

Paul Novick & J. M. Budish

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JEW S  
*in the*  
SOVIET  
UNION

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*Citizens  
and  
Builders*

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*Citizens and Builders*

by **PAUL NOVICK** and **J. M. BUDISH**

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## A Note About the Author

Paul Novick is editor of the *Morning Freiheit*, progressive Jewish daily, and one of its founders (1922). He is the author of a number of pamphlets on Zionism and other Jewish problems, and of the following books: *Palestine, the Arabs, the Jews* (1932); *The Socialist Party* (1934) and *Europe—Between War and Peace* (1948). Mr. Novick visited Europe including the Soviet Union in 1929, 1932, 1936, and 1946, also Palestine in 1932, and Birobidjan in 1936. For many years associate editor of the *Morning Freiheit*, he became its editor-in-chief after the death of M. J. Olgin in 1939.

He is a member of the National Executive Board of the Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order, the National Executive Board of the Committee of American Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, and the National Executive Board of the Ykuf, of Ambijan, of Morning Freiheit Association.

# THE NEW JEW IN THE SOVIET UNION

By PAUL NOVICK

THE Soviet Union is the only country in Europe where, in spite of all the efforts of Hitler to exterminate the Jewish people, *millions* of Jews have survived.

This is a primary fact in relation to the development of the Jewish people in the U.S.S.R. since the birth of Soviet power in 1917. The survival of millions of Jews in the U.S.S.R. is a most important feature of the life of world Jewry in the present period. This survival throws into relief the relation of the Soviet government toward the Jews as well as all minority nationalities.

It is amazing and distressing to realize that there are Jewish leaders who try to avoid mention of the fact that in the Soviet Union millions of Jews were saved. Some even are annoyed. Certain "statisticians," who are forced to touch upon the number of Jews in the U.S.S.R., invariably reduce it by half a million to a million short of the real figure.

The traveler in present-day Europe, who so often comes upon the heartrending sight of *remnants* of Jewries in various lands, particularly in Poland, is exhilarated by the sight of big Jewish communities in Moscow, Leningrad, and the Ukraine. This is frightfully important for the development of the Jewish people as a whole. No historian worthy of the name will fail to record this fact in emphatic chapters.

The fact that the proportion of *living* Jews is so much higher in the Soviet Union than in other countries of Europe is the result of the policy of true equality and friendship among races and nationalities.

## EVALUATION OF JEWISH DEVELOPMENT IN THE U.S.S.R.

However, the war played havoc with the reconstruction of the economic and cultural life of the Jewish people in the

U.S.S.R. At present, any evaluation of this development must of necessity stop at the year 1939. Nevertheless, the accomplishments between 1917 and 1939 are worth recording not merely for historical reasons. They show the method—*how* Jewish life was reconstructed.

What was the social composition and general situation of Jews in Russia?

The last census in tsarist Russia was taken in 1897 and it serves as a guide to the social composition of Jews in old Russia. There is no reason to assume any marked changes in that composition when World War I broke out. If anything, the situation became worse, with pogroms in 1903, 1905 and other years prior to World War I, and during that war, becoming ever bloodier.

According to the 1897 census, "gainfully employed" Jews were distributed as follows:<sup>1</sup>

	<i>Per Cent</i>
Agriculture .....	2.4
Small and big industry .....	36.3
Commerce .....	31.0
Transport .....	3.0
House and other servants .....	11.5
Professional, social and government service .....	4.7
Unproductive and indefinite professions . . . . .	7.6
Others .....	3.5

The full meaning of these figures emerges when we classify them according to social strata and relation to economic production. According to such classification the social composition of Jews in old Russia was as follows:

	<i>Per Cent</i>
Workers in big industry .....	4.0
Workers in small shops .....	11.0
Artisans .....	18.4

<sup>1</sup> These and other figures in this chapter, as well as quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the book of the well-known Soviet Jewish statistician, L. Singer, *The Renovated People*, Moscow, 1941.

Peasants .....	2.2
Clerks, office workers .....	10.0
Traders, employers, indefinite.....	54.4

Over 54 per cent of the Jews in old Russia were engaged in commerce or belonged to generally unproductive groups. We shall presently see how the Jews classified as "artisans" and "traders" made their living. Most striking is the small number of workers employed in big industry. Upon examining each of the categories separately we shall realize the utter hopelessness of the Jews in old Russia from the economic standpoint.

### **OPPRESSION IN THE "PALE"**

It was the general political situation prevailing in tsarist Russia that had such a disastrous effect on Jewish life. One result of the general persecution of Jews in old Russia was the creation of the so-called *Pale of Settlement*, composed of 15 gubernias, or states, mostly at a low level of industrial development, including that part of Poland under Russian rule. For the most part Jews were not permitted to live outside this "Pale." Into the Pale 94 per cent of the six million Russian Jews were crowded, mostly in the cities. After a series of laws, edicts, regulations and ukases, Jews were banished from Moscow and other cities outside the Pale, restricted, subjected to special "attention." The oppressions culminated in the regulations of 1882 (when a wave of pogroms took place) prohibiting Jews from obtaining land and generally moving into villages. Jews who had been living in villages for generations were banished to the cities (as portrayed, for instance, by Sholom Aleichem in *Tevye the Dairyman*). Hence the number of peasants as well as workers in big industry was insignificant among Russian Jews, who were forced to become a city people, a people mostly of traders and artisans, subject to innumerable restrictions and unprecedented persecution.



What *kind* of traders and artisans? It will suffice to quote the following from a report of a commission of the tsarist government headed by Count Pallen:

"The Jews who were pushed out of other occupations have unwillingly begun to engage in trading. Competition among the trading Jews was sharpened as a result of the regulations of May 3, 1882, after which many Jews from other places moved into the cities and towns and competition among them became more intense. Goods which were formerly sold in one or two stores began selling in five, ten and even 20 stores and petty shops. All this brought about bitter competition among the Jews, who began to press upon each other."

The same is true of the artisans—tailors, shoemakers and others. Their "workshops" were situated in crowded primitive dwellings which often consisted of one room, used as bedroom and living-room. In certain parts of the Pale of Settlement the artisans comprised as high as 60 per cent of the total Jewish population. Their earnings were miserably low. An investigation by the Jewish Colonization Society in 1888-9 among Jewish tailors in Poland showed that of those investigated 80 per cent earned less than 25 rubles a month with some earning as little as 8-9 rubles a month. The *yearly* earnings of the majority of tailors and carpenters in two gubernias of the Ukraine (Volin and Podol) were between 120 and 200 rubles. (A. Kirzhnitz in *Jews in the U.S.S.R.*, p. 186.)

Competition was murderous. Unemployment was chronic. The skill of many of the artisans was low. No more than 4,000 Jewish youths attended trade schools in old Russia (of a Jewish population of six million).

No wonder pauperization was widespread. In some localities of the Pale as many as 30 per cent of the Jewish population were in need of charity. Bobrowski, in his work on Jews in the gubernia of Grodno, stated: "Quite often you find as **many as 12 families in 3-4 rooms. . . .** The meal of entire

families consists of one pound of bread, a herring and a few onions." (Quoted in the Moscow *Einikeit*, Feb. 1, 1947.)

### **"A NATION OF PAUPERS"**

The classic Yiddish writers, Mendele Mocher Sforim, J. L. Peretz, Sholom Aleichem, portrayed the miserable existence of the Jewish people in old Russia. One of Sholom Aleichem's characters, Menachem Mendl, typified the widespread *luftmentch*, literally "living on air." A. F. Subotin, in his book on the *Pale of Settlement* (St. Petersburg, 1888) tells a weird story of the city of Minsk, and gives a glaring example of Jewish *parnosos* (means of livelihood). This tsarist municipality sold permits to Jews, entitling them to wander about the market place during fairs, sack in hand or on shoulder, to pick up hay dropped from peasants' wagons. . . .

