Questions for Soviet Leaders

Latest news on Soviet Jews still calls for a statement by Soviet leaders

By THE EDITORS

WHILE much encouraging news concerning the rectification on the national question with respect to the Jews has come from the Soviet Union in recent weeks, other news continues to raise questions. No statement as yet has been issued by Soviet authorities on crimes against the Jews in the Stalin era. A Paris Jewish News Agency dispatch received here on June 15 stated that Anastas Mikoyan in May told the French parliamentary delegation in Moscow that anti-Semitism still exists in some sections of the Soviet population. But he added, "We will not rest until anti-Semitism is completely torn out by the roots."

The visit of two delegations of U.S. rabbis to the Soviet Union in June and July brought out nothing essentially new about the situation. The rabbis were received with great interest and friendliness by the religious Jews they met in the synagogues of Moscow and Leningrad. They regarded the future of the Jewish religion in the Soviet Union as doubtful. When one rabbi who met Premier Bulganin complained about the "lack of synagogues," Bulganin replied, "That is up to the Jewish community."

One rabbi stated on his return that "The Jewish people seemed relieved. They are looking forward to permanent relief from oppression. They are less afraid of reprisals than before."

Rehabilitation of Jewish Writers

July also saw the appearance of poems in Russian translation by Perets Markish and Itsik Feffer in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Literary Gazette) with appreciative essays by Nikolai Tikhonov and Mikail Svetlov, reprectively (*N. Y. Times*, July 20 and 25). In addition, the same paper announced formation of a commission to issue a collection of Babel's works (*N.Y. Times*, July 25).

Further, Harrison Salisbury reported in the *N. Y. Times* (July 26) that "Soviet authorities appear to have launched a comprehensive but publicly unannounced drive to rehabilitate Jewish literary victims of past purges." He reports that recent Soviet literary periodicals show a "startling corelation" between Jewish victims of the "cosmopolitanism" campaign and current contributors to Soviet journals.

Information is accumulating as to the quantity of concerts of Yiddish song and literary recitals in many parts of the Soviet Union. For instance, in 1954 and 1955 the Jewish singer Anna Guzik and her group had given 268 concerts in the Ukraine, the Volga area, the Urals, Baltic republics and Central Asia. In the 1955-56 winter season, the Jewish singer Saul Lyubimov had given 34 Jewish concerts.

Some Disturbing Questions

Nevertheless, despite these encouraging signs and plans reported by Chaim Suller in this issue, a number of disturbing questions remain. On July 7, the Warsaw Yiddish *Folks-Shtimme* disputed the view reportedly expressed by Soviet leaders that "so-called full assimilation of the millions of Jews in the Soviet Union" accounts for the lack of Yiddish cultural life. This view, said the paper, "cannot stand up under criticism and does not correspond to reality." The slowness of Soviet authorities in once more setting up Jewish institutions is criticised. "Why," ask the paper, "is there no full rehabilitation and revival of Yiddish cultural and social life in the Soviet Union?" (*N. Y. Times*, July 11).

The absence of any statement from the Soviet Union perhaps accounts for the disturbing fact that the following clause in the Eugene Dennis article on the secret Khrushchev report was omitted from the Pravda reprint of that article: "snuffing out the lives of more than a score of Jewish cultural figures." The need for a Soviet declaration on the Jewish question is still urgent.

Quite inexplicable is the denial by a Soviet leader, Ekaterina Furtseva, an alternate member of the party presidium, that Jewish culture had been suppressed. This denial came in an interview by *National Guardian* correspondent Tabitha Petran (June 25). We are at a loss to understand this statement by Madame Furtseva and believe that it shows most urgently that all is not well even yet with the implementation of Soviet nationalities policy toward the Jews.

Madame Furtseva further showed that she does not understand the meaning of this policy with respect to the Jews, for Miss Petran also reports Furtseva's opinion that "Jewish culture has been developing freely" in the Soviet Union because many Jews are prominent in science and the arts and 80 per cent of the musicians in the orchestra that played for the Tito reception in the

Kremlin were Jewish. It should hardly be necessary to point out that these are not signs of *Jewish* culture but rather of free access of Soviet Jews to general Soviet culture.

A further question also calls for some explanation, at the least, when Furtseva stated that in some Soviet government departments Jews comprised over 50 per cent of the personnel and that complaints caused some of these Jews to be transferred to equally good positions in other places. These measures, she said, were misinterpreted as anti-Semitism. Khrushchev is also reported to have stated something similar to the French parliamentary delegation (*N. Y. Times*, June 10). But such a policy does have resemblance to a "quota" system. Surely more elucidation on this point is called for.

Thus, despite the evidences of a return of cultural rights to Yiddish speaking Soviet citizens in some respects and the plans mentioned in the interview of Chaim Suller in this issue, the disquieting facts mentioned above indicate that a full return to socialist nationality rights for Jews is far from completed.

A Statement is Needed

We therefore agree with the communication sent in June by the United Jewish People's Order in Canada to Soviet President Kliment Voroshilov and Premier Nikolai Bulganin. While affirming friendship for the Soviet Union and recalling the steps taken by the Soviet government in the past to assure full rights to the Jews, the memorandum continues:

"We feel that the Soviet government should make public the full information pertaining to these shocking events" [recounted in the *Folks-Shtimme* article of April 4. The statement then recalls reported statements by Soviet leaders to the French parliamentary delegation and the Fursteva interview—*Eds.]*

The memorandum goes on: "This news, together with the complete silence of the government of the USSR regarding the past crimes committed against Jewish culture and the failure to date to restore Jewish cultural life to its former position, is most disturbing. . . . We feel that a public clarification of the position taken by the Soviet Union on this matter is required. Thousands of Jewish people in our country will remain disturbed until a proper explanation is made and the necessary steps taken to assure the Jewish people of the USSR full and equal rights and opportunities to their distinctive cultural and communal expression" (*Canadian Jewish Weekly*, July 12).

We join our voice to that of the UJPO for fulfilment of these requisities to the restoration of full nationality rights to the Jews of the Soviet Union. And we believe that the revival of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union should be hastened.