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MORNING FREIHEIT

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Paul Novick

**JEWS
IN THE
SOVIET UNION**

Report of a 2 Months' Stay in the USSR

Price 25 cents

JEWES IN THE SOVIET UNION

*Impressions of a two months' visit to the USSR
(November - December, 1964)*

By PAUL NOVICK

**Editor-in-chief of the Jewish Daily
Morning Freiheit**

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JEWS IN THE SOVIET UNION

By PAUL NOVICK

At a serious moment for the world, for America, for the Jewish people, a moment of great dangers, dangers of an atomic war, the first message I wish to bring back after a trip of four months through several countries in Europe, through the socialist countries—is a message of peace, of a burning desire for peace.

In Paris, at a tremendous, united meeting the slogan was: "Never another Auschwitz, never another war!" This was an echo of a similar slogan I had heard a few days before that in Warsaw, in the city which rose from the ashes, from destruction; the echo of a slogan in a call to the world, to Jews everywhere, issued by that small but dynamic Jewish community of Poland. I saw the slogan for peace at the port of Szczecin and at the outskirts of Prague. And in the harbor of Riga, while interviewing a Jewish ship-captain, I saw the slogan again. And on the way to Ilya Ehrenburg's home outside of Moscow, I saw the slogan for peace in the area where the Muscovites repelled the attack of the Nazi hordes, where Moscow women dug trenches to defend their city. And the conversation I had with the President of Soviet Lithuania, Justas Paletskis, ended with his appeal for peace to all people of good will in America. And in the homes of many ordinary people, who sacrificed so much, I felt the yearning for peace. And on the train, amidst the Briansk forests, I saw, in the middle of the woods, a memorial for the Partisans, inscribed with a call for peace.

So I begin my report with this. Let the call from Europe, from men and women of all shades of opinion, from the peoples of the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, let this call be heard. Let peace be assured!

My report is one of achievements and of problems; of successes and of difficulties. Most certainly it is pleasant to report

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only about good things and to hear only about good things. But if we do not talk about difficulties and problems—along with achievements—it will not be the truth. And that would be of no use, nor would it help to overcome the difficulties and solve the problems.

As I did six years ago, when I returned from a trip to Europe and the Soviet Union, I will caution that we must not think of the Socialist countries as Utopias where everything has been solved, where there are no problems. This would not correspond to reality. The main thing is—in what direction is the course of history moving there? Is it going forward in spite of difficulties and problems? Is the foundation of socialism being strengthened? That is what we shall talk about.

The Slogan — “Soviet Anti-Semitism”

I visited both Germanys—the German Federated Republic (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), as well as France, Poland and Czechoslovakia. But primarily I want to talk now about the Soviet Union because the main purpose of my trip lay there, and for a very definite reason.

Most certainly I am interested in the program of Socialist construction in that country, now preparing for the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution (1967). Of that I will speak later. But I had a *special* task in the Soviet Union.

In our own country and in other capitalist countries there has been for years a campaign against “Soviet Anti-Semitism.” This campaign places upon the government of the Soviet Union and upon the entire country the stamp of anti-Semitism. Various events and developments are presented to the public so as to reinforce this impression. What results is something that can only undermine the struggle for peace and coexistence. Because if it is true that the Soviet Union is a land of anti-Semitism, then how can the United States conduct a policy of coexistence with it?

I am not mainly concerned with defending the good name of the Soviet Union—although for friends of the Soviet Union this is quite an honorable task. But it is first of all a matter of defending Peace and Coexistence. We are defending here, in great measure, *the interests of America, of the Jewish people!*

Talks With Soviet People

What is the truth about the slogan of “Soviet Anti-Semitism” which is bandied about so freely?

For two months I was in the Soviet Union as the guest of *Literaturnya Gazetta*, organ of the Soviet Writers Union. I had every opportunity to “mingle with the people,” and I could talk with them—without interpreters—in Russian, Yiddish or English. In the Moskva Hotel, where I stayed two months, in the very heart of the city, I got to know the employees, the waiters, who often used to bring meals to my room. I spoke to them freely about the general situation and about their own lives. All sorts of people came to my hotel room—old friends I had met on previous visits as well as total strangers. All of them had learned of my presence in Moscow either from an announcement in *Literaturnya Gazetta* (on November 7, 1964) or from other sources. These people were Jewish factory workers, office workers, intellectuals, and some *landsleit* from my native Brest. I spent days and nights with Jewish writers at the gatherings of the Yiddish monthly, *Sovietish Heimland*—or traveling with them to Kiev and Odessa—as one does with old friends.

Thanks to *Literaturnya Gazetta* and *Sovietish Heimland* I had the opportunity to speak with the Vice Premier of the Soviet Union, Benjamin Dymshitz, who is the chairman of the highest economic council in the country; with Ilya Ehrenburg; with the chief of the highest military academy in the Soviet Union, Colonel-General Alexander Zirlin, also a Jew; with the President of Soviet Lithuania, Justas Paletskis; with the Vice Premier of the Soviet Ukraine, Pyotr Troyinko; with the Vice President of the Ukrainian Academy of Science, Prof. Victor Gutir; with a member of the Collegium of the Ministry for Higher Education, Prof. Anatole Bogomolov; with the head of the Department of Foreign Relations in the Ministry of Culture in Moscow, Nikolai Kalinin; with the top leaders of the Medical Academy; with the associates of the Chief Prosecutor of the Soviet Union; with the editors of *New Times* magazine (mostly Jews); with the heads of the Foreign Department of *Pravda*. I attended the Moscow synagogue, spoke with Rabbi Yehuda Leib Levin, with the President of the Marina-Rostsha synagogue, Zvi Leib; inquired about the synagogues in cities I visited. I attended celebrations of the Soviet Writers Union and *Sovietish Heimland*;

I visited factories in Moscow, Riga, Odessa. I was inside the homes of relatives and friends—workers in factories, engineers, writers, translators, physicians; I had a private visit with a Jewish general.