The majority of Jews formed a "nation of paupers," subjected to tsarist persecutions too numerous to recount here. All Jews, even the handful of well-to-do, were, with very few exceptions, persecuted and oppressed. There was a *numerus clausus* for Jewish students in universities, high schools, trade schools (inside the Pale, Jews were admitted on a ratio of 10 per cent of all students; outside the pale in St. Petersburg 5 per cent, and in Moscow 3 per cent). There were oppressive restrictions on books and newspapers in Yiddish, the theater, schools. Religious institutions were not exempt from persecution. Life itself was not safe. From time to time the tsarist government organized mass looting accompanied by bloodshed—*pogroms*. In October 1905 pogroms took place in 660 cities and towns. Nearly 1,000 Jews were killed and close to 2,000 wounded. Over 200,000 Jews suffered. There was the horrible pogrom in Kishinev, Bessarabia, in 1903. And there was the ritual murder frame-up against the Kiev Jew, Mendel Beiliss, in 1912. Jews lived under constant terror.

"No other nationality in Russia," Lenin wrote in 1914, "is as oppressed and persecuted as are the Jews. Anti-

Semitism is taking ever deeper roots among the well-to-do elements. Jewish workers are groaning under a double yoke, as workers and as Jews. The persecutions against Jews have in recent years acquired enormous scope. It is enough to mention the anti-Jewish pogroms and the Beiliss trial. Under such circumstances the organized Marxists must give proper attention to the Jewish question.

"It is self-evident that the Jewish question can be seriously solved together with the basic questions now on the agenda in Russia. The working class must raise its voice, and particularly loud must be the voice of the Russian workers in protest against national oppression." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, p. 291, Russian edition.)

### **THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA**

The oppressive regime of old Russia was overthrown by the organized workers in the triumph of the Revolution of November 7. And only eight days later, on November 15, the week-old Soviet government issued over the signatures of Lenin and Stalin, a historic declaration, written by Stalin, *The Declaration of the Rights of Nationalities*, heralding the rebirth of peoples and nationalities in a country which heretofore had borne the name of "prison of nationalities."

The Declaration proclaimed: (1) equality for all nationalities; (2) the right of self-determination; (3) the abolition of all national and religious privileges and restrictions; (4) free development of all national minorities and ethnic groups. As an immediate result of the revolution, the rebirth of the pauperized, persecuted Jewish people began.

### **ERADICATION OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN U.S.S.R.**

Things began to happen under the Soviets. The struggle to eradicate anti-Semitism, the struggle against pogroms were serious matters. Anti-Semitism was deeply rooted among the reactionary strata of the Russian people. The number of

tsarist henchmen and their collaborators ran into the millions. In addition, Denikin, Kolchak, Yudenitch, Petlura and other "white" generals and counterrevolutionaries and interventionists used anti-Semitism as their instrument. A horrible wave of pogroms took place. Over 200,000 Jews were slaughtered, mostly in the Ukraine. During the struggle against these forces of intervention and counterrevolution much effort was exerted by the young Soviet state against the pogromists, the anti-Semites.

On July 27, 1919 a special decree against anti-Semitism was issued by the Soviet government. Lenin delivered his historic phonograph record speech against anti-Semitism: "Shame on cursed tsarism," Lenin shouted into the recording machine, "which tortured and persecuted the Jews! Shame on those who spread animosity to Jews, who spread hatred against other nations."

But these measures against anti-Semitism and pogroms, no matter how much effort they required, were merely the first steps. There was the hard, long-range job of reconstructing the social composition of the Jewish people, as well as of developing Jewish culture. This job was started by the People's Commissariat for Nationalities and its subsidiaries headed by Stalin. This Commissariat among others devoted its efforts to the development of Jewish culture—literature, the theater, the press, children's homes and schools.

But "with schools alone you will not go far," Stalin said, and it will be well to remember this fundamental aspect of the solution of the national and Jewish question in the Soviet Union.

### ***"ACTUAL INEQUALITY IS BASIS OF ALL FRICTION"***

In his report, "National Factors in Party and State Development," delivered April 23, 1923 at the 12th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, Stalin said:

"The trouble is that some nationalities have no prole-

tarians of their own, have never passed through the stage of industrial development, or even entered that stage, are frightfully backward culturally and are entirely unable to take advantage of the rights granted them by the revolution. This, comrades, is a question of greater importance than the question of schools. Some of our comrades here think that the knot can be unravelled by stressing the question of schools and language. That is not so, comrades. Schools will not get you very far. The schools are developing, so are the languages; but actual inequality is the basis of all discord and friction." (Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, N. Y., p. 156.)

This gives an idea how the Soviet government approached the problem of reconstruction of the Jewish people. National culture? Of course. Prior to World War I, Stalin, in his classic, *Marxism and the National Question*, wrote:

"Limitation of freedom of movement, disfranchisement, suppression of language, restriction of schools, and other forms of repression affect the workers no less, if not more, than the bourgeoisie. Such a state of affairs can only serve to retard the free development of the intellectual forces of the proletariat of subject nations. There can be no possibility of a full development of the intellectual faculties of the Tartar or Jewish worker if he is not allowed to use his native language at meetings and lectures, and if his schools are closed down" (p. 17).

## **BUILDING FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURE**

As a result of the views outlined above, the work of developing the culture of all nationalities within the Soviet Union went ahead at full speed. But this was merely the beginning of the work of national reconstruction. There was the hard task of transforming the *luftmentchn* into productive citizens, of putting the Jewish people on a sound economic foundation,

of developing a Jewish proletariat and peasantry without which no full-blooded national existence is possible.

Already early in 1919 the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party considered the question of utilizing unsettled lands for Jewish colonization. As a result, in July of that year measures were taken by the Soviet government for such colonization in the Crimea and the Ukraine. This work eventually culminated in the years 1927-1930 in the establishment of the following Jewish national districts: Kalinindorf, New-Zlatopol and Stalindorf in the Ukraine, and one in the Crimea. By that time Birobidjan was already designated as a special district for Jewish settlement (March 28, 1928). In the Jewish national districts, where Yiddish was an official language and the school system and cultural institutions mainly Jewish, a certain limited form of national self-determination was realized.

Simultaneously, another process took place, that of industrialization. Petty artisans and former traders (who preferred not to settle on the land) were organized into producing co-operatives. Trade schools were established for Jewish youth. With the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan in 1928 a constant stream of Jews flowed into shops, factories and mines. Tens of thousands of Jews entered government service, institutions of higher education, laboratories, etc. The results of this development appeared in the censuses of 1926 and 1939.

According to the census of 1926 there were in the then territory of the Soviet Union 2,672,000 Jews, an increase of nearly 100,000 compared with the number of Jews on the same territory in 1897 (that is, minus Poland, Western Ukraine, Western Belorussia, Bessarabia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were all part of Russia in 1897). In view of the emigration of 600,000 Jews from the same territory since 1897 and the murder of nearly 200,000 in tsarist pogroms, the small increase is not surprising.

The census of January 1939 showed a Jewish population on the same territory of 3,020,000, a growth of 348,000, or 16 per cent in 12 years. The social composition revealed by that

census shows a complete transformation of the economic structure of the Jewish people.

### ***A TRANSFORMED PEOPLE***

The census of 1926 had already showed that 11.4 per cent of the gainfully employed Jews were engaged in large scale industry; in small industry, 3.7 per cent; as clerks, 24.7 per cent; as co-operative and independent artisans, 22.6 per cent; as peasants, 8.3 per cent; while the number of traders dropped to 8.8 per cent. Ten per cent were classified as "unemployed." Compared with the figures of 1897 the trend of redistribution is striking, but the census of 1926 could record merely the beginnings of reconstruction. The national agricultural districts were yet to be established. The first Five-Year Plan was still in the offing.

Quite a different picture appears from the census of 1939, the second year of the third Five-Year Plan. The Jewish people, like all Soviet peoples, already consisted mainly of workers, collective farmers and the intelligentsia, classified as follows:

	<i>Per Cent</i>
Workers and clerks .....	71.2
Collective farmers .....	5.8
Artisans in co-operative enterprises .....	16.1
Artisans running small independent enterprises .....	4.0
Others .....	2.9

These figures truly reflected a historic turn in the development of the Jewish people in the U.S.S.R., which was part of a general historic development, the industrialization of the country. This is one reason for the decline in the relative number of collective farmers since the census of 1926, though it was not the only reason. Another factor in the reduction of the proportion of the rural Jewish population was the lack of more free land for colonization in the Ukraine and Crimea.

The approximately 250,000 Jews on land in 1926 were scattered over five districts, three in the Ukraine and two in the Crimea. The possibilities for colonization in the Ukraine and the Crimea were almost exhausted. In addition there were, prior to the turn to industrialization, a number of Jews who engaged in "near-town" farming, tilling the soil on the outskirts of the towns. The wave of industrialization swept this element off the soil in which it was not rooted, and into the factories. These developments mainly accounted for the reduction of the Jewish farming population by over two per cent between the two census.

