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# JEWSS IN USSR

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Solomon Rabinovich

# JEW IN USSR



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Solomon Rabinovich, a veteran Soviet journalist, was born in the Ukraine in 1904. During World War II he held the rank of major and was editor of the Army newspaper "Forward to the West". He was decorated three times for valour in battle. Rabinovich now works regularly for the Novosti Press Agency, and is a freelance contributor to the Soviet Jewish magazine "Sovietish Heimland" and also to Jewish publications in the USA, Israel, France and Canada. Solomon Rabinovich is one of the authors of the book in Yiddish "This Is How We Live" published in Moscow in January 1965.

We receive letters from many countries asking us how Jews live in the Soviet Union. We have asked Solomon Rabinovich to tell our correspondents about that.

*First of all, I should like to dwell on how the national question was solved in the Soviet Union.*

Let us begin by looking into the historical past. In tsarist Russia the Russians comprised 43 per cent of the population. Other nationalities accounted for 57 per cent. Despite this ratio the entire way of life in the state was geared to the interests of the Russian minority. The vitally important problems that faced the other nationalities were ignored.

Old Russia embraced many oppressed peoples and nationalities, who were extremely backward economically, underdeveloped politically and culturally, almost completely illiterate, deprived of medical aid and doomed to starvation, disease and

to gradual extinction. Tsarism followed the motto of ancient Rome —“divide and rule”—and energetically fostered national discord and hatred in the country. Russian capitalism left behind the unsavoury memory of the Armenian-Turkish slaughters, colonial oppression in Central Asia and Jewish pogroms. Now these dark pages of the past seem as diabolical and improbable as the inquisition and medieval plague.

The October Revolution of 1917 put an end to this criminal policy and completely swept out all forms of discrimination against the non-Russian population of Russia, including the national minorities.

The numerous guests and tourists who visit the Soviet Union see for themselves that the Constitution is strictly observed here. It established as immutable law the equality of all citizens of the USSR, irrespective of nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural and socio-political activities.

The Penal Code of the Russian Federation (clause 74) as well as the Penal Codes of the other union republics provide for severe punishment (imprisonment from six months to three years or exile from two to five years) for any attempt to sow racial or national hatred, to insult national dignity, to restrict the rights of or, on the contrary,

to grant advantages to citizens because of their race or nationality.

From its very inception the young Soviet republic started to carry out radical measures to eradicate national inequality—the disgraceful heritage of tsarism, and resolutely fought the survivals of anti-Semitism which had been implanted for centuries.

One of the first legislative acts of the Soviet government was the Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia that was signed by Lenin on November 3 (16), 1917. The Declaration gave all peoples full political freedom and guaranteed each nation the right to self-determination, including secession and the right to form an independent state. The Declaration stipulated that the Soviet regime was guided in its activities regarding the nationalities of Russia by the following principles: 1) equality and sovereignty for all the peoples of Russia; 2) the right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, including secession and the formation of an independent state; 3) the repeal of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions; 4) free development of the national minorities and ethnographical groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.

The Soviet Union is a vast country. Its population amounts to approximately 228 million and

includes 109 different nationalities and 11 small national groups that are close to other, kindred peoples. The native people, who account for 97.6 per cent of the entire population, acquired national statehood under the USSR Constitution. They formed union and autonomous republics, national regions and areas. These include such union republics as the Russian Federation (RSFSR), Uzbekistan, Georgia, Azerbaidjan, and 20 autonomous republics. The remaining 2.4 per cent of the population who do not have their own states in the USSR come from nationalities which mainly live outside the USSR. Among them are Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, Kurds, Greeks.

It is not my purpose to describe in detail all these forms of state. This is a subject for special examination and would steer me too far away from my principal topic. I may make this remark, however; this diversity is primarily dictated by the Soviet regime's concern to provide all the nationalities, big and small, that inhabit our country, with the fullest, comprehensive opportunities to exercise their rights and to pursue their interests. Here is one fact to illustrate this point.

Two Chambers with equal rights, the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, were established in the USSR Supreme Soviet—the supreme organ of power in this country. This was done to

ensure the correct combination of interests of all the working people of the Soviet Union, irrespective of their nationality. What are norms of representation in these Chambers? The Soviet of the Union has one member for every 300,000 of the population. This is the same for all republics. If there were only one Chamber in the Supreme Soviet then the bigger republics would enjoy factual advantages over the smaller republics. In order to avoid this the Soviet of Nationalities has an *equal* number of members from all republics irrespective of territory or population. Every union republic has 25

**“Where in the whole world are we recognized as an equal nation? What government provides us with all opportunities for a progressive life? Where is anti-Semitism a state crime? Where are all roads open to us for the development of our physical and spiritual energies? Nowhere in the world do we enjoy the degree and scope of rights that we do in the Soviet Union.” (Haim Zhitlovsky, scientist and Jewish civic leader, USA.)**

members, every autonomous republic—11, every autonomous region—5, and every national area—1. For legislation to be passed it must have the approval of both Chambers of the Supreme Soviet.

All republics and autonomous regions have

their own state executives, planning and economic bodies, their own budgets, press, radio and TV, theatres, schools and institutes.

Let us see how this applies to the Jewish autonomous region. This region was founded by Decision of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR (now the USSR Supreme Soviet) on May 7, 1934.