Permit me to introduce him. His name is Moissei Isakovitch Siminovsky, born in a village near Zhlobin, his grandfather an innkeeper in a village, his father—Yitzhok Gedalya—a carpenter who sought his fortune in America and did not find it. Without going into details as to how Moissei Isakovitch Siminovsky became a general, let me say only that during the war he conducted the operations which liberated Vitebsk. He has 19 awards, among them one Order of Lenin, three Orders of Kutusov and one Order of Souvorov. In July 1964, when Vitebsk celebrated the 20th anniversary of its liberation he was at the head of the parade which marched through the main streets of the city. (I saw the pictures)

When I asked General Siminovsky whether there were many Jewish generals in the army he replied: "A million!"

"A hundred thousand would be enough for me," I said. "At least mention the names of *some* of the generals."

To which he said: "I'll tell you something better. The *chief* of the military engineers academy in Moscow is a Jew." (This academy was founded by Czar Alexander I in 1819.) General Siminovsky gave me the name of the head of the academy—Alexander Zirlin. From Alexander I to Alexander Zirlin!

I asked the *Literaturnya Gazetta* to arrange a meeting for me with Colonel-General Zirlin and the meeting took place on December 26 (1964). Siminovsky told me also that the Deputy Commander of the Kiev military district is a Jew—General Matvei Weinrub, Hero of the Soviet Union. The names of General Jacob Kraiser and General David Dragunsky are well known. I was looking for *new* names. But let us remember that General Jacob Kraiser bears the highest title—General of the Army. General David Dragunsky twice was awarded the decoration "Hero of the Soviet Union" and is the chief of a military district near the southern border of the country.

So much about Jews in the Soviet Army and I ask every honest person to take it into consideration.

But here one may perhaps ask: So what? Arent't there any Jews in the military forces of the United States? My answer to this would be: I do not know. Maybe there are, though cer-

tainly not of the type of a Kraiser, or a Zirlin. I can hardly imagine a Jew at the head of the West Point Military Academy. But this is beside the point. The point is that since there *are* Jews in some important position in the U.S. Army and in the government generally, it would be preposterous to say that the U.S. government is adhering to an anti-Semitic policy!

How else, then, can one disprove an accusation of this type against the Soviet government if not by listing Jews high in the councils of the government, the army, in the management of industry, etc., etc.? Let us therefore continue with our report.

Jews in Government and Industry

I was at the famous Dynamo plant in Moscow—famous because Lenin spoke there in 1921, famous also because the workers of this plant took an active part in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. The director of this enterprise of about 10,000 workers is Joseph Lvovitch Litvak. I was taken through the plant by the chief builder ("constructor")—Aron Abramovich Rabinovich. In one of the departments of the plant I came across master-mechanic Leybl Lenovich from Mozir who told me, in Yiddish, that some of the workers in his department were Jews.

In Riga I visited one of the most important radio-electrical plants in the Soviet Union. The chief engineer is a Jew—Yevsei Markovitch Rozenski. There are a large number of Jewish engineers who have won awards, and there are many Jews among the workers. The editor of the plant newspaper is a Jew—Boris Heyman. In Odessa, at a meeting with the manager and assistant-managers of a plant which manufactures complicated lathes, I asked whether any Jews worked there. The answer was a burst of laughter. It appeared that the majority of the people in the room were Jews—people who had received prizes, leaders of production, heads of trade-union committees, Party committees. Walking through the plant, I found workers at the bench with whom I spoke in Yiddish and who were readers of *Sovietish Heimland*.

When I visited with Benjamin Dymshitz, Vice-Premier of the Soviet Union, he gave me an issue of *Uralski Rabotchi* (Ural Worker), which had two large photos on page one—two industrial leaders who had received Order of Lenin awards for their role in the Ural industries. The name of one is rather unusual:

Solomon Abi-Saulevitch Shaikevitch. A "real" Jewish name that was never changed. The name of the other man was—Zalman Abelevitch Sominsky.

Dymshitz also gave me a long list of names of leaders in construction and agriculture and I cite only a few: Aron Markovitch Gindin, head of construction at the biggest hydro-electric station in the world (in Bratsk); Moissei Grigorievich Bass, holder of the Lenin Order; Semyon Zacharevich Ginsberg, engineer and agronomist, now chairman of the directors of "Stroibank"; Lev Benzionevitch Alter, (another "real" Jewish name), doctor of economic science, deputy-director of the Research Institute in Moscow.

Jews in Education

Vice Premier Dymshitz also gave me figures about Soviet citizens with high school and college education. From these figures it appears that whereas among Russians such citizens make up 7.6 percent, and among Ukrainians 3.5 percent, among Jews the percentage is 18.8. The actual figures are: 310,600 Jews with college education and almost 147,000 with high school specialist training.

Among Soviet scientists, Jews are in *third* place, after the Russians and Ukrainians, although the Jewish population is *eleventh* among the Soviet peoples.

Here are some figures supplied by the 1964 annual of "The National Economy of the USSR." It shows that in 1958 slightly more than 10 percent of all Soviet scientists were Jews—28,966. By 1963 their number increased to 48,012—an increase of 65 percent in five years! It is true that in spite of this enormous growth the ratio in relation to the number of scientists generally was reduced to 8 percent. This was due to the heightened tempo of education among the former under-developed nationalities in the USSR, particularly of Central Asia.

The above-mentioned annual also shows that in the 1961-62 school year there were 77,000 Jewish students in Soviet higher schools. In 1962-63 the number was 79,300. In 1963-64 the number had risen to 82,600. The proportion of Jewish students in higher schools to Jewish population (364 per 10,000) is very much higher than the proportion for the whole population (144 per 10,000).

Certain people (Professor De Witt in a study issued by the American Jewish Congress) maintain that despite the increase in absolute figures there was a decline in the proportion of Jewish students in the universities. This may be so, but the reason for this is, again, the enormous increase in the participation in higher education by students of all other Soviet peoples.

To some degree there is a similar situation in the United States. C. Bezalel Sherman in his book, *The Jew Within American Society*, shows a drop in the percentage of Jewish students in American universities between 1946 and 1955, from 9.0 percent to 7.5, offering the following explanation: "These figures represent a tremendous drift toward higher education among the general population on the one hand, and the fact that the Jewish population has lagged behind the country as a whole in numerical growth on the other hand" (p. 176).