In spite of this shortcoming, *i.e.*, the comparatively small proportion of farmers, the over-all picture is that of a *reborn people*. Gone are the "traders" of old who, together with other unproductive elements, comprised over 50 per cent of the Jewish population! Gone are the "artisans" of old! Gone are the *parnosos* of the paupers of Minsk! Gone are the paupers, the *luftmentchn*. Menachem Mendl became a character of a bygone period, to be seen only in Sholom Aleichem's works and on the stage.

## **JEWISH WORKERS IN LARGE SCALE INDUSTRY**

As shown by the above table, artisans still comprised a large percentage of the Jewish population, over 20 per cent. But by 1939 this artisan element was quite different from that of the period covered by the census of 1926. The overwhelming majority of these artisans were employed in industrial co-operatives. Their standards of living and importance in the general economy of the country differed considerably from that of 1926, not to speak of pre-revolutionary days.

One may be justified in complaining that while the figure of 71.2 per cent for "workers and clerks" may be too general, other figures compiled in 1936 classifying "workers and clerks" in industry according to their special functions shed more light on this category of the 1939 census. In that year (1936)



the distribution of Jewish workers and others engaged in industry ran as follows:

	<i>Ukraine</i> <i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Belorussia</i> <i>Per Cent</i>
Workers .....	64.2	73.8
Apprentices .....	3.5	3.3
Engineers, technicians .....	13.7	9.8
Clerks .....	15.0	10.2
Service personnel .....	3.6	2.9

It can therefore be safely stated that the majority of those employed in industry as per the census of 1939 were workers.

While the census of 1926 shows a Jewish proletariat of merely 150,000, this category had grown in the 1939 census to 700,000! The traders of 1926 (8.8 per cent), the unemployed (10 per cent), many of the clerks (24.7 per cent), the people of indefinite professions, part of the artisans and mainly the youth were drawn into productive labor. The problem posed by Stalin in 1923, when he pointed out that some nationalities "have no proletarians of their own," was solved.

What *kind* of proletariat? The statistics for 1936 also classified the Jewish workers according to industries. This showed that in the Ukraine, metal workers, including workers in machine tool industries, occupied first place (28.3 per cent). Needle workers came second (16.2 per cent). There were entirely new items—Jewish workers engaged in mining (3.3 per cent), in chemical industries (2.8 per cent). Not only did the Jews of the U.S.S.R. become a productive people, but this productivity itself was of a higher quality. The proletariat of former years was not only small but also engaged primarily in light industries, in the needle trades and petty industry.

### **GROWTH OF JEWISH INTELLIGENTSIA**

The Jewish intelligentsia had grown tremendously. Prior to the revolution there were on the territory of the U.S.S.R. (as constituted in 1939) 1,500 writers and artists, 4,500 persons

engaged in medicine and sanitation, 500 lawyers, etc. Almost all of them made their living by serving the pauperized Jewish population. The picture for the period prior to World War II changed beyond recognition, as will be seen from the following statistics on the composition of the Jewish intelligentsia in 1936:

Engineers, architects and constructors . . . . .	25,000
Technical personnel . . . . .	35,000
Agronomys . . . . .	1,000
Other agro-technical personnel . . . . .	1,000
Science workers (professors, teachers in higher schools of learning) . . . . .	7,000
Teachers in elementary and high schools . . . . .	46,000
Cultural and educational workers, (journalists, librarians, club directors) . . . . .	30,000
Art workers . . . . .	17,000
Doctors . . . . .	21,000
Other medical personnel . . . . .	31,000

With the *numerus clausus* a thing of the past, with full equality not merely on paper but in actuality, the number of Jewish pupils in public and high schools reached the figure of 425,000. In 1936 there were 62,000 Jewish students in all higher institutions of learning and 32,000 in the technical schools and colleges.

Jewish culture flourished. During my visit to the U.S.S.R. in that year (1936) I visited Jewish elementary schools and technicums in Odessa, Minsk, Berditchev and other cities. Scores of thousands of Jewish children were getting their education in Jewish schools. There were ten Jewish state theaters in 1939, with two dramatic schools (one in Moscow and another in Kiev).

The publication of Yiddish books grew by leaps and bounds. While in 1913 only 73 titles were published on the territory which was part of the U.S.S.R. prior to the last war, 339 were published in 1938 in 1,351,000 copies. In 1940, after western Ukraine and Belorussia were returned to the U.S.S.R., the

*Emes Verlag* (the Truth Publishing House) in Moscow alone issued a book every day; there were also other important Jewish publishing houses in Kiev, Kharkov and Minsk.

Both economically and culturally the transformation of the Jewish people in the course of approximately 15 to 18 years was phenomenal.

### **WAR, EVACUATION, RE-EVACUATION; DESTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION**

After World War II broke out, the foundations of the Jewish people in the U.S.S.R. were shattered. It is estimated that by June 1941, when Hitler attacked, there were five million Jews in the U.S.S.R., the increase resulting from the return of western Ukraine and Belorussia as well as Bessarabia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the Soviet Union in 1939-1940. With the exception of Moscow and Leningrad, where large masses of Jews reside, the overwhelming majority of Soviet Jews lived in the territories which were in the course of the war overrun by Hitler. Nearly two million of them perished in the area which fell to the Nazis in the first impact of the attack, before the rapidly organized evacuation of the Jewish people before the onrush of the Nazi war machine could become fully effective. If there are nevertheless now about three million Jews in the U.S.S.R., including over one million Jews in the Ukraine, hundreds of thousands in Belorussia, Bessarabia, tens of thousands in Lithuania, etc., it is a result of the superhuman effort on the part of the Soviet government in evacuating the Jews from the regions about to be occupied by the Nazis to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Bashkiria, the Kuibishev region, western Siberia, and other regions of safety.

It is worth remembering that almost *all* Jews now living in the U.S.S.R., about three million of them, were evacuated, including the Jews of Moscow and Leningrad, and were moved hundreds and even thousands of miles away from the battle-front. The story of this evacuation has yet to be told. It is a

story of pain and sacrifice, of shattered families, of mothers and children "living" on trains for many weeks, watching other trains speed westward toward the front. It is a story of heroism, of enormous sacrifice on the part of the Soviet government, which needed the trains to move armies, factories.

All measures were taken to prevent Jews from falling prey to the hordes of Hitler. Hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews, who flocked across the Soviet border when Hitler invaded Poland, were also evacuated into the interior of the U.S.S.R. After the war ended, 160,000 of these Polish Jews were helped to return to Poland, to look for the remnants of their families; many of the Jews who wanted to remain in the U.S.S.R. were asked by the Committee of Polish Patriots to return home to help build a new Poland. The Ukraine and other areas temporarily occupied by Hitler, which practically had no Jews left at the time of liberation, again became the home of teeming Jewish communities (Kiev and Odessa, over 100,000 each; Kharkov, 90,000; Dniepropetrovsk, 70,000, etc.).

The Soviet Jews, together with the Ukrainians, Belorussians, and other Soviet peoples, are now working at the hard, painful task of rebuilding their cities, towns, collective farms and mines devastated by the enemy. I saw the destruction on my trips through the Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania and central parts of the U.S.S.R. This destruction, this sacrifice on the part of the U.S.S.R., a sacrifice which saved the cities and towns of America and other countries, must be remembered. It must be remembered when questions of reparations are considered, when the subject of real, friendly relations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. is approached.

### ***VESTIGES OF HITLER'S ANTI-SEMITIC PROPAGANDA***

Reconstruction meant—and means—more than the rebuilding of houses, factories, mines, hospitals, etc. There had to take place spiritual reconstruction as well.

The Nazi-fascist propaganda of the Hitlerites made an im-

print here and there. The propaganda against Socialism, against collectivization, gained some recruits, particularly among former factory owners, kulaks or their families. These elements were receptive to anti-Semitic propaganda.

