

A MEMO TO SOVIET LEADERS

A memorandum to the leaders of the Soviet people "urgently requesting" that the Soviet Union issue an authoritative statement regarding the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union was sent on October 12 under the signatures of 26 progressive Jewish leaders and writers. The full text of the memorandum and the signees follows:

Hon. Nikolai A. Bulganin,
Chairman, Council of Ministers,
U.S.S.R.

The Kremlin
Moscow, U.S.S.R.

Hon. K. Y. Voroshilov,
President of the Presidium of the
USSR Supreme Soviet,
Moscow, U.S.S.R.

Honorable Sirs:

The undersigned are individuals active in Jewish community and cultural life, trade unionists or members of Jewish organizations which represent an important segment of the five million Jews in the United States.

We have always cherished the common ties which bind American Jews with their brothers and sisters throughout the world. This bond exists by virtue of the common past and history of the Jewish people, of the creation and common appreciation of cultural values and languages, and for many Jews, of a common religion.

For the majority of the Jewish people in the United States, whether they agreed with the social-political system of the USSR or not, the Soviet Union set the historic example of the liberation of peoples from all forms of na-

tional oppression and discrimination. The Jewish people rejoiced when the Soviet Union was the first country in all history to pass a law making anti-Semitism a crime and to institute complete equality of all races and peoples.

This enlightened policy contributed to the flowering of a brilliant Soviet Jewish culture in the Yiddish language in the 20's, 30's and 40's, which enriched Jewish culture generally and contributed to the development of Jewish culture in America.

When the Soviet Union proclaimed Birobidjan as the Jewish Autonomous Region in 1934, people of diverse viewpoints regarded this as an historic act which aimed at securing the national existence and development of the Jewish people as an equal member among all the nationalities of the USSR.

Not only Jews but all anti-nazis rejoiced when the Soviet Union welcomed 400,000 Polish Jews in flight from Hitler murderers—and as a result of special measures of evacuation succeeded in protecting its Jewish population and proved to be the only country where the majority of the Jewish population—two and a half million Jews—survived nazi occupation.

IN THE LIGHT OF THIS POSITIVE APPROACH to problems of the Jewish people, the revelations of the crimes committed against Soviet Jews as a result of a departure from the historic nationalities policies of the Soviet Union have caused widespread shock and consternation not only among Jews

but among millions of Americans.

We are aware that these crimes resulted from the gross distortion of the Soviet legal system. These distortions, as we have learned, have done great injury to the Soviet population in general. We have noted that in the process of eliminating the former injustices certain steps are being taken to correct the wrongs suffered by Soviet Jews as well. These efforts are all to the good. We suggest, however, that certain considerations still stand in the way of adequate rectification.

The Jewish people of the United States are deeply disturbed by the fact that no authoritative statement has to this date been made on the disappearance of Jewish cultural and communal

institutions or on the execution and jailing of so many Jewish leaders.

This situation was hardly improved by the remarks of Ekaterina Furtseva, made in an interview with Tabitha Petran in the American weekly *National Guardian* (June 25, 1956) to the effect that "if there had been any drive against the Jewish people or Jewish culture, 'we would have published it ourselves and would not need to have it published in the Polish press.'"

We are greatly concerned that such a prominent leader is not even aware of the undeniable facts regarding the disappearance of Jewish cultural institutions and personalities in her country.

UNKNOWN LOVER

For a Jewish Poet

By WALTER LOWENFELS

Your love of me abolishes your death-
corrupted self, leaps distance none survive,
lights up your smile and puts you here, alive
in me. I touch you, breathing on my breath.

Then tell them quick, my innocent, confess
the truth—swear it!—what poet ever lied?—
you are the unknown lover we denied,
the heartbreak that your love of us keeps fresh.

Tomorrow was my life to my last day . . .

Enough, enough! This love that your heart leaves
I take—to be your life, your love, your youth.

In your own land, six thousand miles away
and mine, where I was deaf, your laughter breathes
in millions—turns you, dead, into our truth.

Equally upsetting was Ekaterina Furtseva's statement in the same interview to the effect that certain government departments supposedly contained an excessive proportion of Jews. Coming on the heels of news items quoting other leaders of the Soviet Union in a similar vein, the Jewish people, along with all democratic-minded groups, are deeply shocked by anything suggestive of quotas based on race or nationality considerations.

Another fact which has caused concern is the treatment of the Jewish people in Volume 15 of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, which appeared in 1952. The section on "Jews" (*Yevrei*), reduced to four columns as compared to 152 columns in the 1932 edition, negates the very existence of the Jewish people and even makes light of statistics pertaining to Jews. Great figures in Soviet Jewish life as well as world-renowned Yiddish writers, including the classics, have disappeared from all volumes of the new edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* published so far.