The above figures should suffice to answer the accusations that Jewish enrollment in the Soviet universities is being artificially limited. Incidentally, in whatever Jewish homes I visited I found an engineer, a doctor, etc. The proof of the pudding, as the saying goes, is in the eating. Figures show Jews to be 14.7 percent of all Soviet doctors, 10.4 percent of lawyers and judges, although Jews number little over one percent of the total population.

I shall not dwell here on the prominent place which Jews occupy in literature and art, for this is too well known. Therefore, when you take into consideration the place Soviet Jews occupy in government (and Benjamin Dymshitz is not the only one), in industry, in the army, in science, in the arts—what becomes of the cry: Soviet Anti-Semitism? Is there the slightest moral justification for this charge? Is this how one should react toward a country where Jews have such broad opportunities, are prominent in occupations and professions hitherto inaccessible to Jews—as for example the captain of the ship in the Riga harbor, or Aron Gindin, the builder of the hydro-electric station in Bratsk?

The Film—"The Price of Silence"

I ask that question of Edward G. Robinson, whom I heard on the TV film, *The Price of Silence*, bemoaning the fact that the word *Yevrei* (Jew) on the identity papers of Soviet Jews

closes the door to a career. But the word *Yevrei* is written on the identity papers of Vice Premier B. Dymshitz; of Colonel-General Zirlin; of the Hero of the Soviet Union General Weinrub; of the builder Gindin; of the engineer Solomon Abi-Saulevitch Shaikovich, or of Lev Benzionévich Alter, or of Henrich Zimanas, chief editor of *Tiesa (Pravda)* in Vilna, or the editor of *New Times*, Lev Sedin, or the bridge-builder of the Ukraine, Barenbaum, or the most impotrant architect of Kiev—Maletskil

What gave such a responsible person as Supreme Court Justice Arthur J. Goldberg the right to say (in the same film) that the Soviet Union is carrying through a “plan of anti-Semitic action”? Is that why Jews occupy such prominent positions in that country? And how could Senator Jacob K. Javits say, pointing to a bundle of issues of *Pravda*, that they contained incitements against Jews? Let him give at least one quotation of such a nature from *Pravda!* I have been reading that paper regularly for years and I have never seen such “incitements”! During the two months I spent in the Soviet Union I remember only two instances where *Pravda* used the word “Jew”—once on December 17 (1964) when it reported from New York that Rabbi Joachim Prinz had made a speech against the statute of limitations on trials of Nazi war criminals. (Dr. Prinz’s title was given as President of the American Jewish Congress.) The other occasion, December 19, was a report from Vienna about a condemned murderer of Jews. Let Senator Javits cite *his* dates.

I do not charge that Justice Goldberg or Senator Javits personally invented the things they said. Nor am I accusing Edward G. Robinson—although a narrator of a film bears a particular responsibility for his words. But I *am* accusing the script-writers who prepared this tainted material. And I ask such responsible bodies as the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, who sponsored the film: How could they lend their names to such an abominable fabrication as *The Price of Silence*?

Babi Yar

The script writers put into the mouth of Edward G. Robinson words to the effect that Babi Yar “is now a garbage dump.” The film was shown for the first time at Hunter College on October 28, 1964. On Dec. 15, 1964 I was at Babi Yar myself

and I say categorically: The story that Babi Yar is a “dump” is an atrocious lie!

A memorial at Babi Yar? That is a different story. There *should* be one there. (I told this to the Vice Premier in Kiev.) If this fact were pointed out in the film, or that religious Jews are meeting certain restrictions, or that Jewish culture has not yet been completely rehabilitated—these things would be true. But this is not what the film is mainly concerned with.

The entire film, *The Price of Silence*, creates a picture of misery and terror of Soviet Jews. People who see the film must say to themselves: With such a country there can be no coexistence, no peace. The same conclusion can be reached by many who are generally influenced by the propoganda of “Soviet Anti-Semitism.” The question is: Is it good for America, for the Jewish people, when the cause of peace and coexistence is undermined?

Remnants of Anti-Semitism

Does this mean, then, that there is no anti-Semitism whatever in the Soviet Union? No, there is. There are still a number of unsolved problems—as we have just indicated, referring to religious restrictions and the question of the rehabilitation of Jewish culture. And there are other “remnants.” Jews are still missing in the diplomatic field—a remnant of the Stalin “cult” period which still has to be overcome. Moreover, in the Soviet Union, a land of 230 million people, individuals are tried every day for crimes, minor and major. At my meeting with the prosecutors they gave me quite interesting statistics about the steady *decline* in the crime rate—but among the “negative elements” there are most certainly criminals guilty of anti-Semitism, remnants not only of Czarist days but chiefly of the Nazi occupation and the Stalin cult. It should be remembered too that Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia in 1939 were still under the Pilsudski regime and after that under Nazi occupation. Against these anti-Semitic remnants there ought to be an open struggle—as part of the general struggle against criminals, as part of the struggle against nationalism and chauvinism. If the Leninist approach is to be reinstated—and one hears about this constantly in the Soviet Union—then anti-Semitism must be combatted the way Lenin did.

It is true that I personally did not encounter any anti-Semitic acts or anti-Semitic literature (as one does in America, unfortunately), nor did I see any criminals wearing swastikas on their arms. But I spoke with many people, and some of them told me that one can still meet an anti-Semite here and there, or detect an anti-Semitic feeling. An anti-Semitic insult often goes unpunished. And then you get a Kitchko book or a Mayatsky book, or other "literature" of that sort which, even if not intended to be anti-Semitic, turns out to be anti-Semitic in fact, or in effect.

My visit to the Soviet Union proved to me how correct was the opinion expressed in the editorial of *Political Affairs* (June, 1964) that a struggle is necessary against these anti-Semitic remnants. The editorial spoke of the bad and harmful anti-religious propaganda and of abolishing all the restrictions against believers, direct or indirect, in the practice of their religion. These are serious things *which should not be minimized*. But a bad and harmful approach to anti-religious propaganda can be found among Jews, too, just as there can be Jewish assimilationists who have a false approach to Jewish culture. (We have such Jews in the USA too and there are Zionist leaders who are opposed to Yiddish.) But this is not anti-Semitism—as a policy!