The Jewish autonomous region, or Birobidjan, as it is sometimes called, is situated in the Soviet Far East and is part of Khabarovsk territory. It occupies an area of 35,800 sq. km. along the Amur, a high-water river in the Far East, and its tributaries the Bira and Bidjan. It is hemmed in by the picturesque Khingán mountains. It borders along the Amur river on People's China.

The Jewish autonomous region consists of five administrative districts with two cities-Birobidjan and Obluchye, 12 urban settlements, including Hingansk, Bira, Birakan, Londoko, Teplozersk, Smidovich, etc., and 43 villages.

At the moment the region was formed in 1934 its only industries were 15 craft shops and a dozen small factories. In the 30 years since then 50 big enterprises have been built in the non-ferrous metallurgical industry, in the engineering, cement, wood-working, paper and textile industries. There were also knitted goods and footwear factories,

food processing plants, building material mills, prefabricated homes factories, etc.

In one week's time the Jewish autonomous region now produces roughly as much goods in value as in all of 1934.

The Jewish autonomous region daily ships to other parts of Khabarovsk territory and throughout the country transformers, auto-tractor trailers, building materials, garments, footwear, textile, knitted goods and foodstuffs.

Much attention is paid to education and cultural advancement in the Jewish autonomous region. There are 160 schools with approximately 40,000 pupils. There are also teachers' training, medical, technical and music schools, as well as a school training farm-machinery operators.

The region's Sholom-Aleikhem Library has become a major cultural centre. Its collection includes the works of classical and modern Jewish writers. The library frequently holds literary readings and concerts.

The region broadcasts in Yiddish. The programmes include local newscasts, songs, literary readings and accounts of life in the region.

Concerts are frequently given in Birobidjan and in outlying areas by professional Jewish musical and variety groups.

There are two newspapers published in the

region. One is the "Birobidjan Zvezda", which appears in Russian, and the other—the "Burobidjaner Stern" in Yiddish. The Jewish autonomous region is proud of its local authors who write in Yiddish.

Lenin wrote in 1914 that the Jewish question could only be settled conjointly with the other basic questions that faced Russia at the time. The October Revolution in 1917 radically changed the position of all the nationalities in multi-national Russia. It also enabled the Jewish people to take the high road of free creative development. The Jews not only acquired the right, but the factual possibility to begin a different and entirely new life.

*What are the relations between the nationalities of the Soviet Union?*

Mention must first be made of the unselfish aid that the nationalities extend to one another. Let us take the recent past.

Giving political freedom to the oppressed nations of the former Russian Empire was not all. Who can say how many years would be required to alter the way of life of people on territories which formerly had no industries, railways, how many years would be needed to eradicate the national discord, which was foisted over centuries,

how many years would be required to instill literacy in a nationality that had no written language previously and did not even know what writing was? Furthermore, the inequality of nations which reigned for centuries in this huge country made itself felt at every step.

In order to make the proclaimed rights rights in reality, the Soviet state steered a course of more rapid economic development for areas populated by the formerly oppressed nations. With the direct participation and assistance of the more developed nations and, primarily, the Russian nation, the outer fringes of the country radically changed their economic and cultural features.

Take, for instance, the Republic of Uzbekistan. Prior to the revolution, cotton grown in Uzbekistan was shipped for processing to the central areas of Russia. Now it has become one of the centres of a highly modern textile industry. The Uzbeks were helped by Russian textile specialists to master the fine points of textile manufacture. Other industries are also developing successfully in Uzbekistan.

The 15 national republics of the Soviet Union acquired a new economic foundation to develop science and culture at an accelerated pace.

All peoples of this country regard one another as colleagues and comrades who work together



for a new life. I do not exaggerate when I say that the feeling of solidarity and friendship with other nations has become part and parcel of the Soviet way of life.

Could the local population have organised the prospecting, drilling and refining of the rich oil-fields along the Volga river and in Bashkiria, Central Asia and Western Siberia? Could they have built such huge hydro-power stations as the Kuibyshev, Volgograd, Bukhtarma and Bratsk by themselves?

In Kazakhstan, 34 different nationalities helped to build the Karaganda metallurgical mills. The Bratsk hydro-power station on the Angara river in Siberia was built by workers and engineers of 41 nationalities. Many more cases could be cited. There is truly inexhaustible force latent in the most humane moral principle of our day—man to man is a friend, comrade and brother.

The motto that guides the Soviet people is: support, assistance and friendship. This is true not only in happiness, but in sorrow, as well. I remember the past war which brought dire grief to my people... In the long centuries of Jewish history, ever since Roman rule and medieval terror, there were no more tragic pages than those describing the horrors and privation that fascism brought. The man-hating doctrine of the superio-

riety of the "Aryan race" decimated many nationalities. For the Jewish people this turned out to be a truly national tragedy. Hitler's official racial program aimed at completely destroying the Jews

**"If we still live it is thanks to the Soviet Union." (Andre Blumel, prominent lawyer and former President of the Zionist Federation in France.)**

everywhere. Mountains of corpses and ash were all that remained of the towns and settlements in which the Jews had lived for almost one thousand years.

In those difficult years the Soviet state, which was fighting a bloody war with a brutal enemy, found the means and possibilities of evacuating to the hinterland large numbers of people of many nationalities. Hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia and the Baltic Republics who were threatened with imminent destruction found refuge in Bashkiria, Kirghizia, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Siberia and the Urals.