Even in those parts of the Ukraine and Belorussia which enjoyed Soviet power for twenty years or more prior to the Nazi onslaught (it was only after 1921 that Soviet Ukraine and Belorussia were rid of the counterrevolutionary and white guardist bands) there were in all probability remnants of anti-Semitic sentiments of the days of tsarism, the Pilsudsky, Petlura, Denikin and other white guardist and interventionist hordes. In western Ukraine and Belorussia, in Lithuania, Latvia, Bessarabia, the situation was worse. Up until 1939-1940 these parts were ruled by fascist and semi-fascist *anti-Semitic* governments. The short period during which these territories were under Soviet rule was barely sufficient for eradicating anti-Semitism, just as there was no time to overcome, by education and other means (such as collectivization) capitalistic and kulak influences left by the old regime. Here, the Nazis came upon fertile ground.

Quite naturally, they made extensive use of anti-Semitic propaganda. In all occupied territories, as well as all along the front, and even in the Soviet hinterland close to the front there was a constant barrage of such propaganda. The millions of prisoners of war and civilians taken to Germany for slave labor were contaminated by it. Obviously, the problem of eradicating the effects of Nazi propaganda—against Sovietism, against collectivization, against Socialism generally, as well as anti-Semitic propaganda—posed itself as one of the most serious tasks of postwar reconstruction.

### ***THE TRUTH vs. SENSATIONALISM***

Soviet leaders publicly recognized it as such and were prepared for this task even prior to the defeat of Hitler.

Anti-Semitism was a part of the general problem of postwar re-education. This evil was, in fact, one of the first the Soviet

government went after. Immediately after liberation a vigorous campaign against anti-Semitism began.

Before I left for Europe, in 1946, there appeared in the *Jewish Daily Forward* and other anti-Soviet publications stories about pogroms in Kiev, Kharkov and other localities, particularly in the Ukraine. It was clear from the outset that no such things could have taken place under Soviet rule, even immediately after liberation. Nevertheless, while I was in Kiev, at the end of that year, I made inquiries about these reports. I spoke to people in Moscow and to intimate friends arriving from Kharkov. There was, of course, no truth in the stories about pogroms! No such things occurred! The anti-Semites remembered too well that under Soviet rule one is severely punished for such acts.

The vestiges of Hitlerism were expressed in "mild" forms. Sometimes one would make an insulting remark, even though the word "Jew" would rarely be mentioned. In the long lines before food shops some one would pass a remark that it was all "their" fault. Some individuals would try to create animosity toward Jews without openly admitting being anti-Semitic. On rare occasions an anti-Semitic insult was hurled. Most Jews hardly encountered any expression of anti-Semitism. Some, however, came in contact with this evil.

That is how the situation presented itself immediately after liberation. Again, such anti-Semitic expressions as were encountered were part of the general legacy of Nazism.

In a relatively short time even the "milder" forms of anti-Semitism began to disappear, too. Soviet life returned to its old self. The process was faster in the central parts of the country, in the Russian Republic, or in those parts of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Republics which enjoyed Soviet rule since 1920 and 1921, as I had the occasion to witness when I was there at the end of 1946. It took longer in western Ukraine and Belorussia, in Lithuania and Latvia. No doubt there are still hidden anti-Semites in these latter parts and it will take time before they are smoked out or die a natural death.

The bands that were roaming the woods along the Soviet-Polish frontier were out to kill Jews, as they were out to kill representatives of the Soviet government. They were fought and exterminated by the Soviets as enemies of the State. The successful struggle against these bands was another blow at anti-Semitism.

### ***FRIENDSHIP—A BASIC TENET***

Naturally, alongside sterner measures, or warnings, Soviet education, in schools, universities, clubs and factories is taking effect.

One must constantly be aware of one of the basic tenets of Soviet life, one of the foundations of Soviet power—friendship among nationalities. Anti-Semitism is simply an anachronism under Soviet rule. There might be hidden remnants here and there, just as there might be former capitalists or kulaks lying low, masking themselves. Such characters are either unmasked when put to test, or are assimilated. But just as anti-Sovietism is incompatible with Soviet life, so is anti-Semitism.

One of the features of the struggle against anti-Semitism is that this evil is rarely singled out. The struggle is against racism generally, as the enemy of the State. It is constantly pointed out that the Soviet Union consists of many nationalities and races and that this Union held together and was victorious because it is built on friendship among nationalities and races. One hears and sees these slogans during parades, in speeches of Soviet leaders and army commanders, in the classroom, the club, the army barrack. And of course there is article 123 of the Soviet constitution outlawing discriminations of, as well as privileges for, any nationality or race.

Last but not least, there is the unified effort of Jews and non-Jews to rebuild, to make life easier.

### ***REBUILDING JEWISH CULTURE***

Soviet Jews, together with all Soviet citizens, are now en-

gaged in peaceful reconstruction, are bending their efforts for the success of the present, the fourth, Five Year Plan. Slowly their economic and cultural life is being restored.

Conditions generally are by far not the same as they were in 1941. This naturally is equally true about facilities for Jewish culture. For instance, while the publishing house of National Minorities in the Ukraine before the war issued hundreds of thousands of Jewish books (over 840,000 in 1936), there was not one Jewish print shop after liberation. The building of the Jewish State Theater in Kiev was destroyed, and the theater company has its home now temporarily in the city of Chernovits.

The Jewish State Theater of Belorussia, which recently returned to Minsk from evacuation in Siberia, is minus a playhouse; it plays twice a week in the only theater left in the Belorussian capital which belongs to the main Belorussian state troupe. These examples indicate that it will take some time to restore cultural life to what it was before the war as the basis for its continued development. But Jewish life is being built.

There is vibrant Jewish life in the U.S.S.R. Cultural activities of broad scope go on. I witnessed these activities myself during my stay in the Soviet Union from the middle of September 1946 to the early part of January 1947. Upon my return to America I stated that these activities are on the upgrade, on the evidence of my own eyes and on what I knew about the plans of the various cultural institutions, the Jewish theaters, publishing houses, writers' groups, children's schools, etc. I also knew about the plans for the intensified building of Birobidjan. Subsequent developments substantiated these predictions.

Finally, and most important, I became convinced that in the Soviet Union, as everywhere, the interest of the Jewish masses in Jewish affairs was heightened as a result of the war. This estimate was proved accurate by developments this year, both in the building of Jewish culture in the U.S.S.R. generally, and in Birobidjan.



## CULTURAL ACTIVITY

During the two months I spent in Moscow in the winter of 1946, I witnessed more Jewish cultural events than are available in New York, with its over two million Jews. An evening of Yiddish literature took place in the most prominent concert and lecture hall in Moscow, that of the Polytechnical Museum. Posters in Russian throughout the city heralded "An Evening of Jewish Literature." David Bergelson, Itzik Feffer, Aaron Kushnirov, Leon Kwitko, Samuel Halkin and others read from their works, while Prof. I. Dobrushin read a short paper (in Yiddish) on the role of Yiddish literature in the present period. There was no musical program—only the reading of Yiddish literature. Over 1,000 people came, including many young people and students.

The Jewish State Theater in Moscow, where about 250,000 Jews live, is one of the best in the Soviet Union. It is a most important Jewish national institution for the entire Jewish people. It has an artistic and technical personnel of close to 400 people—which gives an idea of the scope of this amazing cultural organization. Attached to it and under its direction is a dramatic school with about 60 students which is training young people for the Jewish stage. The theater conducts courses in Jewish literature for the general public. On Mondays (when there are no performances) the theater organizes evenings of Jewish literature, Jewish folk songs and songs of modern Jewish poets and composers.

The Jewish newspaper, *Einikeit*, which appears in Moscow, also arranges "literary Mondays" when Jewish writers read their newly created works, participated in by Jewish singers of the Bolshoi Theater (equivalent, say, to the Metropolitan Opera House of New York), or the cantor of the main synagogue (I attended several such evenings). The Union of Jewish writers (section of the All-Soviet Writers Union) arranges regular evenings when Jewish writers read their works.

It would take too much space to enumerate the Jewish cultural affairs I witnessed in Moscow, Kiev \*(capital of the

Ukraine), Minsk (capital of Belorussia), and Vilna (capital of Lithuania). I attended a gathering in the Jewish children's school in Vilna, a state school, of course. During my stay in the U.S.S.R. I also clipped from *Einikeit* items regarding Jewish cultural events in scores of cities in the Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, as well as in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, outside of Moscow (Leningrad, Kuibishev, Gorki, Magnitogorsk, etc.). It is impossible to list them here. I will, however, dwell upon one affair which is of particular significance. It will give an idea of how differently Jewish culture is being developed in a Socialist country. It will also answer the question about assimilation in the U.S.S.R.