The Kitchko Book

A few words about the Kitchko book (*Judaism Without Embellishment*) will illustrate what we have just said. One of my purposes in going to Kiev was to visit the Ukrainian Academy of Science which issued this book. I spent a few hours in the office of Prof. Victor Gutir, Vice President of the Academy (the president was on a trip to Japan). He familiarized me with the activities of this body, an important scientific institution on a world scale. He pointed out the large number of Jews in the Academy—scholars, associates, heads of Institutes. Among its many complex activities there is a publishing department for popular books and pamphlets—which printed the Kitchko book. When the editor of this body was asked why he had issued the book he pointed to the foreword by the two "experts" who had recommended it. I knew that one of them—Plotkin—was a Jew. Now I discovered that the other, Vedenski, is also a Jew. The editor—he admitted it himself—had not even read the book, since two Jews had given it their OK!

The editor was removed from his position and Kitchko is now practically ostracized, removed from public life. The two Jewish "experts" are not to be seen anymore. But the fact that Jews are the chief culprits here confirms an opinion which I expressed in my articles about the book in the *Morning Freiheit* (March, 1964). The major share of the blame here should go to the manner in which anti-religious propaganda is conducted in the Soviet Union; even when it is written by Jews, who have no anti-Semitic *intent*, the vulgar and harmful anti-religious propaganda takes on an anti-Semitic character.

Jewish Culture

I have touched on a few negative aspects which, of course, should not conceal the positive things, the participation of Jews in general Soviet affairs, the prominent place which they occupy in public life. I want now to deal with the question of Yiddish culture and *begin* with a negative aspect.

What is the essential thing? The essential thing is that Jewish culture must be fully rehabilitated! There must be the same *approach* as there was in the 30s. Whether the *forms* must all be the same is another matter. Certain forms may change. For instance, I do not think self-sufficient Jewish (Yiddish) schools are possible *everywhere*. Perhaps in Vilna, or Kovno or other cities where the majority of Jews gave Yiddish as their mother tongue, it is possible. (In Kovno, 75 percent of the Jewish population; in Vilna, 70 percent.) In other cities, Yiddish will have to be one of the subjects in the public school if parents request it for their children, or there will have to be supplementary hours of instruction for these children. As regards Jewish theater (in Yiddish), if plays cannot be presented every day of the week, let them be presented as often as possible, say, on week-ends. The *forms*, how Yiddish culture will take shape, will have to develop in the process of applying the proper, Leninist approach of the thirties. This, the *approach*, is the essential thing! Full, principled rehabilitation of Jewish (Yiddish) culture, with state theaters, newspapers, publishing houses, university chairs in Yiddish, text books, Jewish history books, history of the Jews in the labor movement, etc., etc.—full rehabilitation on the basis of equality with all other nationalities.

Important Achievements

Bearing this in mind, I must, however, emphasize the *great achievements* which I found, as compared to six years ago. Surprising, gladdening experiences I had because of these achievements. It is not only the magazine *Sovietish Heimland*, although this is a very important, a splendid publication which should be more widely read even here in the United States. *Sovietish Heimland*, now a monthly, has become a world-address, a broad Jewish cultural institution. It is also a publishing house *in a sense*. One Yiddish book—*Azoy Lebn Mir* (This Is How We Live) had appeared while I was still there, in November, 1964. It was beautifully printed. Another book, *Horizontn* (Horizons) was published—an anthology of 50 contemporary Yiddish poets. In addition, this year six other books are scheduled—by Peretz Markish, Elya Shechtman, Nota Luria, Jacob Shternberg, Moishe Teif, and one other anthology. Not sufficient in comparison with what once existed, but a substantial beginning.

Further, the staff of *Sovietish Heimland* received a gift from the Ukrainian Scientific Academy—the Russian-Yiddish dictionary which the former Jewish department of the Academy had prepared. The dictionary is now being completed and will be published.

When Aron Vergelis, editor-in-chief of *Sovietish Heimland*, and I visited Ilya Ehrenburg, he gave us two large portfolios of letters which he received during the war from Jews concerning Nazi horrors. The letters are now in the safe of *Sovietish Heimland* and will be studied and edited.

In December (1964) I had the good fortune to participate in a conference called by *Sovietish Heimland* in Moscow, actually a conference of Jewish cultural workers from all over the country, although it was designated as a “critics’ conference.” An air of optimism reigned there. The leading theme was: “*We are in motion,*” as Vergelis expressed it; or “*We are in a process of renewal,*” as the critic Moishe Notowich exclaimed.

In Odessa and Vilnius

Of importance too are the *readers’ conferences* called by *Sovietish Heimland*. At one such meeting, in Odessa, I had the

honor of bringing the 500-600 assembled Jews greetings from America. It was most moving to hear the ovations they gave my remarks, and the cheers that greeted the news that the magazine had become a monthly, and that Yiddish books are to be published. Similar meetings have been held in Moscow, Kiev, Vilna, and Birobidjan. Other meetings are planned in Leningrad, Kishinev, and Czernowitz. *No meetings like these have taken place since the 'thirties!*

(Those in our own country who once developed the theory that Soviet Jews are all “integrated” and do not want Yiddish culture should learn something from these meetings.)

In Vilna I attended one of the Yiddish concerts which take place in many cities of the Soviet Union. The concert was given by the Yiddish actress Sidi Tal, of Czernowitz, with her ensemble. About one thousand people attended, including many young people. Twice in the same week the Vilna State Theater was filled with about one thousand people each time, although Vilna has no more than about 18,000 Jews all told.

Officially it is reported that the Yiddish concerts in 1963 had an audience of 300,000, truly an extraordinary percentage of the Jewish population. (There is no question that non-Jews, if they come at all to such concerts, are very few in number. At the Vilna concert which I attended, the audience seemed to be completely Jewish. It is clear therefore that this proportionately-large attendance represents a sort of *vote* of the Jewish population in favor of Yiddish theater and Jewish culture in Yiddish in general.) There is also a highly-developed Yiddish theater troupe in Vilna, one of the amateur trade union groups. It has presented about ten plays in the last four or five years, and was preparing an I. L. Peretz program for the 50th anniversary of the death of the Yiddish classicist. This troupe travels to Kovno and other cities to perform. Under the supervision of this same body there is also a chorus, a dance group, a mandolin orchestra. They often appear together on the same program.