In a book about World War II, which was published in Rome in 1948, M. Kaganovich, prominent in public affairs in Italy, correctly noted that during the most critical days for the Jews the Soviet government saved them from sure death. This en-

abled many tens of thousands of Jews who lived in the Ukraine and Byelorussia to survive the war. Approximately 300 thousand Jews, who fled from Poland from the advance of Hitler's hordes found salvation on Soviet territory and after the war were able to join their families, who lived outside the USSR. The American journalist, Paul Novick, has estimated that 2 million Jews were saved on the territory of the Soviet Union alone.

The brutal eradication of the Jewish population in the occupied areas caused deep pain to the Soviet people. Pavlo Tychina and Maxim Rylsky, two of the Ukraine's leading poets, wrote fiery poems dedicated to the tragedy of the Jewish peo-

**"There is lofty humaneness in Russia. That is why the Russian people ushered in a new era. Radishchev, the Decembrists, Chernyshevsky and the Bolsheviks all dreamt of fraternity. It was not the law of the tsars, but the spirit of the Russian people that consolidated the Russian Jews' ties with Russia. Tolstoi and Shchedrin, Gorky and Lenin raised their immortal voices in defence of the persecuted." (Ilya Ehrenburg).**

ple. A forceful poem appeared in 1942 in the Soviet press. It was by the Uzbek poet and scientist, Gafur Gulyam, who called his poem: "I am a Jew". Hitler's program for the complete oblite-

ration of the Jewish people heightened hatred for the enemy and inspired to energetic action. In temporarily occupied Minsk the Communist Party underground and guerilla command undertook heroic efforts to free as many people as possible from the ghetto and to transport them to the forests which were held by the guerillas. Ten thousand inmates of the Minsk ghetto were saved this way. Many of them are still alive and work in Byelorussia.

Many cases can be cited of Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, risking their lives to come to the aid of doomed Jews. In Kaunas two Russian women, Natalia Fugalevich and Natalia Egorova, organised refuge for those who managed to escape from the ghetto. Thirty Jews were saved in the village of Blagodatnoye in the Ukraine by Pavel Zinchenko, a collective farm book-keeper, at the risk of his life. Five farmers in the village of Zakutentsy, Zhitomir region in the Ukraine, Nikolai Sych, Vladimir Dyachuk, Natalia Shulyak, Galina Fisik and Pavel Kovtonyuk sheltered the family of Samuel Blimess from Berdichev for three years. Incidentally, there are about 100 Jewish families in this city who survived thanks to the selfless aid of the local Ukrainian population.

The fascists did not only want to exterminate

us Jews. They wanted us to disappear from this earth with the mark of coward stamped on each one of us. But history decided otherwise. The Jews struck the Hitlerites powerful blows. There were the uprisings in the Warsaw ghetto and ghettos of other occupied cities. There were Jews who fought in guerilla detachments. The Soviet Jews who felt the brotherly elbow of the Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Uzbek, Armenian, of the entire Soviet people, fought alongside them in the great battle for the honour and freedom of the Soviet homeland. On November 21, 1942, the Mos-

**"I frequently think that we are the first generation in many millennia, the first generation of Jews to have their own homeland. That is why I love this land with the tenderness of a first love" (from the last letter of Pavel Kogan, a young Soviet poet and soldier, who was killed near Novorossiisk in 1942 in the fighting against the fascists).**

cow newspaper "*Pravda*" reported that in the battle on the Volga three Soviet soldiers—a Jew Shoi-khet, a Ukrainian Tkachenko, and a Russian Chertsov, attacked 85 Hitlerites and destroyed them in a fierce clash.

The fraternal friendship linking the Soviet people manifested itself in diverse dramatic situations. In

one of the Byelorussian villages liberated by the Soviet troops in 1944 I was told how the Hitlerites captured three Russian soldiers and ordered them to dig a grave for the Jews. The Russians refused. Then the Hitlerites ordered the Jews to dig a grave for the Russians, but the Jews refused. The fascists then shot the Russians and the Jews.

In the War I, then a Soviet officer, fought my way with the Soviet army from Moscow to Berlin. I recall with pride the names of my fellow-Jews, who were among those who fought the Hitlerites so heroically in the air, sea and on land. The fascist invaders learnt from their bitter experience the destructiveness of the torpedoes of the legendary submarine "*Maluytka*", which was commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union, Israel Fisanovich, of the artillery formation commanded by Guards Lieutenant-General Girsh Plaskov, of the grenades thrown by a Moscow watchmaker and Hero of the Soviet Union, Lazar Papernik, who was a crack-skier of the air-borne forces, of the tank attacks of Hero of the Soviet Union, Solomon Gorelik, of the bomb blows of Hero of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Plotkin, whose plane was on display in Leningrad as one of the fighting relics of World War II.

I have a note in one of my wartime pads. I copied it from the official operations report: dur-

ing the forcing of the Dnieper river 900 Soviet soldiers merited the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Among them were 607 Russians, 181 Ukrainians, 27 Jews, 9 Tatars, 8 Kazakhs, 6 Armenians, and 2 Byelorussians.