In October 1946 the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee arranged a reception for the editor of the New York *Morning Freiheit*. Present at this reception were, besides the above mentioned and other Jewish writers, the following: David Saslavsky, one of the editors of *Pravda*; Dr. Lena Stern, physicist of international fame; Dr. Boris Shimelevitch, head of the largest hospital in the U.S.S.R., the Moscow Botkin Hospital; Academician Boris Zbarsky, hero of Socialist Labor (it was he who preserved Lenin's body); Aaron Trainin, internationally prominent juridical expert, member of the Soviet legal staff at the Nuremberg trial; General A. Wershigora, hero of the Soviet Union, a Russian; Colonel L. Linkow-Batia, a Belorussian; Maxim Rylsky, one of the foremost Ukrainian poets, deputy of the Supreme Soviet, and others. What was the particular significance of this gathering?

### **FALLACIOUS THEORY OF ASSIMILATION**

1) Jewish leaders, cultural workers, are not isolated from leaders and cultural workers of other nationalities. It was for this reason that non-Jews attended a function of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee for the editor of a Jewish progressive newspaper in the U.S.A.

2) At that gathering the Ukrainian poet and deputy, Rylsky, chided the Moscow Jewish writers for neglecting to send their

writings to Kiev, where a Jewish Almanac was in preparation. I thought how unlikely it would be for some of the best known American poets to chide Jewish writers in New York for neglecting to send their writings to a Jewish publication in, say, Chicago. . . . I was able to see, as I saw afterwards in Minsk, Kiev, Vilna, that the development of Jewish culture is not merely the job of Jewish cultural leaders; that such Jewish leaders are being encouraged by non-Jews in the development of Jewish cultural values.

3) The theory of "assimilation through equality" is fallacious. An article in *Congress Weekly* prior to my departure for Europe, was thus captioned: "Assimilation Through Equality." The writer drew an analogy between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. and came to the conclusion that in both countries this type of assimilation is taking place. I remembered that article well while I observed the people at that reception and listened to the speeches. I saw and felt why the writer of that article was wrong.

That *some* Soviet Jews get assimilated, as is the case with *many* American Jews, is quite true, though, I am not sure that the term "assimilation" can be applied there. Who is an assimilated Jew in in the U.S.S.R.? Is a general of the Soviet Army who does not speak Yiddish assimilated? Maybe. But you often meet such a general in the Jewish theater, and as a citizen of the Soviet Union, which provides for the development of the culture of the *various* nationalities, he is interested in Jewish culture, as in the development of Birobidjan.

Assimilation, in the U.S.A. and other countries, takes place because of inequality, because some Jews are afraid to read Jewish newspapers in public. A Jewish general in the American army (if there *is* one in peace time) would certainly be *afraid* to read a Jewish newspaper; or to go to the Jewish theater. That would be "improper" indeed! A Jewish general in the U.S.S.R. (and there are many of them) is not afraid, and *cannot* be.

At that reception there was present, as already mentioned, the head of the largest Soviet hospital, Dr. Shimelevitch. His

counterpart in New York would certainly hesitate to come to a reception for an editor of a Jewish newspaper. It would most certainly have been "improper" for him to sing Yiddish songs in public. But Dr. Shimelevitch was not afraid to sing for everyone to hear! *Teiere Malke, gesunt solstu sein* (dear Malke, keep in good health), and it was in "good tone," too. Nay, it was the *natural thing!* As to the non-Jewish participants, they not only consider Jewish culture one of the Soviet cultures, they are interested in its development!

### **ASPECTS OF JEWISH LIFE IN THE U.S.S.R.**

The position of the Jew in the U.S.S.R. is different from that in our own country. The term "assimilation" does not exactly apply in the U.S.S.R. though some Soviet Jews are not participating in Jewish activities and do not speak or read Yiddish. Generally, however, there is an intensified national consciousness among Soviet Jews. And inasmuch as Jewish activities and Jewish culture are part of general Soviet life; inasmuch as Birobidjan is being built by the Jewish people with generous assistance of the government and the non-Jews, the interest among the *Jewish* people for these things is widespread.

The facts are that, although there are now about the same number of Jews in the U.S.S.R. as there were at the beginning of 1939, Jewish books are having a greater circulation. The fact is that Jewish theaters in Moscow, Minsk, Tchernovitz, Tashkent, Riga, Odessa, etc., are well attended and tickets for certain performances are hard to get. The same is the case in Kiev, Kharkov, Vilna, Kuibishev and other cities in which Jewish theaters tour. Traveling dramatic groups are organized by government cultural agencies to visit small towns, as are concerts of Jewish folk songs, literary evenings, etc. Sholom Aleichem affairs in the various cities and towns invariably turn into mass demonstrations for Jewish culture participated in by representatives of the government and cultural and party institutions.

Jewish life in the U.S.S.R. is concentrated in, and is given expression by, the following institutions:

1) The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow, which may be considered the leadership of Jewish life in the U.S.S.R. The Committee keeps in touch with the various Jewish cultural and other activities throughout the U.S.S.R. both directly and through its newspaper *Einikeit*;

2) The Jewish State Theater headed by the Moscow theater and dramatic school;

3) The Jewish Writers Associations, one in each of the six republics: Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Latvia and Moldavia. Jewish literary magazines are now published in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Vilna;

4) Publishing houses headed by the Emes Publishing House in Moscow;

5) The Division for Jewish Culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Science in Kiev and the Jewish Museum in Vilna, both institutions of national scope;

6) Jewish children's schools which are to be found now in Vilna, Kaunas, Tchernovitz, and other places.

This does not exhaust Jewish activities in the various communities and collective farms. And there is Birobidjan, which is a chapter by itself—an extremely important chapter, indeed.

Then, there are Jewish religious activities. I visited the main synagogue in Moscow during Yom Kippur. It was overcrowded, with people outside listening to the cantor through loud speakers. I spoke to the Chief Rabbi Solomon Shliffer, and the then head of the Moscow *kehilla*, Samuel Chobrutsky. I visited synagogues in Kiev, Vilna, Berditchev, Zhytomir. There are about 300 organized religious communities in the U.S.S.R. with a budget running into scores of millions of rubles.

There are no Jewish charities—because there are no charities in general. There are no separate Jewish hospitals because *all* hospitals are non-sectarian and non-religious. There are no relief activities. These forms of “Jewish activities” which dominate Jewish life in the U.S.A. were rendered obsolete

in the U.S.S.R., as they will be in every country where unemployment and discrimination are abolished.

## **JEWISH STATEHOOD**

However, the development of Jewish culture, the changes in the social composition of the Jewish people, and other achievements, tremendous as they were, were still not sufficient to place the Jews on a basis of full equality with other nationalities. The Jews still lacked—statehood.

On March 28, 1928, a territory in the Far East of the U.S.S.R. in the general domain of Khabarovsk, lying between the Amur River to the south and the Khingan Mountains to the north, was designated by the Soviet government for Jewish settlement, and in 1934 it became the Jewish Autonomous Region with full self-government.

I shall not go into details of Birobidjan's development.<sup>1</sup> I merely wish to quote from an editorial in the Moscow *Einikeit* of May 31, 1947, where the reasons for the present stepped-up Birobidjan activities are given. The editorial points out that Jews have equal opportunities in *all* part of the U.S.S.R. Why, then, should they go to Birobidjan? The answer, *Einikeit* states, is as follows:

“The new settlers had their opportunities in Vinnitza, Bershad, Kiev, Bobruisk, but they, as Soviet patriots, feel that they are needed in Birobidjan . . . in the Jewish Autonomous Region. Thereby the sense of national dignity plays a great role; they desire to actively participate in the upbuilding of the only Jewish Soviet State in the world.”

*Actively* participate. For in a general way all Jews in the U.S.S.R. are interested in the Birobidjan development. Jewish statehood there will enrich *their* life, too, will give them a sense of full equality with other nationalities. Jewish culture

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<sup>1</sup> This topic is being treated by J. M. Budish.

throughout the U.S.S.R. will derive strength from Birobidjan, where Yiddish is *the* language of the state and all its institutions. In the technicums and universities, in the laboratories, as well as in the mines, factories and fields of Birobidjan new terms for the Yiddish language are being coined. As stated in a recent article A. Bachmutsky, Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R from Birobidjan, the goal is that Yiddish should in the immediate future be the language of institutions of higher learning. Already, Yiddish is obligatory for non-Jewish children as well.