Very few cities in the Soviet Union have what Vilna does in respect to Yiddish culture. In Kovno there is a Yiddish drama group and a chorus, on a smaller scale, the entire Jewish population being only 5,000. In Leningrad it is reported there is an amateur Yiddish cultural ensemble. Apart from the professional concert groups or professional singers, there can be no claim that Jewish cultural work—in Yiddish, or Russian, or Ukrainian

—on a mass scale is being conducted. Regardless of this, however, and keeping in mind the mass meetings of *Sovietish Heimland* readers and the role of the magazine generally, I found a mood which justifies the words “revival,” “movement,” “renewal.” And since in the Soviet Union there is a general trend towards the “safeguarding of Leninist norms,” one should expect that as regards Jewish culture these norms will be supplied—by a full rehabilitation of this culture. In any case it is clear that there can be no talk of returning to Lenin’s methods while not returning, at the same time, to these methods in the field of Jewish culture.

The Removal of Khrushchev

This leads to the general situation in the Soviet Union which is today, in a sense, also in a process of renewal, with the strengthening of collective leadership after the removal of Nikita Khrushchev. It is not my task here to evaluate the Khrushchev period, but it is clear that that period had several *positive* high-points: the exposure of the crimes of the Stalin-Beria period; the instituting of socialist legality; the rehabilitation of masses of individuals, including the Yiddish writers; strengthening the struggle for peace and coexistence. But by far not all the Stalin-remnants were eliminated, and in 1960, as I heard in the Soviet Union, Khrushchev’s personal style of work began to make its appearance—taking uncalled-for personal responsibilities, dealing impulsively, not consulting with the Presidium on many important matters. And the fact that Khrushchev filled both important posts—First Secretary of the Communist Party and Premier, apparently made the situation worse.

Let me stipulate that as far as I heard in Moscow, the Presidium of the Party was opposed to Khrushchev’s “feat” of giving Nasser the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev made this promise publicly without the agreement of the Presidium. This aroused dissatisfaction. Khrushchev’s impulsive conduct, changing the apparatus of the Party (splitting the apparatus into separate industrial and agricultural divisions), changing administrative personnel—all this caused dissatisfaction and hindered the development of both industry and agriculture.

The fact that the removal of Khrushchev took place without disturbing the country—even if the method of doing it was not the

best—shows that there was no Khrushchev-cult in any way similar to the Stalin-cult. Legality was not violated. It is a sign of a better time, which Khrushchev himself helped to create.

The division of the two highest posts—First Secretary and Premier—between two individuals, the fact that collective leadership (which apparently did not exist in recent years in its best form) was reinstated, has created an atmosphere of greater security, of freer expression, of better planning.

The “Lieberman Plan”

Here we come to another matter. The Soviet Union is now approaching important changes in the management of its economy. It faces the urgent task of raising the quality of its products—not only the quantity—and of finally solving the problem of its agriculture. And it is perhaps no accident that one of the most important economists in the country, Alexei Kosygin, is now the Premier.

400 enterprises in the Soviet Union have now begun to institute the so-called Lieberman Plan. This is a plan, briefly (I do not pretend to be an economist), to tie production to the market, to the consumer; to reward factories with extra bonuses not so much for quantity as for quality. They are loosening the strict centralization which hamstrung the initiative of individual factories under specific, local conditions. This centralization, which was apparently necessary years ago, was maintained by the “cult” long after it had outlived its usefulness. The fact that production was separated from the market, from trade—a situation which stemmed from the NEP period when trade was capitalist and production socialist—and stemmed also from a time of scarcity when the consumer “swallowed” anything—this situation had apparently, years ago, even before Yevsei Lieberman, among others, came out with his plan, retarded the economy’s development. Now, it seems, there began a process of dismantling those forms in industry and agriculture which were obstacles in the way.

(It could be noted here that the name Lieberman on the new plan also tells us something about the preposterous slogan of “Soviet anti-Semitism.”)

Another of the main tasks now in the Soviet Union, as pointed out in various statements, is the strengthening of Socialist democ-

racy. It is this process which one meets in the Soviet Union when one speaks with people, with the youth, when one sees how foreign broadcasts are listened to and discussed. I remember well my impression of six years ago when the terror of the cult-period was still felt. I found a great change in this respect, although that does not mean the fear has disappeared from every last individual in the Soviet Union.

A curious thing: An old friend of mine in Moscow told me openly on the telephone: "Six years ago you asked me a question which I did not answer. Now I'll answer it." The fact that he came to see me at my hotel (in 1959 he did not want to do this) is in itself an expression of a new situation. But answering a question I asked him six years ago reminded me of the story of the Yiddish humorist writer, Yosl Cutler, about the fellow who made a date with a girl for eight o'clock and came a little late—he came fifty years after eight. . . .

Six years is less than fifty but the wheels of history grind slowly; six years mean quite little for them. But they grind steadily. Through curious incidents like this and through serious public statements, you can see and feel how socialist democracy is being strengthened and how it finds expression in higher levels of economic and cultural life.

The Spirit of the People

Take a walk on Gorki Street in Moscow, or on Lenin Prospect in Vilna, or on the Kiev "Krestchatik," or on Nevski in Leningrad; come to a Brecht play in a Moscow theater filled with young people; come to the "House of the Literati" at an evening devoted to the memory of the writer Isaac Babel and hear the ovations for Ilya Ehrenburg, who was quite outspoken; come to a reception given by the writers in Riga and hear the frank words of those present; come to a meeting of the Yiddish writers in *Sovietish Heimland* and listen to the demands for "another tribune" in addition to the magazine; come to Odessa to a meeting of Odessa Jews and hear the ovations for the names of the Hebrew poet H. N. Bialik and the Yiddish classicist Mendele, hear the requests for Yiddish textbooks; come among the people, follow the press, and you will feel a new pulse beating, you will find socialist democracy growing stronger. . . .

I was impressed by the letter of a Leningrad worker on page

one of *Pravda* criticizing the workers in his factory who are always keeping quiet, always afraid to criticize. "Don't be silent! Don't cover up anything!" this worker wrote. It is of great significance that *Pravda* printed the letter on its front page.

(I would propose to certain devoted friends of the Soviet Union in our own country that they consider the words of that Leningrad worker carefully. Criticism, friendly criticism, is an important thing.)