The Soviet Union, the Soviet peoples shouldered the main burden of the struggle against Hitler Germany. In the decisive fighting to the death against racism, which not only threatened to wipe out my people, but to bring the blight of genocide to the whole world, the ideology of humanity conquered, an ideology founded on the principles of fraternity and cooperation among peoples.

*How many Jews are there in the Soviet Union?*

The 1959 Census showed that there were 2,268,000 Jews in the USSR. By 1964 the population of the Soviet Union had increased by nearly 20 million, consequently, there was a corresponding increase in the Jewish population.

The Jews are able to live and work just like all the other Soviet people do. Here are some figures referring to 1959. There were 875,000 Jews in the Russian Federation, 840,000 in the Ukraine, 150,000 in Byelorussia, 94,000 in Uzbekistan, 95,000 in Moldavia, 52,000 in Georgia, 25,000 in Lithuania, 37,000 in Latvia, etc.

And now some history.

The Jews settled on Russian territory some 800 years ago. In some parts of the former Russian Empire, as, for instance, the Caucasus and the Crimea, the Jews appeared approximately 2,500 years ago.

In 1791 the so-called residential restrictions were introduced. This meant that the Jews could

**"I was in Russia in tsarist times. I saw how hard a life the Jews lived at the time. They had no rights whatsoever. They were kept out of science, they were not allowed to live where they wanted to. It is simply impossible to list all the restrictions and humiliation that they had to undergo. I have not made a special study of the present position of Jews in Russia. But every time I visit the Soviet Union and I have been here no fewer than twenty times, I am convinced that the laws and ethics of the country do not permit discrimination of any nationality, including the Jews." (Professor Jerome Davis, American writer, Doctor of Philosophy.)**

only live in designated areas of the empire: on the territory of what is now Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, the Crimea, Moldavia and in a small area of central Russia. Closed to Jews was residence in Kiev, Nikolayev, Sevastopol, Yalta and other cities. Only Jews with higher edu-

cation, merchants of the first guild and in places craftsmen could live outside the prescribed areas. The latter were practically deprived of this right because of the complicated professional and police formalities and bribery involved. As for Jews with higher education they were a mere handful since there was a percentage restriction on Jews at all schools.

The residential restrictions were a major factor explaining the difficult position of the poor Jews who constituted the majority of the Jewish population in tsarist Russia. It was one of the causes of Jewish pauperism (up to  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the Jewish population).

The October Revolution of 1917 put an end once and for all to the residential restrictions, which were one of the most disgraceful pages in the persecution of the Jewish people. In recent decades large numbers of Jews moved from the small towns to big industrial and cultural centres. For instance a concert of Jewish songs in Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk or Novosibirsk now draws a much greater audience than in such traditionally Jewish towns as Berdichev or Vitebsk.

This, of course, does not mean that there are no longer any Jews left in Berdichev or Vitebsk or in other towns that were within the former residential areas for the Jews. There are Jews still

living there. But there is no trace of the previous isolated, fenced-off, Jewish way of life.

*A question is often asked as to what professions Soviet Jews prefer.*

In the past the Jews had their so-called traditional professions, ones that they preferred. Roughly 30 per cent of the Jewish population of tsarist Russia were engaged in petty trade. Within the Jewish residential areas there were only 20,000 Jewish workers. This was about the number of melameds (teachers of religious schools). And even these workers were employed at small factories. Since the large enterprises were primarily situated in the big cities the number of Jewish workers there was naturally negligible.

The life of oppression, which kept the Jews within strictly defined territorial bounds, made them take up anything that would earn them a livelihood. There could be no talk of preferred professions.

In Soviet conditions the Jews, who are free citizens, work in professions they never dreamt of before. Jews are given every opportunity of working in any sphere.

Jews no longer stand out like white crows among workers, farmers, officers, engineers and scientists. My friend, Haim Minkin, was a scout during the

war. For valour in battle he was awarded the Order of Glory, all three grades. Now he is a senior scientist at the Institute of Hydrogeology. Not long ago the entire Soviet press wrote about

**"This was my first visit to the Soviet Union. I went to many cities. In Minsk, in the centre of town, I saw two big displays with the names of people who had distinguished themselves in various spheres of endeavour. On one board of merit I counted eight Jews among the 24 names and four among the 22 on the other. I think this fact speaks much for itself." (Professor Haim Darin-Drabkin, Director of the Department of Economic and Sociological Research in Israel.)**

captain Gorelik. A group of sappers, working under his command, defused a huge dump of bombs discovered in Kursk many years after the war. Victor Mostovoi, commander of a TU-124 airliner, landed his huge plane on the Neva river in Leningrad in exceptionally difficult conditions when the plane's landing gear went out of commission. He saved the passengers and crew from what seemed to be unavoidable death. In the virgin lands territory Leah Goldberg, a state farm director, won acclaim for her good work. A person well known in Kishinev, Moldavia, is Shabsa Mau-shkatsan, shop foreman at an electrical equipment

plant, who merited the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. These are just a few names known all over the country.

I recently visited Berdichev, which used to be a typical town designated for Jewish residents under tsarism. I asked one of the local residents, Alexander Krifeld, to tell me about his life. Here is part of the interview:

"I have been working 30 years as a bus driver. My father, Samuel, used to carry passengers, too, just like I do. Only he was a "balegoleh", that is a droshky driver. He had an old horse that was just a bag of bones. Every day we feared that we would see father coming home harnessed to the droshky himself. On Saturdays he would sometimes treat us to cheap herring instead of meat. He was a big joker and in such cases he would always say: "Thank God it's not worse."