A full-blooded Jewish nation is being developed in the U.S.S.R., a nation with its own language and culture, its own economy, participated in by Jewish workers in factories and mines and Jewish farmers, a nation enjoying full equality among the numerous peoples of the U.S.S.R., equal among equals. A Jewish nation—truly reborn—or born.

A JEWISH STATE RISES IN BIROBIDJAN

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### **A Note About the Author**

J. M. Budish is Executive Vice President of the American Committee for Birobidjan (ACBJ), an organization devoted to the settlement and rehabilitation in Birobidjan of the Jews who survived the war of annihilation waged against them by the Nazis.

Mr. Budish is an economist and expert on Soviet affairs.

## A JEWISH STATE RISES IN BIROBIDJAN

By J. M. BUDISH

THE thirtieth anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has special significance for the Jewish people. It is in that country that a new era dawned for the Jews bringing them hope, encouragement and promise at the time of their greatest distress. The new day had its crowning achievement in the establishment and development of the Jewish Autonomous Region. Birobidjan has become an anchor for our hopes, renewing our faith in man's progress and the certainty that national and racial equality will conquer all forms of national and racial discrimination and oppression.

The designation in 1928 of the territory of Birobidjan for Jewish settlement had a twofold purpose. In the European part of the Soviet Union, the fund of unoccupied, cultivable land that could be made available for Jews desiring to take up farming was practically exhausted. Birobidjan provided opportunities for additional substantial numbers of Jews to settle on land and engage in agriculture, forestry, fishing, etc. But, above all, Birobidjan presented the Jews of the Soviet Union with the opportunity to develop their own statehood.

The late president of the U.S.S.R., Michael I. Kalinin, explained these purposes in an address to the workers of the Moscow industries on May 28, 1934. Said Kalinin:

"Three million Soviet Jews are the only nationality in the U.S.S.R. that has no statehood. . . . In the Jewish Autonomous Region, Birobidjan, there will develop a great socialist construction and hand in hand with it a genuine socialist Jewish culture. . . . How are people regenerated? They are regenerated by contact with the

hard, almost virgin nature of the region, through the great creative effort that it demands. . . . Just like the early American cowboys, the Birobidjan people will have to conquer nature. Naturally, the development of a great region is a time-consuming process. . . . I consider Birobidjan as a Jewish national state. The elevation of Birobidjan to the status of an Autonomous Region [in 1934] is a result of the will of the Jewish masses to strengthen the work in Birobidjan and develop Jewish national statehood. . . . As to the transformation of this region into a Republic, it is merely a matter of time. . . . To create a republic out of a region will be easier than it was to transform a district [county] into a region. The elevation of the Region to the status of Republic depends on the efforts of the toiling Jews themselves."

### ***A RICH AREA***

Birobidjan is located in the Far Eastern territory of the Soviet Union, in the bend of the Amur River above Manchuria. Its area is fifteen thousand square miles. It extends from the city of Obluchie in the west almost up to the city of Khabarovsk on the east—a distance of 200 miles along the Trans-Siberian Railroad. It is bounded on the south by the Amur River which separates the region from Manchuria for a distance of over four hundred miles. Although it lies about five thousand miles east of Moscow, it is no further from the equator than Duluth, Minnesota, Paris, or Montreal. Its climate is similar to that of the states of Maine and Minnesota, but has much more sunshine. This climate is quite favorable for such crops as spring wheat, early varieties of maize, potatoes, oats, soy beans, rice, grapes and all vegetables. The abundance of fine flowers make it one of the leading honey-producing areas of the Soviet Union. Its climate and vegetation make the region adaptable for large-scale livestock-raising.

Heavy woods cover about 32 per cent of the entire area and the timber resources are estimated at two and one-half

billion cubic feet. This forms an excellent basis for the building and furniture industries and for the production of pulp and paper. The forests teem with fur-bearing animals, including some valuable species such as sables, foxes, bears, racoons, squirrels, deer, etc.

The northern part of the Jewish Autonomous Region is covered by the foothills of the Khingan Mountains abounding in rich deposits of useful minerals: coal, iron ore, molybdenum, lead, magnesite, dolomite, gold and graphite. Recently, large deposits of tin were discovered in Birobidjan. The region has practically inexhaustible supplies of construction minerals, such as limestone, marble, clay and sand, and some 40,000 acres of peat deposits.

The region derives its name from the two rivers, Bira and Bidjan, running from north to south and emptying into the Amur River. The total length of all rivers and lakes of the Jewish Autonomous Region is some 2,000 miles. The lakes and rivers of Birobidjan abound in fish, supplying the basis for a thriving fishing and canning industry. The hardy, healthy climate and rich natural resources of Birobidjan have made possible for the new Jewish settlers, with the assistance of the U.S.S.R. as a whole, to develop in a comparatively short time agriculture and industries which have made the region not only self-sustaining but also enabled it to provide surpluses for the Red Army during World War II and to offer a haven for thousands of Jewish war orphans, evacuees and refugee Jews in the present period of postwar rehabilitation.

### ***JEWS ROOTED IN THE LAND***

There are about 2,000,000 acres of tillable soil in the region. Up to the establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Region, the area under cultivation was so small that the average annual increase in the cultivated areas amounted to only a few hundred acres. In the past ten years, however, more than 17,000 acres of forest land have been cleared and 84,000 acres

of virgin land were brought under cultivation. During the same period, 27,000 acres of marshland were drained. At present, the region has a total cultivated area of 123,550 acres, and it is increasing rapidly.

Most significant is the transformation of the new Jewish settlers, former artisans and trading people into highly skilled farmers. One of the oldest Jewish collective farms in the region, Waldheim, was represented at the All Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow in 1938-1941 and received premiums for many of its excellent crops.

Cattle-breeding has also made record gains. Almost two-thirds of the sixty-six collective farms in the region have three cattle-farms each; one-quarter have four each and ten per cent two each. There are 300 head of cattle in each *kolkhoz* farm and up to 600 cattle in each of the five state farms of the region. A beginning has also been made in horse-raising and the region has five horse-breeding farms.

Another important branch of agriculture is apiculture; there is hardly a *kolkhoz* in Birobidjan without a beehive. At present there are 84 beehouses in the collective farms, with 10,000 hives. The present plan provides for increasing the number of beehouses to 2,500, with 250,000 hives which would provide 5,000 tons of honey a year.

It is important to emphasize that the new Jewish settlers in their struggle to conquer this virgin land have succeeded not only in developing a large cultivated area and establishing many successful collective farms, but have also developed outstanding Jewish agriculturists well-known throughout the entire Far East.

## **INDUSTRIAL CENTER RISES**

The progress of industrial development has paralleled that of agriculture. At the time Birobidjan was designated for Jewish settlement there were practically no industries there. The only railroad station within the region at which the Trans-Siberian express would stop for a minute was Tikhon-

kaya (in English it means "quiet")—a little village of a few hundred people. Out of this village grew the present capital of the Jewish Autonomous Region, Birobidjan City, with a population of 50,000.

Birobidjan City is a thriving, industrial, agricultural and cultural center of the region. It has many fine buildings, paved streets, asphalt sidewalks, and in 1946 it also got a system of water supply and sewage disposal.

The well-known Jewish writer, S. Gordon, in the summer of 1946 visited Birobidjan after an absence of ten years. Here is his own description of his impressions:

"I was unable to recognize it," says Mr. Gordon. "Birobidjan is at present a term designating excellent highways, asphalted sidewalks, big buildings, water supply, sewerage, squares and streets lined with trees and shrubs." He describes the various streets starting from the great brick railroad station, one of the most beautiful in the entire Far East, on the October Street—"an exceptionally beautiful street, with two and three-story brick buildings, and with tree-lined asphalt sidewalks." Then, passing to Kalininsk and Waldheim Streets where the major public institutions are concentrated, such as the Birobidjan Machine Tractor Station, the Music school, the Radio Broadcasting station, the Medical school, the Normal school, the College for Railroad Technicians, the buildings of the Regional and County governments, the Moving Picture house at the central square, and starting from there, the Sholom Aleichem Street, and the Lenin Street with its furniture plant, wagon and wheel plant, the four-story building of the newspaper, *Birobidjan Shtern*, the Jewish State theater, the large building of the Ten-Year school, the hotel with telephone service in each room and a central heating system, and the side streets with their factories including the plywood factory, the tile plant, the machine shop, the several brick plants, the saw and lumber mill and the plant for the production of doors, windows and other prefabricated parts for houses, the large clothing factory employing over 1,000 people, the department stores, the "gastronom" (grocery,

delicatessen store), numerous other stores, the Park of Culture and Rest with its stadium for sports, the numerous small factories and co-operatives, enterprises producing kitchenware, food products, soft drinks, etc. All of this made the impression upon Mr. Gordon, "of a big city."