Let us return to our "promenade" along the main streets of Soviet cities. In Moscow I especially liked to walk on "Kuznetski Most," near Gorki Street, where the bookstores are concentrated. It is wonderful to see how people buy books; wonderful to see the signs on the stores: Come get your volume number so-and-so of Dickens, or Pushkin, or Feuchtwanger, or Saltykov-Schedrin, or Ehrenburg, Hemingway, Alexei Tolstoi. . . . Books are sold along the sidewalks, and I loved to stop and see who was buying what.

When I came to Kiev I noticed that our chauffeur had a book alongside him. I caught a glimpse of the title—a chemistry book by an author with an odd name: Israelit. On the train from Odessa to Moscow I noticed a waitress in the dining-car reading a book—a translation from serious French literature.

According to a UNESCO statistic there are two books per person published annually in the world. In the Soviet Union this figure is *six*. In 1964 the Soviet Union published 78,204 titles in a total of one billion, 253 million copies! An astronomical figure, and it grows steadily. And there are books and books. A certain type of book sold in American drugstores can not be found there. . . .

Libraries in the plants and factories are nothing new in the Soviet Union but still you are amazed when you actually see them. In the Dynamo plant in Moscow I found a library of 120,000 books, half of them technical. In the library of an Odessa plant I found Yiddish books. In a Riga factory I saw the books being brought to the workers at the bench to save them the trouble of going to the library. And those who are active in cultural work in the factories collect subscriptions for literary journals or for the books of famous writers.

The "New Man"

I do not agree with those who say that in the Soviet Union one can already see the "new Socialist Man." It's not so. Such transformations do not take place so easily. There are still enough of the old habits, manners, weaknesses, superstitions, all sorts of remnants—but the *process* of preparing the new Man can be felt. Unless one is to assume that intense and widespread reading of good literature has no effect on people who read it—or that the absence of a money-grubbing society has no significance.

The translations from Yiddish should be mentioned here. I am not speaking here of Jewish culture per se, although Jewish literature in other language than Yiddish is actually that. But when you realize that during the last ten years books of Yiddish authors in translation have appeared in 25 million copies—a fantastic figure—you begin to comprehend what this means in terms of friendship between the peoples; how the joys and sorrows of the Jews are brought to other peoples through Jewish literature.

Automation

One more point. When I was "touring" the Dynamo plant with the Chief Builder Rabinovitch, he pointed out to me one worker who was tending machines which do the work ten men did before. And since I had the question of automation in mind anyway, I asked him about it when we returned to his office. I did the same on my visits to other plants. And they all pointed out to me what a *good* thing automation is, how it increases production and how the workers themselves are interested in it. *There is practically no such thing there as discharging a worker because of automation.* If one job becomes superfluous the worker is given another job. There are plenty of jobs. And if the worker must learn new skills, *he is taught*—at the same rate of pay he would get on the job. Automation is necessary for the Soviet Union not in order to get rid of workers but to increase production. In some cases automation is introduced only to make the work easier, even if production is *not* increased.

It should be mentioned here too that half of all the workers in the Soviet Union now have a high school or college education—an unheard of proportion, and this in a country which "only yesterday" had a majority of illiterates. (The Soviet Union

now has 1,230,000 engineers with higher education whereas the U.S. has about half that number—650,000).

I shall not go into detail on the subject of pensions, free medical treatment, free education, scholarships, vacations, etc. These are nothing new but they are there and in this field too there are gradual improvements. For instance, the price of medicines, already low in the Soviet Union, was recently lowered still further. In the new budget there is an increase in the sums for education and research. It is clear that all these improvements are an important factor in the growing feeling of security among the people, in a lessening concern for the morrow. I might note here too that average life expectancy in the Soviet Union has risen from 68 to 70 in the last six years.

Shortage of Housing

Again, does this mean that all the problems have been solved? By no means! Is there no discontent? There most certainly is! People look better, are better dressed, eat better—but with the eating comes the appetite. They strive for higher standards. They are not satisfied with the quality of the products. Certain products, especially clothing, are still too expensive. The "gap" between lower and higher incomes has been narrowed a little, but is still too wide, the difference is still too great. The living standard in general is still not high enough, although it is rising slowly.

There is still the very serious problem of housing. After the terrible destruction left by the war, and after the regression in the economy during the years of the "cult," and at a time when cities are growing unceasingly (Moscow's population in 1917 was something over a million, now it is 6 million), after all this it is no wonder that a lot of people are still living in bad, crowded conditions. But they are building at a fast tempo, as is well known. Just as it was six years ago, so today even to a greater extent, the symbol of the Soviet Union is the construction-crane; one often encounters a veritable forest of construction-cranes.

In Moscow, in the area of the new university, they are tearing down old dwellings and putting up new housing. The contrast between the two is tremendous. But people are still living in the old ones.

During the last six years 75 million people—a third of the

entire Soviet population—has moved into new quarters. During the last two years the building of new housing has slowed up a bit. Now the tempo has been stepped up. “Novoselye”—a house-warming—is a popular expression in Moscow and elsewhere these days. The new house is usually a modest one and the rent is ridiculously low. But the more people move into new houses the more impatient grow those who still have to live in the old ones. Some people have given up all hope of ever getting a new place. But such individuals are rare. And I might add: There is no such thing as a permanent slum, such as we have in our own country, which has never suffered the destruction of war, and even grown rich on it.

No Utopia

The tremendous construction now going on in the Soviet Union is an investment, so to speak, in the cause of peace. When one gives all his strength to construction he does not want a war; he wants a lessening of tensions because armaments mean cutting the funds for building. The fight for peace in the Soviet Union expresses itself not only in slogans, in literature, in song—which is important—but in a continuing reduction of military budgets. In 1963, a reduction of 600 million rubles; in 1964, 550 million rubles.

A few words about the vigorous campaign in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries against the “termination date,” the Statute of Limitations for Nazi war criminals adopted by the Bonn government. It is understandable that the Soviet Union wages this struggle against war criminals, against fascism, against the revanchists of Bonn, for the sake of its own interests, because every Soviet citizen still feels the last war in his own bones. But when the interests of a country, of a government, are based on the struggle against fascism, against neo-Nazism, against war criminals, murderers of Jews—then its interests coincide with those of the Jewish people, of America, of the world.