"What is life like now?"

"Judge for yourself. My children have grown up to be something. My daughter, Anna, is an engineer and is married to an engineer. They have two children. They live and work in Riga. My son, Zakhar, is a captain in the Soviet Army and now studies at a military academy. Last year, when I became sixty, I was given a pension..."

In a small village not far from Zhitomir there lived a glazier-Ilya Herman. He always walked

bent under the weight of his box of glass and he constantly prayed to God that the windows in the village might break as often as possible. His son—Max Herman—is no longer a glazier but an engineer in charge of the electrical department of a huge industrial complex—the Nizhne-Tagil metallurgical mills. Max's children grew up in the Urals. They, too, are not glaziers. His oldest son, Boris, is foreman of a blast furnace and his young-

**“I bow my head to the great Russian people who unfolded such tremendous opportunities in life for my people.” (Sholom Ash, Jewish writer, USA.)**

est, Ilya, is job foreman at a huge blooming mill. His second born, Maya, works as a lathe operator and studies at an evening medical college.

Then there is General David Dragunsky, who was twice awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. His father, Abram Dragunsky, was a “hereditary” tailor in the village of Svyatsk, Bryansk region. There was not always enough money in the family to buy bread for the children. Abram's sons and daughters learnt his trade from childhood. David, the youngest, was lucky. He was seven when the revolution took place. He went to school, then worked in Moscow building the underground (subway) and houses. He entered

the army as a private and served his way up to a General.

Evsey Gotsdiner left his village and trade many years ago. He was a cobbler, who performed miracles and returned old footwear to life. He moved to the Jewish autonomous region and settled in the village Valdheim. He started as stable-hand and later became a horticulturist. Now he is on pension. His wife, Basya, is still a dairymaid and his eldest son, Boris, a bee-keeper, has been awarded national certificates and medals for producing superior grades of honey. His youngest son, Yakov, is a farm-machinery mechanic. His daughter, Riva, is a vegetable grower. After marriage Riva became Riva Gotsdiner-Vischinikina. Her good work won her the respect of her fellow citizens and in 1962 she was elected a member of the Soviet Parliament.

What professions do Jews work in? Statistics help to clarify this point. There are 427,100 Jewish specialists with higher and specialized secondary education employed in the national economy. This is 19 per cent of the Jewish population in the Soviet Union.

We Soviet Jews are proud to be doing our share together with the other nationalities in the country in developing Soviet science. The Soviet Union has approximately 121,000 scientists. Half

of them work in technical spheres or physics and mathematics. Of every 100 scientists—50 are Russians, 10—Ukrainians, 6—Jews, 2—Armenians, 2—Georgians. 57 Jews belong to the USSR Academy of Sciences as Members or Corresponding Members. There are 20 Jewish Members and Corresponding Members of the USSR Academy of Medicine.

The Soviet Union has great respect for such big scientists who have made a name for themselves in national and world science as Nobel Prize Winners—Pavel Cherenkov, Ilya Frank, Lev Landau; Academicians Vladimir Veksler, Semyon Volfkovich, Alexander Greenberg, Alexander Mintz, Isaac Mintz, Alexander Frumkin, Gersh Budker, Bentsion Vuhl, Lev Gatovsky, Israel Gelfond, Leonid Cantorovich and many others.

Worthy replacements are being trained in Soviet science. The whole world is aware of the tremendous attention the Soviet Union pays to the training of young specialists with higher education. The Soviet student body includes 77,000 Jewish youths and girls. When entering a higher educational establishment the applicant's race or nationality makes no difference whatsoever. My family is a case in point. My eldest son is an engineer. He works in Moscow at an industrial designing bureau. While he was studying, my youngest son finished secondary school and in 1964 entered one

of the leading departments of the Moscow Power-Engineering Institute. He successfully passed the entrance examinations which are run on a competitive basis.

Soviet Jews are making a major contribution to Soviet-Russian literature and arts. 8.5 per cent of the writers and journalists are Jews. Among actors, musicians and artists 7.7 per cent are Jews. General recognition has been won by such prominent representatives of Soviet culture as the writers Ilya Ehrenburg, Samuel Marshak, Emmanuel Kazakevich, Vera Inber, Pavel Antokolsky, Isaac Babel, Vasili Grossman, Natan Rybak, Mikhail Svetlov; the violinists David Oistrakh and Leonid Kogan; ballerina Maya Plisetskaya; film directors Mark Donskoi, Grigori Roshal, Sergei Yutkevich; singer Mark Reisen; actors Arkady Raikin, Faina Ranevskaya. The Karl Marx monument in the centre of Moscow is the work of the Soviet sculptor Lev Kerbel, a Jew by nationality. In short, Jews work virtually in all fields of science, technology, culture and art.

*How do Jews participate in the country's public and state activities?*

They take part in such activities on a par with all the Soviet people.

