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Avraham Schenker

The writer, who is a member, Jewish Agency Executive; Chairman, Americans for Progressive Israel; Chairman, Israel Horizons Editorial Board, writes here of a pressing problem facing Jews everywhere—the situation of Jewry in the Soviet Union.

Thoughts on the Soviet Jewish Position

THE recent rash of trials and capital sentences for economic offenses which the press continues to report from the Soviet Union has once again raised serious questions, debates and arguments about "the Jewish problem" in the Soviet Union. From all reports, many, if not the majority, of those indicted and sentenced are Jews. Is this part of a new anti-Jewish policy? Why such extreme sentences involving capital punishment during an era universally labelled one of "liberalization" following the death of Stalin?

One of the slogans of the Bolshevik party during the October Revolution was the abolishment of capital punishment. In fact, three separate times since then, the Soviet Government announced the abolition of the death sentence—in 1917, in 1920 and in 1947. But it was reinstated in 1950 as punishment for traitors, spies and saboteurs. In 1954, premeditated murder was added to the list. In 1958, terrorist acts and violent robbery were added. In 1961, the death sentence was made applicable in cases of large-scale stealing of Government and public property, currency forgery, and violence by criminals under imprisonment. The extension of the death sentence to include economic crimes came about a year after the Government began its campaign against parasitism.

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Economic Offenses

For years, the Soviet press has reported widespread robbery of state property, speculation and illegal private businesses, black and gray markets in money and goods and similar offenses. In 1960, a widespread educational and legal campaign was started to end these crimes. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the newspaper of the Communist youth movement, stated then: "We have one principle—he who does not work does not eat. But to our sorrow, one can see

people who do not work and yet live a life of luxury; not only do they eat—but they eat the best food."

In Moscow, a conference took place in the summer of 1960 under the slogan, "Let us sharpen the war against the parasites." It was made clear that this was a serious, vital and urgent task which required the full cooperation of the population and the authorities. L. Ilychev, at that time the head of the Government Propaganda Bureau and now the Secretary of the Communist Party, said, "We must wipe out the capitalist, chauvinistic tendencies, the decadent religious beliefs and every other form of bourgeois ideology." Thus began a widespread effort to wipe out networks of speculators which had appeared in a number of the larger cities, and who, through the use of bribes and other methods, had established large criminal enterprises involving many individuals. Those caught received heavy sentences ranging from five years' imprisonment for a shoe worker who resold eight pairs of shoes he took from the factory in another city, to ten years for a man who purchased (illegally) 500 silk shawls in Tiflis for resale in Baku, to twenty-five years for the resale of stolen goods including nylon thread, gold, caracul and narcotic drugs. In the latter, loss of all civil rights was added to the sentence.

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Death Sentences

Similar campaigns have been going on in some of the other socialist countries. The death sentence was imposed for serious economic crimes in Bulgaria in 1954, in Hungary and Rumania in 1958, and in Poland in 1960.

But it is incorrect to attribute the actions against speculators or even against employes of synagogues as evidence of a specific anti-Jewish campaign. Employes of Christian churches, including a group of Catholic priests

in Lithuania, have been sentenced to up to twenty years for economic offenses. Recently, the U.S. press reported a widespread ring of scientists, professors, parents and students involved in the falsification of university applications, entrance examinations, bribery and pay-offs. So far as can be ascertained by competent judges, not a single Jewish name was among them.

Yet the fact that there are many Jewish names among those accused of black marketeering has resulted in anti-Jewish overtones to the crusade against parasites, particularly in the existing circumstances in the Soviet Union with its acknowledged remnants of anti-Semitism among the population. We can assume that it is not the intent of the Soviet Government to utilize its justified campaign against economic crimes for anti-Jewish purposes. But those who follow the Soviet press regularly note that those accused who have obviously Jewish names tend to receive harsher sentences, and when a Jewish defendant has a Russian family name, his obviously Jewish given name is emphasized in the press.

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Mention of Israel

In 1961, *Leningradskaya Pravda* reported about one B. Oyzerman who was sentenced to death for speculation in currency, precious stones, gold and securities and added: "This man gathered a great treasure and dreamed about fleeing abroad to his brother in England, or his other brother in Germany, or his sister in Israel." Or in an article in *Trud* in which accused Jews are described as serving the golden calf of "making money which is their only interest," and then without any direct apparent connection with the matter at hand, goes on to inform the reader that when any disputes broke out among Jews, including those about money, "they went to the local rabbi to mediate or arbitrate. Not only did the latter know about the doings of his believers but he also served as their arbitrator."

Thus in various ways it is stated that not only are there vicious parasites, both Jews and non-Jews, but it is implied that the Jews are hiding their real identities, that they are cosmopolitans with "international" connections, and that somehow their religious faith is organized for these evil purposes. The fact that Jews having lived in Russia for many generations have been given typically Russian names

in many cases; that the Jewish people is dispersed over the world and that as a result of known and valid historical circumstances it is highly likely that a Jewish family will be broken up and will be living in widely-separated areas of the globe; and that in Jewish religious life, the role of the rabbi has traditionally included the task of community mediator and arbitrator—all these factors convert Jewish perpetrators of economic crimes into "representatives" of the Jewish group rather than individual transgressors who deserve to be punished. The situation is much too reminiscent of the Stalin era when the word "cosmopolite" was often used as a synonym for the word "Jew." Now the synonym has become "parasite."

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Tragedy of Dispersion

Thus the universal tragedy of Jewish dispersion, rootlessness and homelessness repeats itself in a socialist context. Yet two serious questions must be asked: Why has not the Soviet Government taken steps to oppose the anti-Jewish overtones which have developed among the press and the population in the wake of the widespread crusade against economic crimes and parasitism? Are we to assume that Soviet authorities really believe that the Jewish religion, the synagogue and identification with the Jewish people are synonymous with the likelihood of anti-social actions? The second question has to do with the imposition of the death sentence for economic crimes. Was it simply a political convenience for Lenin and his colleagues to place the emphasis they did on the abolition of capital punishment? If, as recently as 1947, the Soviet Government reaffirmed its opposition to capital punishment, it is clear that it was properly considered an integral ingredient of socialist law and justice. The subsequent return of the death sentence for various crimes against the state seems to us a regressive step and evidence of an inability to deal with serious problems in more humanist terms.

Would it not be of tremendous and lasting importance for the future of socialism, its impact on the awakening sections of the world, and its effect and challenge to capitalist society, to return to its humanist origins and rescind the barbarism of the death sentence for these economic crimes?

**Melvin
M. Tumin**

THE conjunction of factors regarding the exceedingly difficult and intricate social scientific phenomenon. We are aware of how much anti-Semitism is present in our sources; how deeply it is embedded in our structures, and how it affects the character and nature of our society. Our difficulties in reaching agreements on the proper calculation of the true sense of the unanimity among both General and Specific criteria as to its variable notions of blame. On top of our difficulties, we encounter not only a surety of Jews in our rates of discrimination but also a method to be calculated.

Importance

These difficulties in determining the relative ease of the present analysis of the prejudice and discrimination. Judging by the treatment of the Negroes in our society, it is not to doubt as to the disadvantaged, more prominently excluded. Yet it is less than a million Jews were Jews; and unless the assumption that such a step will open again, at least one must be prepared with a significant recent social and economic in the United States. I make that into