Before I make some comments—limited as they must be—about some other countries which I visited, I would like to emphasize what I said at the very beginning, and what I said six years ago: *Let us not think of the Soviet Union as a Utopia* where everything has been solved, where there are no problems and no difficulties. This will not correspond to reality, nor will

it be a favor to socialism. There still remain difficulties and problems—just as there are gains and achievements. We still face a process of struggle, struggle against inherited difficulties, against old habits, against violations, against errors, and a struggle against the influences and obstacles of the capitalist world.

The essential thing is, again: What is the course of history there—is it forward, to get rid of the society of “every man for himself,” of wars and spoliation? To that question I can answer: *With zigzags and with retreats* sometimes the course *goes forward*, the foundations of socialism are being strengthened, and insofar as those countries struggle against fascism, for peace, it is good for us too, for Jews, for America, for the entire world.

From Moscow to Warsaw

The trip from the center of Moscow to the Sheremetievo airport, for the plane to Warsaw, showed me how much the city of Moscow has spread out, has swallowed up the old villages on the outskirts of the city. The road signs reading TO VOLOKOLAMSK, TO ISTRRA, are names associated with the wartime communiques when the Nazi hordes were converging on Moscow. And I recalled how Ehrenburg, when I visited him in his datcha, complained that here, on the sacred mass-graves of the heroes who beat back the Nazis, there are still no memorials.

All sorts of thoughts went through my mind on the ride to the airport, after eight weeks in the USSR, mostly in Moscow. One has the feeling that some things were left undone; more things should have been seen and heard; one should have delved deeper into the homes, new and old, flashing by outside the car.

With these emotions, after saying goodbye to relatives, and to the editor of *Sovietish Heimland*, you take your seat inside the Soviet jet which rises from a snow-blanketed field and carries you off to Warsaw. And before you have even managed to look through the Moscow morning papers and finish your lunch, you are instructed to fasten your safety belt—and on an airport even more solidly covered with snow than the one in Moscow—the plane makes its easy landing and you are met by old friends, among them the editor of the Warsaw Yiddish newspaper *Folk Shtimme*.

In Warsaw

Warsaw, so familiar from so many visits since 1908. . . . Long-suffering, hard-hit Warsaw, which has risen from the ashes as beautiful as she was before, in some respects even more beautiful. Risen, but not completely. There is still much to do in Warsaw, as in all of Poland. And it seems that here, too, as in the Soviet Union, the followers of socialism let themselves be carried away by subjective feelings; they assumed that everything would be taken care of as if by a magic wand; that even the utter devastation left by the Nazis would disappear overnight. But the devastation is still felt, and not only because here and there you run into actual evidence of it. When the member of the Cabinet, Minister Janusz Wiercok, emphasized for me that during the war 40 percent of all Poland's property was destroyed, and when he stressed what six years of Nazi occupation meant, what the march of the Nazis across Poland toward the USSR and the retreat from the USSR did to the country, when he gave me these facts, I saw two things very clearly: First, that we ourselves were misled by our own enthusiasm into thinking that reconstruction, even in a socialist manner, would come easy. Second, I saw, on the other hand, the miracle of socialism, which, despite the destruction and despite the firm grip of the Catholic Church hierarchy on substantial sectors of the people, has transformed the formerly peasant Poland into a great industrial country with a socialist industry and tremendous achievements in education and culture.

Poland, like Czechoslovakia, like the Soviet Union, faces serious changes of its own in its economic structure; it must adapt its economy more concretely to its own conditions and to the moods of its population. It is well known that there is hardly any collectivization at all in Poland. And you can now find on Marszalkowska Street in Warsaw, or in Szczecin, or in Wroclaw, or other cities, small privately-owned stores which had been prematurely abolished. I do not want to compare this to the NEP period in the USSR, but one should not make a mistake about this; here, too, through struggles and difficulties and errors the course is forward. And when you see how the policy of the Polish government finds expression in Jewish life, you begin to comprehend the long way they have come in the solution of many of the Jewish problems.

Jewish Life in Poland

What I could say here about Jewish life in Poland, about Jewish culture, mostly in Yiddish but also in Polish, would not be news. But when you see it and experience it yourself, that's something else. I still feel the excitement of the celebration held in mid-January (1965) to honor the 20th anniversary of Warsaw's liberation—the plenary meeting held by the leaders and active workers of the Cultural-Social Society of the Polish Jews. I can still feel the heightened atmosphere in which I listened to the report of the renowned actress and theater director Ida Kaminska about the Warsaw Yiddish State Theater; when I heard the spirited report of Hirsh Smoliar, editor of the daily Yiddish *Folk Shtimme*, about the traditions of the Jews of Poland, and how these traditions are finding their worthy expression today; when I heard the chairman of the Presidium of the Cultural-Social Society, Leib Domb, speak of *Yiddish Buch*, the publishing house of books in Yiddish which is growing so amazingly; when I heard the report of Professor Ber Mark about the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; when I heard representatives of the youth and the songs of the Yiddish youth choruses—when all these things had soaked into my consciousness I *really* began to comprehend what heights Jews can attain with their culture under socialism, with a Leninist approach.

Three times a day, like the ancient Hebrew prayers, we should sing praises to People's Poland and its socialist government for its Leninist approach toward the national question, toward Jewish culture. And if it was ever true, as the old saying goes, that "the treatment of its Jews is the barometer of a country" it is true here—especially when one remembers how Pilsudski's Poland treated the Jews.

But here too I want to add a little sober prose to the poetry. That there are tragically-few Jews in Poland is well known, and you can feel it. (Especially in the theater, which is sometimes not filled even at a premiere.) Those among American Jews who preached the "Exodus from Poland" (for their own political purposes) should be the last to find fault with Jewish life in Poland. The small number of Jews must understandably affect the work. But in the great enthusiasm I saw that night in the Yiddish State Theater in mid-January, during the performance of the Youth Ensembles of Lignitz and Lodz, the problems were

shunted aside. It is the same when you see the packed halls in Szczecin, Wroclaw, Lodz; when you visit the Jewish schools maintained by the government, the cooperatives, when you see the many-sided activities of the Jewish committees in the various cities, the buildings they own. Again you are impressed with what can be done for Jewish culture in Yiddish and in the language of the country, under a new society.