The Jews are proud that they gave the country



such a brilliant personality as Yakov Sverdlov, the first President of the Soviet Republic, whom Lenin called an outstanding proletarian leader. Ever since Soviet power was instituted we see leaders in various economic and cultural spheres coming from different nationalities, including the Jews. Among them are Pyotr Schwartzburd, an engineer from Minsk, who is now Deputy Chief of the USSR State Planning Committee; Raphael Eligulashvili, President of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce, Mark Zlatkin, Chief Editor of Georgia's biggest Book Publishing House and his son Robert, who is a key official at the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. The latter three live in Tbilisi. In Tashkent there is Vladimir Vengersky, a ranking official of the Central Committee of the Uzbekistan Communist Party. In Kiev—Isaac Barenboim, who holds the title of Hero of Socialist Labour. He is a member of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party and head of a building organisation.

7,647 Jews have been elected to the national and local parliaments. Among them are Veniamin Dymshitz, Deputy Prime Minister of the USSR and Chairman of the USSR National Economic Council; Army General Yakov Kreiser, Hero of the Soviet Union; sculptor, Zair Azgur, who has merited the title of People's Artist of Byelorussia; Ilya Egudin,

Chairman of the Druzhba Narodov (Friendship of Nations) Collective Farm in the Ukraine; Genrikh Zimanas, Editor-in-Chief of the Lithuanian newspaper "Tiesa"; Naum Fershtak, one of the leading officials in the sphere of production and sales of agricultural machinery in Uzbekistan, etc.

Thousands of Jews hold leading posts in industry, in state institutions, in the armed forces, in schools and research institutions and in public organisations.

I should again like to stress the point that a man's place in Soviet society is not determined by his post or rank, but by his industriousness and his activities for the benefit of his fellow citizens.

*Some people in the West think that the Soviet Union does not publish any literature in Yiddish.*

It must be mentioned, to begin with, that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population, 80 per cent according to statistics, cannot read or write Yiddish. Naturally, they make wide use of the culture of the republic in which they live. At the same time they are given the possibility of reading Jewish literature translated into the corresponding language. During the past 7-8 years the works of Sholom-Aleikhem, for instance, have been published in Russian translation in a total edition of over 3 million copies. The 6-volume col-

lection of Sholom-Aleikhem's works, that was published to mark the writer's 90th birthday, appeared in a printing of 225,000 copies. The entire edition was bought up. Never before and nowhere else have Sholom-Aleikhem's works appeared in such a large printing—not even in the United States where some 6 million Jews live. The works of other Jewish classics—Mendele Moikher-Sforim and I. L. Peretz have also been published in Russian. State publishing houses in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk and Kishinev have printed translations of more than 200 books by contemporary Jewish-Soviet writers during this period. Each edition was no less than 30,000 copies. Jewish prose and poetry frequently appears in magazines and newspapers published in Moscow and other cities in various languages.

For those who read and write Yiddish there is a magazine "Sovietish Heimland" (Soviet Homeland) which appears in an edition of 25,000 copies. It prints Jewish writers, who live in various parts of the country. The magazine describes the manifold activities of the Soviet people, including the life and endeavour of the Jews.

Here is an issue of the "Sovietish Heimland" taken at random—the issue dated September-October 1964. It contains a novel by Itzhok Meres, a

Vilnius engineer and writer—"Stalemate" which grips the reader from the very first lines. This novel might be called a song of love and lofty human dignity. A valiant youth doomed to death comes out the victor in his struggle with the commandant of the ghetto, a sadist and killer. Then there is a story by Blima Yakir, a young woman writer from Kishinev. The magazine prints poems by the great Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov translated by two Jewish poets, Moisei Haschevatsky and Samuel Rosin. There is also a historical poem "Spartacus" by Girsh Osherovich (Vilnius) and poems by Haim Maltinsky (Minsk), Riva Balyasnaya (Kiev), Yosif Kerler (Moscow), Ieshua Latzman (Vilnius). Professor Nokhem Oislender prints his memoirs about the legendary Jewish poet Osher Schwartzman. There is an article by the critic, Moisei Notovich, marking the 125th anniversary of the birth of the Jewish writer, I. Linetsky. The poet, Aron Vergelis, contributes travel notes "20 Days in America".

The magazine now regularly publishes books in Yiddish. During the last few months of 1964 it published a collection of short stories and an Anthology of Contemporary Jewish Poetry. Novels by Peretz Markish, Eli Shekhtman, Note Lurye are being prepared for printing together with a collection of short stories by various authors and

books of poems by Moisei Teif and Yakov Sternberg.

The "Sovietish Heimland" is becoming a monthly. This and the beginning of publication of books in Yiddish unfold to Jewish-Soviet writers new and still greater vistas and inspires them with greater creative energy.

Readers can find big collections of books in Yiddish. The Lenin Library in Moscow has more than 70,000 volumes in Yiddish, the Saltykov-Schedrin Library in Leningrad has some 50,000 volumes. There are Yiddish departments at the libraries in Vilnius, Riga, Odessa, Lvov and other cities.

Jewish writers maintain close ties with their readers. In 1964 I was present at two readings of Jewish literature—one in Vilnius, the other in Kiev. Each one of these readings attracted about 1,000 people, who came to hear poets and prose writers read their latest works.

Some Western newspapers continue circulating contradictory rumours about the Jewish writers that fell victim to the Stalin personality cult. I feel I must say a few words on this score.

First, not only Jews and not only writers perished during that period. Many prominent Party, state and Army leaders, scientific and cultural workers fell victim to the personality cult. Among

them were Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Jews and others. Now they have been fully rehabilitated, their past services duly recognized.