"The more I walk the streets of Birobidjan, the more I have the feeling," continues Mr. Gordon, "that I am not in the Far East but somewhere in the South. The center of the city, with its brightly-lit brick buildings and thickly-treed lanes is very similar to that of the center of Evpatoria, Feodosia, and Jankoy. You have the feeling that these streets will bring you to the seashore."

Among the older industrial establishments in the city are the large clothing factory, furniture factory, leather factory, sawmill, plywood plant, barrel plant, wagon plant, brick works, mechanized bakery, printing shop, electric power station and several food and beverage producing plants. The large machine and automobile repair shops which service the eight machine tractor stations of the region are rapidly becoming the initial units for a machine producing and repairing industry. World War II retarded the rapid industrial development of Birobidjan. However, immediately after the war, new industrial construction began again on a large scale. On the Birofeld Highway, not far from the City of Birobidjan, a new tile factory with a capacity of 350,000 tiles a year has just started.

The building of a large textile mill was started in March, 1945, and the first completed section of this mill was put into operation in 1947. The production capacity of this combine when completed with 6,780 spindles and 190 looms, will be five million meters of fabrics a year. It will also produce large quantities of felt and yarn for the knit-goods industry. A new shoe factory began production in August, 1946. Its total initial capacity will be 15,000 pairs a year. However, the plant provides for the extension of its capacity to 100,000 pairs a year. A large confectionary factory is in operation now.

## **EXPANDING THE INDUSTRIAL AREA**

Birobidjan City is not the only industrial center of the Region. Near Londoko at Teploye Ozero (Warm Lake) the construction of a large cement plant has begun. This will be the biggest cement plant in the entire Far East. In the town of Birokan the first pulp and paper plant of Birobidjan has just been put in operation.

There are, in the Jewish Autonomous Region, 60 substantial industrial enterprises, not counting the numerous co-operative factories. It is a matter of general knowledge that the term "Stakhanovite worker" is used in the U.S.S.R. to designate the most highly skillful and productive industrial workers who make up only a few per cent of the total number. The total number of workers in the various industrial enterprises of Birobidjan who have merited the title "Stakhanovite workers" exceeds 2,000. The city of Obluchie, and the towns of Izvestkovaia, Teploye-Ozero, Londoko, Khingan, Kimkan, Birokan, Inn, Stalinsk and Biro are also important industrial centers of the Jewish Autonomous Region. All towns have producers co-operatives in the lumber and woodworking industries, the production of tar, and fishing and canning, etc. In addition, most of the towns have also important large-scale industrial enterprises.

Obluchie has great railroad shops: it is the center for the nearby Sutari Gold Works, has a school for locomotive engineers, several high schools, a theater, several clubs, libraries, hospitals, a Park of Culture and Rest, a sports stadium, motion picture theater, etc.

Londoko is the center of the lime industry. The lime plant has a capacity of 80,000 tons a year.

Khingan is the center of the recently discovered rich tin deposits; it is a boom-town planned for about 30,000 workers to be employed in the tin mines and smelters.

Teploye-Ozero is the center of the cement industry with the biggest cement plant in the entire Far East.

Birokan is the center of the marble and paper industries.



The marble produced in Birokan is of green-red colors, among the best in the U.S.S.R., and was used for the construction of the beautiful Belorussian station of the Moscow subway. In 1947, there was put into operation in Birokan the first paper mill of the Region.

Not far from Birokan is the famous resort town of Kuldur with its hot springs, known for their curative effects for rheumatism and digestive troubles, with its modern hospital buildings. The town of Inn is the center of locomotive repair shops and auxiliary industries, and also the center for training railroad transportation workers and technicians. The town of Stalinsk is distinguished by its modern Agricultural College with its Experimental Research Stations that are supplying the Region with an increasing number of scientific agriculturists.

The Ushuman coal mines have started to produce coal during the present year. A pencil factory from local graphite and cedar wood is being built. During the war the Region started the production of parachutes and trailers for military vehicles. These war industries are now being converted to peacetime production.

The construction and railroad industries are making rapid strides. The building of improved highways, housing facilities, schools and public buildings is one of the major tasks of the Jewish Autonomous Region at present. While Birobidjan has all the necessary raw materials and can easily obtain the needed labor force, since tens of thousands of new settlers are applying daily for admission to Birobidjan, the Region suffers from an acute shortage of construction machinery.

There are twenty railroad stations within the geographical limits of Birobidjan. There are large railroad depots and shops at Obluchie, Inn and Birobidjan City. While there were no Jewish railroad workers among the original Jewish settlers of Birobidjan a substantial number of highly skilled locomotive engineers, foremen and conductors, stationmasters, etc., have been trained in the Region. A number of new railroad branch lines are under construction, connecting such

important industrial enterprises as the Ushuman coal mines with the Trans-Siberian Railway.

## ***JEWISH SELF-GOVERNMENT***

Birobidjan enjoys full self-government in all local affairs, including regional agriculture and industrial planning and development, police, militia, health and sanitation, local taxation and the collection of federal taxes. The local authorities are elected by the local population, and the Region is represented on the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. Elections of Deputies to local Soviets and regional Legislature of the Jewish Autonomous Region were held in December, 1947. All citizens eighteen years of age and over have a right to vote. About 2,000 candidates had been nominated for the various regional and municipal offices throughout the Region. A candidate must receive an absolute majority of all the votes cast to be elected. In case no candidate gets an absolute majority, a run-off election is held. Birobidjan is the only place in the world where all ballots are printed in Yiddish. In individual cases, ballots printed in Russian are provided for voters of other nationalities who do not know the Yiddish language.

The Municipal Council of Birobidjan City consists of 73 members. Out of these 73 Deputies elected in December, 1947, 45 are Jews and 28 are non-Jews, representing the various other nationalities of this capital city. Among the members of the Municipal Council there are 11 with a university education and 25 with a secondary education. There are 29 women Deputies.

The budgetary income of the Jewish Autonomous Region in 1946 reached 43,555,000 rubles, and the expenditures amounted to 41,452,000. The budgetary appropriations for 1947 are 52,266,000 rubles, an increase of 29 per cent as against 1946. The savings of the residents of Birobidjan were, besides, large enough to enable them to purchase Soviet State

Bonds of the May, 1947, Loan to the amount of 18,373,000 rubles.

By the establishment of the Jewish Autonomous Region, the Soviet Union presented the Jews with the opportunity of acquiring all the attributes of a nation, thus enabling them to develop their own culture, national in form and Socialist in content, on the basis of the historic continuity of the cultural heritage of the Jewish people.

The sound economic, social and political foundations have made possible for the Jewish Autonomous Region to develop within the short time of only thirteen years into one of the most important centers of Jewish culture in the world. We shall briefly describe its major cultural achievements.

The cultural development of Birobidjan is of special historic significance. At present Birobidjan is the only Jewish community where Yiddish culture embraces every human endeavor as the superstructure of the production relationships of the Region. It is the only center where Yiddish culture is developing on the sure foundation of the entire economic, social and political life. Here Yiddish is the language of the community in its everyday life: in the marketplace, in government institutions, in the schools as the language of instruction, in the courts, in industry, trade and transportation.

## ***DEVELOPING JEWISH CULTURE***

The Yiddish school system of Birobidjan has no parallel anywhere in the world. There are nurseries, kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools, four colleges, a music school, a school for physical culture, courses of kindergarten teachers, agricultural experimental and research stations, evening and day schools for adults, schools for civics, libraries, reading rooms and clubs. The writer had the opportunity to visit the public schools, high schools and colleges of Birobidjan. It was a real thrill to watch the classes in mathematics, physics, chemistry and natural sciences conducted in the Yiddish

language, and examine the student's notebooks in the same language. The educational standards of the Birobidjan schools and colleges are second to none. They would do credit to similar educational institutions anywhere. Even though the Region still lacks adequate school equipment and supplies and is short of textbooks, the school educational level compares favorably with that prevailing in most civilized countries.