The Message of Buchenwald

I must leave Czechoslovakia for future discourse, but I do want to note here the new "thaw" I found in my talks with writers, economists and movie-directors in Prague; a new wave of liberalism, so to speak, a new critical way of looking at things without fear; friendly criticism in the framework of the new socialist society.

I visited the wonderful Prague Jewish museums maintained by the government. I saw the famous Pinchas Synagogue on whose walls are inscribed the names of all the Czech Jews murdered by the Nazis—over 77,000 names, and I was shaken by the sight. I went to Lidice and to the "model" concentration camp at Theresienstadt; there is so much to tell about that!

But let me conclude with the camps at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen in the German Democratic Republic, GDR (East Germany). After I had seen Babi Yar and Auschwitz and Maidanek, the horrors of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald could not surprise me. And after I had seen the Warsaw Ghetto Monument, and others like it, the Jewish museum in Sachsenhausen was also incapable of surprising me—though we must be grateful to the German Democratic Republic for establishing the museum, for publishing books—in German—about the Warsaw Ghetto, for translations—into German—of the writings of the Yiddish classicist I. L. Peretz to honor the 50th anniversary of his death, and for other books by and about Jews. I was impressed by a class of German children in Sachsenhausen who came with their teacher from Dessau. I was told that this was part of the regular curriculum—to bring children to the concentration camps and let them see what Nazism did. They are shown (in Buchenwald) the place where Thaelmann was executed; the Thaelmann spirit, the Liebknecht spirit is strengthened in the children.

I visited a few schools in Berlin, looked at the text books, saw the chapters on the "Crystal Night," the pogroms; this—the re-education of the youth, which has been going on for the last 15 years, is of basic significance for a truly "different" Germany. It was one of the sharpest impressions I took away from there.

This does not mean that there are no more "ex-Nazis" in the GDR. It only means that they are "lying low"; that the *criminals* among them were tried long ago—and many of the criminals fled to the West before they were apprehended. It means that in the government there are no men of Globke's stripe. The German Democratic Republic is ruled by men of the Thaelmann-Liebknecht spirit, former fighters in Spain, former inmates of concentration camps. And you find Jews among government officials in the GDR, something which is impossible in West Germany. One of the most important government officials is *Albert Norden*, the son of a rabbi. Hirsh Smoliar of the Warsaw *Folk Shtimme*, M. Vilner of the Paris *Naye Presse*, I. Gershman of the Toronto *Vochenblatt* and I—four editors of four Yiddish newspapers—spent several hours with him. Herman Axen, the editor-in-chief of the central organ of the Party, *Neues Deutschland*, is a Jew. Dr. Georg Kraus, chairman of the journalists' organization, is a Jew; Leah Grundig, the warm and friendly Jewish artist with whom we talked for a whole evening, is the chairman of the Artists Federation of the GDR. And Arnold Zweig, in whose home I visited, is honored in his country. Together with the fact that the government is made up of anti-Nazis, people who were persecuted by the Nazis, old-time fighters against fascism, all this gives the GDR quite a different atmosphere.

How different from West Germany! I attended the Frankfurt trials in West Germany. It is simply agonizing to realize that only now, 20 years later, have the murderers of Auschwitz been brought to trial; to watch their insolence and the insolence of their attorneys toward the witnesses who often collapse while recounting their experiences. Even worse is to see the wealth of the city of Frankfurt—largely stolen wealth—wealth acquired with the help of America; to see how the chief culprits of Auschwitz—I. G. Farben, Krupp, and others who made fortunes out of the tortured bodies of the inmates—are now the real power behind the Globkes. *They have held on to their booty*; they are richer now than they were before.

Painful too is the sweet-talk, the fawning, of the West Germans. All of them swear that they knew absolutely nothing about what Hitler was doing to the Jews. In fact, they love Jews. Even the organ of the SS, *Nationale und Soldaten Zeitung*, writes that it is against anti-Semitism. . . . The SS is against anti-Semitism! (The organization of Waffen SS, like other Hitlerite organizations, is legal, while the Communist Party is outlawed and other anti-fascist organizations are hounded.)

As I was experiencing this I recalled what the martyr Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote in his Notes of the Warsaw Ghetto: He asked how it was possible for the Nazis to deport 300,000 Warsaw Jews to Treblinka so easily; and he answered: "*The perfidy.*" The Nazi-German perfidy, the low, bloody deceit. And when I see how, today, certain people bait the East German government and insist on maintaining alliances with West Germany through armaments and other such things, I think about this "perfidy." When I hear SS men talking against anti-Semitism, I think of this perfidy. They want a war against the East—and they'd rather the Jewish people didn't put up any obstacles.

So one wants to exclaim: *Let Us Beware!* Come back with me to Buchenwald in the GDR. There you will see a remarkable complex of monuments to commemorate the martyrs of a dozen peoples; in the midst of the monuments is a high tower containing a bell at the very top. Twice a day, at 10 in the morning and three in the afternoon, the Buchenwald Bell rings. The sound carries far across the fields of Thuringia and must be clearly heard below, in Weimar. Only the Nazi fiends could have arranged such a diabolic trick—that in the hilly country over Weimar, the home of Goethe, the home of Schiller who wrote the *Ode to Joy*—"Alle Menschen seinen Brueder"—they would erect a Buchenwald with its crematory-chimneys rising over Weimar. So the bell of Buchenwald rings here twice every day. And thus the Soviet poet Alexander Sobelev, in his poem, *The Buchenwald Bell*, can say:

"People of the world, stand up a while,
Listen, listen well to the sound from everywhere
From everywhere beneath the skies of Buchenwald
A tolling of bells, a tolling of bells . . .

People of the world, redouble your guard—
Guard the peace, guard the peace. . . ."

I am concluding, therefore, on a note on which I began this short report. I will have a lot more to say about my four months stay in Europe—many additional things to say, and in more detail, about the Soviet Union, many things to say about Poland, the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, countries which are merely mentioned here in passing. But above all let us hear the call for peace coming from the countries I visited, let us behold the sounds of the Buchenwald Bell:

"Peoples of the world, redouble your guard—
Guard the peace, guard the peace. . . ."

* Translated into Yiddish by Elya Reisman, Polish-Yiddish poet and retranslated here from the Yiddish version.

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