

When Lenin Fought Anti-Semitism

By RUVIM GROYER

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April 22d, 1970 marked the centennial of Lenin, founder of the Soviet state. Mr. Groyer is the Moscow correspondent of the Jewish Voice.

The first decade of the 20th century was one of the darkest in the history of Russian Jewry. The year 1903 saw the Kishinev pogrom which horrified Europe. After that the wave of pogroms mounted in volume month by month.

By 1905 it swept all Russia. This wave of pogroms can be explained by the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century there was a mighty upsurge in the movement against tsarism. The 1905 revolution was in the making and the tsarist authorities were trying to channel the people's discontent into national enmity. In their efforts to find a scapegoat, chauvinistic organizations were used to pronounce Jews the cause of all troubles and disasters.

However, progressive people in Russia came out in defense of the Jews. Leo Tolstoi, for one, con-

demned the pogromists with anger and indignation. But the strongest protest came from the Russian Bolsheviks headed by Lenin.

Lenin pointed out at the time that the Jewish question could be settled only together with the basic problems facing Russia, not with petitions but with armed struggle by the people against the corrupt regime. This was understood by the Jewish working people and intelligentsia, thousands of whom took an active part in the struggle.

They included Yakov Sverdlov, the first president of the Soviet state, Maxim Litvinov, who became Soviet Foreign Minister, Solomon Lazovsky, V. Volodarsky, Moisei Uritsky and many others who were to leave their mark on the Soviet Union's history.

Lenin and his party used every opportunity, both legal and illegal,

to press for the complete equality of the Jews. In 1914 the Bolsheviks submitted a bill to the State Duma (parliament) drafted by Lenin stating that "There are to be abolished all and any laws . . . restricting Jews in any area of public and state life.

There is to be a repeal of Art. 767 saying that 'Jews are liable to all laws in all cases when there are special regulations for them.' It enumerated the restrictions to be annulled.

Naturally, the bill was rejected. The Declaration of Rights of the Nations of Russia signed by Lenin on November 16, 1917, immediately after the revolution, gave all the nations of the former Russian empire real freedom, and it stipulated that the Soviet government based itself on the principles of equality and sovereignty of the nations of Russia; the right of nations to freedom and self-determination, including the right to secede and form independent states; the abolition of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions, and freedom of development of national minorities and ethnic groups.

The Declaration was the first major step of the Soviet state in the national emancipation of the people.

At the beginning of 1918 a decree was signed by Lenin separating the church from the state. Since the Jews, as all other nationalities, were

regarded in old Russia as religious groups, they were provided with the legal status of nationality independent of religious conviction.

The following year, a decree was issued making it a criminal offense to bait anyone on the grounds of their nationality, and called on the working people to spare no means to fight this evil.

When the decree was drafted, Lenin himself wrote on it "The Council of People's Commissars makes it incumbent upon all the Soviets of Deputies to adopt resolute measures to prevent anti-Semitism. Pogrom-mongers and pogrom agitation are to be outlawed.

"Only completely ignorant and backward people can believe the lies and calumny spread against the Jews."

The principles of Lenin's national policy are reflected in the present Constitution, Article 123 of which states:

"Equality of rights of citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, government, cultural, political and other social activity, is an infeasible law. Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or conversely, the establishment of any direct or indirect privileges for citizens on account of their race or national exclusiveness or hatred or contempt, are punishable by law."

Offenses of this kind are punishable under the law by sentences of

from six months to three years imprisonment or two to five years exile.

With the consolidation of Socialism in the U.S.S.R., anti-Semitism was gradually deprived of its social basis. There was no longer the economic competition which was used formerly to instigate national dissent.

Equality, improved living standards and the wide encouragement of national cultures helped to forge the brotherhood of Soviet peoples.

The social aspect of the Jewish population has changed completely.

In tsarist Russia the main occupations of the Jewish population were: workers of big enterprises — 4 per cent, workers in local crafts — 11 per cent, artisans — 18.4 per cent, and traders and petty owners and persons, without a definite occupation — 54.4 per cent. Today there are no so-called "Jewish occupations" and there is not a single branch of the country's economy in which Jews are not employed.



THE PARABLE OF THE FUNNY LOOKING MAN

.By Morton Donald Rubin

Everyone came to look at the man approaching them.

"What a funny looking man he is."

"He doesn't look like the rest of us."

"He doesn't walk like the rest of us."

"His head looks funny."

"His legs look funny."

"His back is at an odd angle."

"His walk is different."

"His nose looks strange."

"He has such a big chin."

"What a funny looking man he is."

The Neanderthal men laughed as they watched the Homo-Sapiens enter their valley for the first time.

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The boss of a Tel Aviv tourist office to one of his guides: "My boy, remember the customer is always right. So if an American tells you that the United States is a greater power than Israel, don't argue with him."