As for the perished Jewish writers, their books are now published in Yiddish, Russian, Ukrainian and other languages. The "Khudozhestvennaya Literatura" Publishing House, for example, has published two-volume collections of works by Peretz Markish (30 thousand copies) and by David Bergelson (70 thousand copies). Soviet publishing houses printed the works of Lev Kvitko in eight million copies during the past eight years.

*There are many Soviet scientists-Hebraists working in the Soviet Union.*

A special group of researchers at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Asian Peoples of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR is constantly studying questions of Jewish history. It is indicative that among these Hebraists one finds not only Jews, but Russians as well. General recognition has been won by the study made by Professor Klavdiya Starkova of the work of the outstanding Jewish poet and philosopher of the 12th century, Yehuda Halevi.

Assistant-professor Gilel Alexandrov has a major work about the role of Akiva in the Bar-Kokh-

ba uprising (II A.D.). Professor Girsh Lifshitz has a book about the class struggle in ancient Judea and its revolt against Rome.

The research done by Soviet Hebraists was highly praised at the Conference on Semitic languages that took place in Moscow on October 26-28, 1964. Interesting papers were read by A. Gabrielova about certain phonetic features of Aramaic speech among the Samaritan Jews, M. Zand about modern spoken Hebrew, M. Zislin, about the Eastern school of Yiddish grammarians (X-XIII A.D.), A. Rubinstein—about the lexical structure of modern Hebrew, to mention but a few.

The conference adopted a number of important recommendations, among them to set up a permanent Hebrew research centre at the Leningrad branch of the Institute, to prepare text-books for the study of modern Hebrew and the other Semitic languages and to arrange the extensive publication of Jewish cultural, historical and literary monuments.

*Are there any theatrical and concert troupes in the Soviet Union that perform in Yiddish?*

Yes. These are, as a rule, independent groups which embrace various genres—there are singers, stage actors, raconteurs and musicians. These

are the concert troupes of Nechame Lifschitsaite, Sidi Tal, Benjamin Haitovsky, Emil Horovetz,

**“Even long-standing enemies of the Soviet Union now admit that there is no legal disposition spearheaded against the Jews. The Jews enjoy all rights and opportunities granted to all citizens in all spheres of life.” (“Democrat 63”, 1964, weekly published by the Socialist Party of France.)**

Anna Guzik, Zinovi Kaminsky, Esther Roitman and others. In 1963, a drama company was formed directed by Vladimir Schwartzter, Merited Artiste of the Russian Federation. This company staged Sholom-Aleikhem’s “Tevye the Dairyman” and “Big Winnings”.

Every one of these troupes has its distinctive features. Nechame Lifschitsaite, for instance, features classical and folk songs, while the program of Sidi Tal’s group includes musical skits and sketches. Anna Guzik not only presents lyrical, genre and humorous songs, but also literary and musical programs based on Sholom-Aleikhem, Goldfaden and works of Soviet writers. Emil Horovetz mainly sings Soviet songs.

Jewish performers, who appear with programme in Yiddish, not only play to audiences in the big cultural centres—Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk,

Vilnius, Riga, Kishinev, but in small towns and villages of the Russian Federation, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, the Baltic Republics, Moldavia and Central Asia. Jewish songs are also broadcast by radio.

Other singers, who appear with Jewish songs, are Mikhail Alexandrovich, Clementina Shermel, Deana Potapovskaya and others. Emmanuel Kaminka, who holds the title of Merited Artiste of the Russian Federation, is an outstanding raconteur who has won acclaim for his readings of Sholom-Aleikhem in Russian and Yiddish.

Also extremely popular are Jewish amateur art activities which frequently measure up to professional standards. In Vilnius, for instance, there is an amateur group of about 200 people. These are workers, engineers, office employees, teachers, doctors. Among them are Motel Kanovich, team leader at a garment factory; Girsh Sharfstein, tailor; Mark Moises, engineer; Moisei Pyanko, chief accountant of a printing shop; Solomon Meerovich (orchestra leader), book-keeper; Lev Trainovich (ballet master), worker at a shoe factory. Productions of Sholom-Aleikhem's "Two Hundred Thousand", "Tevye the Dairyman", "People", and "Agents" by the amateur drama company numbering 50 persons enjoy successful runs. The Vilnius Jewish choir and orchestra are also very

popular. Emmanuel Lurye, producer-director of the Vilnius Drama Theatre and one of the pupils of Solomon Mikhoels, directs these amateur activities.

Concerts by Jewish performers draw a combined audience of more than half a million. Incidentally, there are quite a few Russians who admire the singing of Nechame Lifschitsaite. This is only natural. Everyone of us is not only interested in the art of his own nationality, but of other nationalities, as well. When the Georgian variety group "Rero" come to Moscow they are just as much a hit with Russian audiences, as they are at home.

The theatres here frequently turn to Jewish themes. The Musical Drama Theatre in Chernovtsy, in the Ukraine, is showing "Uriel Acosta" by Gutzkow. The Odessa and Kharkov theatres are staging "Tevye the Dairyman".

A few words now about artists and musicians.

The Jewish painters Alexander Tyshler, Meer Axelrod, Mendel Gorshman, Girsh Inger, Simon Gruzberg, Isaac Grazhutis, Amshei Nurenberg; the sculptor, Iosif Chaikov, and book illustrators Solomon Telingater and Grigori Kravtsov are working most fruitfully in their respective fields. These big artists arrange displays of their works on Jewish themes.