WE ARE HAPPY TO SEE THAT JEWISH religious leaders are invited to the USSR by the Moscow rabbinate. But we are constrained to ask: who speaks for the secular Jews of the Soviet Union that comprise the majority of the Soviet Jewish people.

We find it difficult to accept the premise that the communal and cultural life of Jews in the Soviet Union is limited to an exclusively religious status. For over 100 years a secular Jewish people's culture developed in your country. This culture was nourished by the humanist and liberation struggles of the Russian people. After 1917 the Jewish people of the Soviet Union received the opportunity of realizing the full potentialities of their cultural creativeness. A rich Jewish

culture flourished, expressed in daily newspapers, literary journals, state theaters, schools, scientific, literary and linguistic research institutions. All these enjoyed the full support of the Soviet government.

Now we are faced with the tragic fact that all these institutions have completely vanished. It is inconceivable that Jewish culture in the Soviet Union has overnight become obsolete or historically superfluous as a result of supposed "integration." Certainly the concept of "integration" does not explain a situation where all Jewish cultural institutions that flourished many years suddenly disappear completely. Many facts prove that this theory of "integration" runs counter to reality.

The unprecedented success of Jewish concerts in Moscow and other Soviet cities in the past months signifies to us that interest in, and need of, Jewish culture are alive in the Soviet Union. Scores of Soviet Jewish writers today engaged in creative work in the Yiddish language, are additional testimony of the potential for a Jewish people's culture in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet government recently reaffirmed its principle of fostering the general development and flowering of the economy and culture of all peoples and nationalities. This naturally includes, we hope, the developing and flowering of the culture of the Jewish people of the USSR.

It is apparent that the Soviet Union has exerted tremendous efforts to right the wrongs committed during the years preceding 1953. However, we wish to express our anxiety in respect to the reconstruction of Jewish communal and cultural life.

A PUBLIC AND AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT dealing with the injustices suffered and with the measures being

taken in the direction of re-establishment of Jewish cultural institutions will go far to allay the apprehensions about the future of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union. We urgently request that such a statement be issued as soon as possible.

In addition, we submit that due to the physical and intellectual losses sustained by the Soviet Jews, the process of reconstruction of their communal life will require the sympathetic and energetic aid of the Soviet leadership.

We are confident such aid will be forthcoming in accordance with the Soviet principle of strengthening the culture of nationalities.

In submitting this memorandum we are motivated by our interest in better understanding and cooperation among all peoples. It cannot be doubted that increased as well as hastened acts of reconstruction of Jewish life in the Soviet Union will have great value in strengthening friendly relations between our countries and will advance the objectives of co-existence and peace.

A. BERGMAN, Jewish educator

ABRAHAM BICK, rabbi, lecturer, writer
LOUIS DAVIDSON, trade unionist
SIMON FEDERMAN, community leader
FANNIE M. GOLOS, trade unionist
JUNE GORDON, women's organizational leader

BER GREEN, poet and journalist
MAURICE GRUBIN, community leader
LOUIS HARAP, editor and writer
ABRAMAM KOLB, trade unionist
ABRAHAM JENOFSKY, cultural organizational leader

NAUM KAMENETZKY, Jewish educator
NATHAN MACK, Jewish organizational leader

CHARLES NEMEROFF, trade unionist
PAUL NOVICK, editor and writer
SAM PEVZNER, journalist

PHILIP ROBERTS, Polish landsmanshaft leader

I. E. RONCH, poet and journalist
RUBIN SALTZMAN, community leader
GEDALIA SANDLER, community leader
EDITH SEGAL, dancer and instructor
MORRIS U. SCHAPPES, Jewish historian
SOPHIE SUSMAN, fraternal leader
ABRAHAM WISE, trade unionist
RUBIN YOUKELSON, cultural organizational leader

SAUL ZIPPER, Jewish teacher

Hungarian Fascists Massacre Jews

A SIGNIFICANT aspect of the situation in Hungary emerges from reports that "massacres" of Jews took place in Budapest. Sidney Gruson reported in the *N. Y. Times* (Nov. 1) from Warsaw that "Some reports reaching Warsaw from Budapest today [Oct. 31] caused considerable concern. These reports told of massacres of Communists and Jews by what are described as 'Fascist elements' amongst those fighting against Soviet intervention." Another report in the *Yiddish Day-Morning Journal* (Nov. 2) read: "A cable received by the Satmar Rabbi [in New York] from Vienna reports the alarming news that Jewish blood is being shed by the rebels in Hungary." And the Paris Yiddish paper, *Di Nait Presse*, on Nov. 8 quoted a letter from Budapest received by a Jewish woman in Paris describing a pogrom in which 200 Jewish men, women and children were murdered by people crying, "The Jews are the allies of the Reds! They must be rooted out so that no trace remains of them!"