

literature. There are many Jewish writers who consider themselves Russian and who prefer to write Russian. We cannot interfere in that matter. This is a matter for the Jewish intelligentsia. We do create all conditions in which Jewish and Russian literatures and the literatures of all other Soviet peoples should have full opportunities for their development, writing and creation."

Personally I am of the opinion that the matter of Yiddish is not yet resolved one way or the other. I am sure that greater facilities than those available at present for the use and extension of Yiddish cultural activities in the U.S.S.R. would be forthcoming to the degree that increased interest in and use of the Yiddish language becomes apparent.

The issue of Yiddish in the Soviet Union has been used as a stick to beat the Soviet Union and to besmirch the tremendous record of achievements and advances gained by the Soviet peoples, including its Jewish citizens. Insufficient objectivity was shown by some in our own Party. These comrades were not helped either when the case about Yiddish was hinged on to the question as to whether the Jews were a nation. The fact remains that though the Jews do not enjoy the prerequisites of a nation in the Marxist sense, they have spoken Yiddish as their mother tongue in large numbers in a number of countries over a long period. Many of them still do—and some may still so desire. If sufficient so desire, then Yiddish will continue as one of the many languages used by the Socialist family of nations.

### *Reuben Falber*

COMRADE Waterman attempts to contest Ramelson's claim that the Yiddish language has ceased to develop by cataloguing Yiddish activities in America. Unfortunately for him, in the *Jewish Chronicle* of April 17th, an American correspondent describes the decline of Yiddish speaking and reading:

"Most of the Yiddish playhouses have been replaced by English-speaking off-Broadway theatres. Yiddish newspapers began to merge with one another several years ago, and a large number have disappeared. The old-timers deplore the passing of the language; are constantly nostalgic about the 'good old days' and perpetuate the fiction that Yiddishkeit is only temporarily eclipsed. They dutifully buy their Yiddish publications, listen to their much curtailed Yiddish language radio programme, and quietly but futilely make propaganda for the Cause."

Comrade Waterman could indeed pass for one of these old-timers except that he wraps his nostalgic laments up in "Marxist" language and tries to blind us with science.

Britain is not included among the countries where Yiddish flourishes. How does Yiddish fare in Britain? A few small groups struggle manfully to keep it going, publishing papers read only by a tiny handful, maintaining a sparsely attended theatre, but making no impact on the life of the Jewish people.

The most prominent Jewish writers write their books, plays and poetry in English, not Yiddish; indeed, it is doubtful whether more than a few can write Yiddish. What is more, they are ceasing to write about Jewish themes or draw inspiration from Jewish life.

Not very long ago a prominent Jewish writer who, since the war, has made a reputation as a successful novelist, wrote in a left paper attacking the Soviet Union for "suppressing" the language of his parents, and then had the brass nerve to admit that he could neither speak nor read Yiddish.

Comrade Ramelson's description of Yiddish (a description which Comrade Waterman distorts) is neither ignorant nor offensive to Yiddish. Did Yiddish exist before the Jews were forced into the Ghettoes of Central and Eastern Europe? And does not Comrade Ramelson say of Yiddish culture that its "essence was the depicting of Ghetto life and a yearning for revolt against such intolerable conditions"?

Of course the rich Jews hated Yiddish. They tried to solve the problem by licking the boots of the local bourgeoisie, buying their way into their ranks, and sometimes in the process echoing their cruder anti-Semitic expressions. Always they have cried that they were "different" from the great mass of Jewry, and had freed themselves from the characteristics which, exaggerated and distorted out of all proportion, form the shot and shell of much of the filthiest anti-Semitic propaganda. So the Yiddish spoken by the poorer Jews was hated by rich Jews, and so were the poor Jews themselves. Alas, that's a way the rich have.

But Waterman goes on to say that Yiddish became "a weapon of the working class and poor Jews". What nonsense! As well describe German as a weapon of proletarian revolution because *Das Kapital* was written in that tongue.

Sholem Aleichem wasn't the only one who could write Yiddish. Hasn't Comrade Waterman ever met the reactionary who could speak Yiddish? Surely the history of the international socialist movement for the past sixty or more

years provides numerous examples of counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet characters capable of putting their filth into Yiddish.

This kind of argument is presented with a quotation from Lenin and talk about Leninist principles, as though the classic writings of Marxism were part of the Talmud. But doesn't Marxism also help us to understand how things change and develop?

The development of bourgeois democracy broke down the walls of the Ghettoes and enabled Jews to move, work and live more freely with non-Jews. At the same time it began to break down the concentration of Jews into one or two districts, sometimes the most overcrowded localities. Half a million Jews in Moscow may not be a great concentration. There are nearly a quarter of a million in London, yet the great pre-war concentration in the East End has broken up to a very considerable extent, and almost every locality has its Jewish population. I don't know how the Jewish population is spread in Moscow and Vilna—does Comrade Waterman?

In their changed circumstances the rigid forms of religious observance and ritual clashed with the desire to "get on" and religious practice became more flexible, usually in face of hostility from those who sought to preserve the past. At the same time the use of Yiddish has decreased

considerably and in Britain, at any rate, is now used by Jews only to a negligible degree.

All this has brought about far-reaching changes in the relations between Jews and non-Jews and the internal relations of the Jewish communities. Is it therefore surprising that under the impact of the greatest act of liberation in the history of mankind—the Russian Revolution, a revolution which swept away the worst oppressors known to Jewry before Hitler—there should be changes in the position of the Jews?

Of course the older Jews celebrated their newly won freedom by printing more books in Yiddish, more Yiddish schools and so on. But for the younger Jews the October Revolution opened vistas their parents and grandparents could not and did not dream of. They could enter the universities, professions, industries, government and administration of a great country—and this is precisely what they did. The old-timers might regret the fact that they spoke, read and wrote Russian and not Yiddish, but they emerged into sunlight after centuries of darkness and oppression, and made a not inconsiderable contribution to Soviet life and socialist construction.

Comrade Ramelson's article may not be the last word on the subject, but at least it does represent an attempt to examine the problems objectively and to do this on the basis of the facts at our disposal and not second-hand reports.

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