to reach correct conclusions which are so necessary at this time. The Eighth Plenum [of the United Workers Party held in Oct. 1956], which marks a new stage in democratization, the struggle for the genuine sovereignty of the country and the introduction of Leninist principles in all aspects of our life, has tremendous significance not only for own country but for all the socialist countries and for the entire working class movement. It has posed the entire question of genuine internationalism and cooperation between nations, of coming to the people with the whole truth, of squaring word with deed.

We too must speak the truth—that despite the fact that the Eighth Plenum clearly asserted the right of national minorities to free development and sharply condemned nationalist elements in our movement, we have recently seen an intensified chauvinistic attack by various elements against the national minorities, including the Jews.

Before the Eighth Plenum, we correctly noted that anti-Semitism was coming from the top. We now see anti-Semitic occurrences in a number of industrial plants. We constantly receive alarming information from these places about the dismissal of Jews from jobs because of alleged "Stalinism." These facts have caused uneasiness and fear among the Jewish population. But it would be a grave error for us to separate these anti-Semitic manifestations from the general situation in the country, from the things now taking place in the factories, in the villages, in the party committees and community organizations.

What has occurred is not merely a change of leaders but actually a change to a new way of understanding the substance of socialism. As is well known, no revolution, even a peaceful one, is without victims. On the wave of democratization a filthy scum of hooliganism and anarchism has appeared. The whole country is still in a state of flux. Everything is in turmoil. The revolution has not yet reached every city and village. We know of instances where destructive and demagogic elements are influencing certain sections of the people. If we correctly understand this, we will better grasp the character and causes of the anti-Jewish outbreaks.

In discussions with the leadership of the party the members of the Executive Committee of the Commu-

nal-Cultural Union have stated the situation of the Jewish population in all its gravity. Party leaders do not doubt that they will overcome this problem because the party has the confidence of the great majority of the people, of the intellectuals, of all political groupings. The party has shown that it can mobilize all the forces of the people for the struggle for socialism and it will not tolerate any nationalistic hooliganism. It is not true, the party said, that the Polish workers want a Poland without Jews. This is the slogan of black reaction. The present situation of the Jews is one aspect of the general situation in the country. The anti-Jewish actions are crimes which will be combated with all the severity of the law.

Jewish Emigration from Poland

Some people think that the desire to leave Poland is a result of the recent anti-Semitic events. Others believe the cause is incorrect work of the Communal-Cultural Union. I believe that the latter reason is not acceptable. Our accomplishments in this field—the theater, publishing house, press, Jewish Historical Institute, drama groups, choruses, clubs—have meaning for Jewish culture generally. Even our honest opponents will agree with that.

On the other hand, it is true that we committed a number of errors, that we sometimes held incorrect views towards certain political ten-

dencies and toward many Jewish national traditions. But this resulted from an entire system which influenced us, as it did the entire international workers movement.

Whatever the reason, we must no longer take a hostile attitude toward those Jews who want to emigrate. Certainly we should not regard them as enemies. We cannot blame Jews who want to join their relatives or those who want to leave because of fear. We cannot even condemn those who maintain that Israel is their fatherland; even more, we should help these people to solve complicated questions, overcome bureaucratic obstacles and distortions in the local governmental organs.

We should try to strengthen our relations with Jewish organizations abroad. It should be emphasized that we have always called for cooperation and have always cordially received representatives of various organizations and listened to their opinions. Yet it must be said that the tone of our appeals was not always correct and thus did not help stimulate such cooperation. The reason is understandable: we were affected by the cold war climate.

Something similar happened in the Jewish community of Poland itself. Even in our call to the artisans, the religious Jews and the petty bourgeois sections to work with us, the tone was not proper. The time has come to establish a unified organization of all the Jews in Poland.

Attitude Toward Israel

It should be emphasized that our position toward Israel flows from our deep concern for the future of the Jewish state. We believe that the present policy of the Israel government does not promote the well-being and growth of that state, but rather the opposite. This is not only the opinion of Communists, but also of some of the Left-Poale Zionists, General Zionists and others. We say categorically that we are ready to help the peace forces of Israel in every way possible in their work on behalf of the Israeli people.

We believe too that our press should radically change its manner of describing life in Israel. We should criticize what is wrong and call attention to what is positive, to that which Jews have created. We should not look at Israel one-sidedly.

We oppose categorically the present aggression against Egypt, just as many honest people of various views in Israel itself are opposed. At the same time we cannot close our eyes to the constant provocation and attacks of the Arab nationalists. We know that only the imperialists are interested in intensifying the conflicts between Jew and Arab. Only peace and friendship will bring good to both sides.

All Jews are sympathetic to Israel and wish it well. But this sympathy should make us see both the good and the bad. Chauvinism is the op-

The Prospect for Polish Jews Has Improved

ALTHOUGH the situation of Jews in Poland remains serious, some improvement has been noted. Hersh Smoliar, editor of the Warsaw *Yiddish Folks-Shtimme*, observed in an article in that paper on Jan. 24 that "the atmosphere is becoming more favorable for the Jewish population than a week or a month ago." One reason is the overwhelming victory of the Gomulka government in the elections of Jan. 20, since anti-Semitism was one of the weapons used by the government opposition. Sidney Gruson reported in the *N. Y. Times* (Jan. 31) that "The Communist Party and the government have launched a campaign of speeches, interviews and newspaper articles attacking anti-Semitism." The government has set up a special apparatus to give energetic battle to anti-Semitism and hooliganism. A decree was issued by the Ministries of the Interior and of Justice authorizing summary trials for law-breakers and chauvinists and sterner sentences than heretofore for outbreaks of hooliganism. A special meeting of the Warsaw militiamen (police) was held to discuss execution of this decree and special police patrols in cars and motorcycles equipped with radios were set up to guard against anti-social elements. Since the Gomulka election victory a number of Jews were restored to the high posts from which they were previously removed.

Last Dec. the Warsaw *Yiddish Folks-Shtimme* published a letter it had sent to Leonid P. Ilyichev, press chief of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, refuting the charge made by him (in an interview with Tabitha Petran in the *National Guardian*, Sept. 3, 1956) that its April 4, 1956 article on the crimes committed by the Stalin regime against Yiddish culture and Yiddish writers, was "slandorous and anti-Soviet." They affirmed that the article was the work of deep friends of the Soviet Union and socialism.

posite of patriotism and leads only to disaster for any people.

Soviet Jewish Culture

We will not cease to demand the rehabilitation of Soviet Jewish culture. We cannot agree with the claim that all the Jews in the Soviet Union are assimilated. This is not true nor is it in the spirit of internationalism. We take our stand with the articles on this subject in

the [Warsaw Yiddish] *Folks-Shtimme*, which have placed this question clearly and forthrightly. However, we categorically oppose the use of this issue as an occasion for anti-Soviet provocation, as many of our enemies do. Our criticism is one of devoted friends, who believe profoundly that this problem will soon be solved.

(Translated from the Yiddish by Max Rosenfeld.)