The four-year normal school for teachers in the City of Birobidjan has already supplied the Region with several hundred teachers. Of the four experimental research stations in the various districts of the Region, one is devoted to all crops while the other three specialize respectively in seeds, vegetables and fruits. In this connection, we should mention the Yiddish scientific publications of the staff of the college and experimental stations, including B. Gottlieb, Zolotnitzky and D. Sokolsky on such subjects as the various crops of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

The Medical College in the City of Birobidjan offers a four-year course for assistant physicians. The railroad college has already given the Region 625 railway technicians. The seven-year music school graduated 80 students in 1947 and its present enrollment consists of some 100 students of violin, piano, clarinet and bayan (a local musical instrument). In 1947, a beginning has been made for the establishment of an art school for children. The well-known Leningrad Jewish painter, Tsimerinov, has settled in Birobidjan and conducts two art schools for talented children, one at the House of Pioneers and the other at the Children's Home for war orphans. Some fifty children attend these two schools. At this writing, we have received word that first steps have been taken to establish a full-fledged Jewish State University in Birobidjan City.

### ***STUDY OF YIDDISH OBLIGATORY***

Last year the study of the Yiddish language was made obligatory for the non-Jewish schools of the Region. This

year, a special textbook, *Yiddish for Non-Jews*, has been published by H. Rabinko. It seems to us that this is the only case where a textbook of that nature has become a necessity for units of the regular school system anywhere in the world.

Among other cultural institutions are the Jewish State Theater, which is the pride of the Region; the Central Library bearing the name of Sholom Aleichem in Birobidjan City, which has a total of 150,000 volumes (110,000 titles), including some 29,000 on Judaica; 29 libraries throughout the Region, 44 reading rooms, 24 clubs, six houses of culture, 27 stationary and 10 portable moving picture houses, 15 radio sub-stations, numerous choruses and music ensembles, several vocational schools, parks of rest and culture and the Regional museum devoted to the flora, fauna and paleontology of Birobidjan and the history of Regional development, to exhibits of Jewish culture, from ancient times to the present, including a special department—"The Jew and Human Culture"—devoted to the contributions of such outstanding Jews as Spinoza, Marx, Heine, Mendelssohn, Rubenstein, etc.

The rapid development of educational institutions in Birobidjan is reflected in a growth of the educational budget: 2,400,000 rubles in 1934; 18,400,000 in 1946; the appropriation for 1947 is over 22,000,000 rubles.

Birobidjan press and literature deserve much more space than we can give it here. The Region has one Yiddish newspaper in the City of Birobidjan, *Der Stern* (The Star), and several in the various district centers. A number of talented writers and poets, dramatists and plastic artists has grown up during this short period of time in the Jewish Autonomous Region and have a prominent place among the Jewish writers of the Soviet Union and throughout the world. The small group of Birobidjan painters—L. Sevin, N. Gorshman, Sisman and Rosenblit—are distinguished by their full appreciation of the specific character of the Birobidjan landscape and the natural, industrial and social life of the Region. Their studies, sketches and paintings reflect the pioneering life and rapid construction of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

## NEW IMMIGRATION FACILITATED

Early in 1947 the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union issued instructions to all Soviet Republics to facilitate in every possible way the immigration of new Jewish settlers to Birobidjan. In 1946, 600 Jewish families arrived in Birobidjan from other parts of U.S.S.R. In 1947, 1,500 Jewish families arrived in Birobidjan in six large contingents, in addition to hundreds of Jewish war orphans and numerous Jewish families who arrived in small groups. During the month of December, three additional contingents of new Jewish settlers left for Birobidjan; on December 6, 255 Jewish families from Crimea left the city of Evpatoria for Birobidjan; on December 14, 248 Jewish families left Kherson, and on December 28, 114 Jewish families left the city of Nikolaiev for the same destination, making a total of 617 families in the month of December alone. According to the available latest official data, 20,000 Jews from the war ravaged regions of the U.S.S.R. were settled in Birobidjan during the 18 months up to the end of 1947. (See *U.S.S.R. Information Bulletin*, published by the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., April 28, 1948, p. 256.)

The latest report of the new Governor, M. Levitin, just elected by the Legislature of the Region, dated February 10, 1948, states that in the month of January, 1948 alone, the number of new Jewish arrivals in Birobidjan reached 2,000. The Jewish Autonomous Region has, since the conclusion of the war, accepted thousands of refugee and evacuee Jewish war orphans and is maintaining them with the co-operation of the American Birobidjan Committee. Four special children's homes in Birobidjan City, Londoko, Waldheim and Bira have been organized for that purpose.

There is an increasing popular desire among the Jewish masses of the Soviet Regions that had been occupied and largely destroyed by the Nazis to go to Birobidjan and participate in the upbuilding of this Jewish state. To quote only two instances: Efraim Granovsky, a Crimean farmer, writes

in the name of fifty farm families: "We are envious of the fortunate Jews who have already arrived in Birobidjan; our aspiration to settle in the Jewish Autonomous Region is very great." Another Jew, Haim Heis, states: "My strongest desire is to go to Birobidjan and contribute with my own labor to the building up of the Jewish Autonomous Region. I am not afraid of any difficulties. I know how to work."

The natural resources of Birobidjan make possible for it to absorb hundreds of thousands of new settlers and provide a high standard of living. The real difficulty arises from the lack of housing facilities and marginal machinery and tools. Under present conditions, keeping in mind the unprecedented destruction suffered by the Soviet Union in the war, these marginal facilities can be provided locally only relatively slowly. The great number of Jews seeking an opportunity to go to Birobidjan are thus unable to be received immediately. The co-operation of American Jews would play an important part in facilitating and hastening the development of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

## ***BIROBIDJAN AND PALESTINE***

It is impossible to overestimate the historic significance of the Jewish Autonomous Region to the Jews of the world. It has supplied an unchallengeable answer to all anti-Jewish calumnies slandering the Jews as unfit for anything but trading, brokerage and similar "unproductive" operations. But here is Birobidjan—a land built up by the hardihood and labor of Jewish pioneers. Here is a self-governing Jewish community that has developed thriving industries and agriculture as well as splendid cultural institutions, highways, transportation, that has built cities, towns and villages by its tireless and efficient labor. The historic accomplishment of the Jewish people in the Jewish Autonomous Region has added to the dignity of the Jews everywhere, and has become a factor in their struggle for recognition and equality.

The fact that the Jews have gained all the attributes of a

nation in Birobidjan has contributed enormously to the obtaining of the decision of the United Nations in favor of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. The warm support given to that decision by the delegation from the Soviet Union undoubtedly was based on the same philosophy of that country which made it extend every facility to its own Jews to enable them to establish a state-unit. For, if it is the inherent right of the Jews of the Soviet Union to build up a Jewish state, and they have shown their capacity to do so, there is certainly no reason why the same right should be denied to the Jewish people of Palestine, who have shown the same pioneering spirit and capacity, and the same devotion and aspiration to develop a Jewish state there.

Birobidjan is a convincing example to every civilized country that full equality for the Jewish people, as well as for all national minorities, is within the reach of the democratic forces of the community. What has been achieved in one great country can and must be achieved in every democratic country. Jewish equality, the development of Jewish culture on a basis of the historic continuity of the Jewish cultural heritage, has been proved by Birobidjan to be of benefit not only to the Jews but to the country as a whole. It lends encouragement and confidence in the struggle of all progressive forces for the elimination of bigotry, discrimination and anti-Semitism. Birobidjan has provided the Jews with all the attributes of a nation. It has opened a new era in the history of the Jewish people.



## *Suggested Readings*

- To Secure Jewish Rights, the Communist Position,  
by Alexander Bittelman ..... 10¢
- Jewish Culture in America, Weapon for Jewish Sur-  
vival and Progress, by Nathan Ausubel ..... 15¢
- Constitution of the U.S.S.R. .... 15¢
- Soviet Democracy, by Harry F. Ward ..... 15¢
- The Soviet Union and World Peace, by Joseph  
Stalin and V. M. Molotov ..... 10¢
- The Soviet Power, by Hewlett Johnson..... 60¢
- The Soviet Spirit, by Harry F. Ward..... 50¢

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