Very popular in the Soviet Union are songs by

the Jewish composers Pulver, Yampolsky, Kompaneietz, Shainsky, Senderey, Kogan, Frenkel and Boyarskaya. In 1964 two collections of songs by Zinovi Kompaneietz with lyrics by Soviet-Jewish poets and folk poems were published together with a collection of songs by Moisei Beregovsky and Lev Pulver.

*Many people are interested in the position of the Judean religion in the Soviet Union.*

In the Soviet Union every person decides for himself his attitude to religion. In no official document, passport, questionnaire, census blank, is any mention made of religion. All religious organizations enjoy equal rights and opportunities in the country, irrespective of how widespread they are.

The Jews are no exception. The Soviet Union has 97 synagogues. They are in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Vilnius, Riga, Kishinev, Tbilisi, Tashkent, Minsk, Odessa. There is a theological school—the Kol Yakov Yeshivot in Moscow, which trains Jewish clergymen. Religious communities supply worshippers with kosher meat, matzoth, religious calendars, etc.

I do not intend to analyse the position of the Judean religion in other countries. But it is interesting to note that in 1961 the conference of Rab-

bis that was held in France conceded that at present no more than 20 per cent of the Jewish population the world over were religious. It appears from what was said at the conference that even in Israel only a fifth of the population comply with all religious rituals.

What are we to say then of the Soviet Union where the overwhelming majority of the popula-

**“The Soviet Union is our home. Together with our brothers of other nationalities we laid its foundation, we protected it from the flames of war and today we continue to beautify it.” (Emmanuel Davidashvili, Rabbi of the synagogue of Georgian Jews in Tbilisi and Mendel Lipkiver, Rabbi of the synagogue of Russian Jews in Tbilisi.)**

tion are atheists? The Soviet people have long departed from religion and this applies in equal measure to the Orthodox Russian and Judean religions. Here are some figures. At the beginning of the October Revolution Moscow had, as they said at the time, 40 times 40 Russian Orthodox churches. Now there are 44. Moscow had 7 synagogues in 1924, now there are four.

Under the Constitution of the USSR all citizens are free to worship as they see fit and to engage in anti-religious propaganda. Freedom of conscience

is guaranteed to all without exception, irrespective of nationality. If there is a reduction in the number of religious Jews and synagogues that is the result of the natural departure from the idealistic outlook to a materialist world outlook.

*Are Jews being assimilated in the USSR?*

Yes.

There have been two tendencies among the Jewish masses from ancient times. One was isolation and withdrawal, a striving to retain the specific features of Jewry. The second—assimilation with the national majority of the country the Jews resided in. The stronger the national oppression of the Jews, the stronger anti-Semitism—the stronger the first tendency. On the contrary, the second tendency manifested itself more strongly when discrimination weakened. In the 19th and beginning of the 20th century the assimilation of the Jews assumed particularly wide scope in the most highly developed countries of Europe—Britain, France, Germany.

It is absolutely normal therefore that in the Soviet Union where the Jews enjoy full equality, both legally and factually, their natural assimilation should be a permanent process taking place most intensively. It is indicative that fewer and fewer Jews now speak Yiddish. In 1926,

726 Jews out of 1,000 knew their mother tongue. In 1939 the figure was down to 397, and in 1959—200.

Jewish writers, scientists, artists and public leaders bring all that is progressive and advanced in the national culture of the Jewish people to the general, multinational Soviet culture.

It must be noted that the process of assimilation in the Soviet Union not only affects the Jews. Here are some illustrations. In Uzbekistan there are several hundred thousand Tadjiks who speak Tadjik and Uzbek equally well. It is indicative that a considerable percentage of Uzbekistan's intellectuals and professionals come from the Tadjik population. Every year a certain section of the Tadjik population merges with the Uzbek nation.

And in Tadjikistan, in the Pamirs, known as the roof of the world, there are several small Iranian nationalities living in the mountains who have retained their ancient languages. Ethnically they are considered to be Tadjiks and the majority do speak the Tadjik. Incidentally, something in the same line is happening with certain sections of the Bukhara Jews who speak Tadjik from childhood; this is already their mother tongue. So in Tadjikistan we see a voluntary assimilation of

certain national minorities with the Tadjiks.

Finally, there is another natural process taking place in Tadjikistan. Certain sections of the population, especially the Tadjik intellectuals, want their children to go to Russian schools. And now one can find boys and girls among the younger Tadjik generation whose mother tongue is Russian.

All this takes place in one tiny republic—Tadjikistan. It is also well known that not only the Jews assimilate rather rapidly, but the Armenians and Tatars (primarily the intellectuals), especially those who live outside their national republics.

An indication of the increasing rapprochement of nations and nationalities in the Soviet Union is the multinational composition of workers at enterprises, students at all schools, joint education and training of children of various nationalities at school and pre-school institutions. The mass mixed marriages between different nationalities is a convincing example of the rapprochement of nationalities. It is also a sign that national barriers and prejudices are being overcome.

The oneness of interests and destiny of the nations and nationalities in the Soviet Union is unprecedented in history. Soviet people of differ-

ent nationalities have acquired common spiritual traits engendered by the new type of social relations. These traits embody the best traditions of all the peoples of the USSR.