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*William Keller*

## ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE SOVIET UNION

### I

THE spring of 1917 was a time of joyful anticipation for the Jews of Russia: the apparent beginning of a "brave new world" which would bring all their dreams and aspirations to a satisfying reality. For a century and a half they had suffered the rigorous restrictions and intermittent persecutions of the Czarist regime;<sup>1</sup> but this regime had now been overthrown, and a democratic Provisional Government formed. The Jews, together with all the many peoples of the former Russian Empire, found themselves emerging for the first time into the full, blinding light of freedom.

Russian Jewry was by no means united within itself as to its future plans. There was first the vast body of Orthodox Jews, living a life apart. Then there were the Zionists and the nationalists, insisting that the Jews were a completely separate nation and culture. Others, the liberals, favored assimilation in all except religious practice, while the socialist labor group, Marxist and anti-religious, opposed national separatism but backed the development of a national culture, at least as a temporary measure.<sup>2</sup>

The most vocal Jewish organization in the years before the Revolution was the General Jewish Workers Alliance, the so-called Bund. As early as 1901, this group had affirmed that the concept of "nation" was applicable to the Jews. It was only natural that even a Marxist

1. For a more detailed account of the position of Russian Jews from medieval times to the Revolution, see Léon Poliakov, *Histoire de l'Antisémitisme*, Vol. I, *Du Christ aux Juifs de cour* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955), pp. 297-304.

2. Solomon M. Schwarz's *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1951) is the best scholarly treatment in English of the relations of Russian Jews with the Soviet state. See pp. 3-23 for a description of the political movements in the Jewish community in the years immediately prior to the Revolution.

organization like this should think of Judaism in national terms, for the Jews in eastern Europe, unlike their brethren in the West, had always been, first perforce and later not unwillingly, a closed society.

In 1903, the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, which included the Jewish Bund, declared its approval of the right of self-determination for all nations in the state. On this occasion, Vladimir Medem proposed on behalf of the Bund an amendment which would permit the various national minorities to establish institutions for the development of their own culture. This proposal was defeated, largely by Lenin's group, and the Bund withdrew from the Social Democratic Workers Party. From that time on, Lenin's followers, now known as the Bolsheviki, that is, the Party of the Majority, became more influential in Russian radical circles. Opposing the notion of a federal union of nations within the state, they canonized, from the very start, the principle of centralization. Lenin saw "self-determination" solely as the right of the various nations to secede if they wished. But a true merger could be formed only if they chose not to do so. Hence he urged his followers to take the lead in the various nationalist movements, but to work against the use of the right to secede. Any aspirations toward national culture were simply regarded as inspired by "clerical or bourgeois fraud."

## II

THE Revolution of March 1917 brought the various radical groups down from the ivory tower of theory into the market place of reality. The national question was vitally pressing and required some immediate solution, for the huge Russian Empire, far from being a melting pot, had been a vast conglomeration of races, peoples and tribes, existing on every historical and cultural level. Each group, with the exception of the Jews, had its own territory. While more numerous in the Ukraine and White Russia than elsewhere, nowhere did the Jews form any extensive territorial majority. As a result, they posed a problem even more difficult of solution than that of the other national groups.

When, in November 1917, the Bolsheviks took control of the Revolution, their emphasis on centralization and their interpretation of "self-determination" began to prevail. Every effort was made to prevent the nationalities from choosing to secede. The brief attempts

in the Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia to establish democratic institutions were criticized as "outdated bourgeois parliamentarianism." In 1921, Stalin went so far as to declare that once the national groups elected to join the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, they permanently renounced their right to secede.

Once the "merger" had taken place, it became necessary to harmonize in some way the widely varying groups that made up the new state. At that point there was an apparent change in Bolshevik policy, with Stalin even defending the right of national minorities to free national development. But this was no real doctrinal change, rather a temporary tactical compromise. National cultures were encouraged in order to bring them all up to a level where fusion could take place. Significantly, no national culture was permitted to develop a content in any way separate from Soviet culture; the only real difference allowed was a difference of language. Stalin prophesied that some nationalities might, and even certainly would, undergo a process of assimilation. But which nations he had in mind, he did not say.

Back in April 1917, the Provisional Government had achieved the goal long sought by all the oppressed peoples of Russia: all religious and national restrictions were repealed. The Jews immediately began organizing themselves along democratic lines. No opposition was given by the government, for all parties except the Bolsheviks favored the establishment of autonomous national-cultural groups. When, in the fall of the same year, the Bolsheviks secured full control, it became uncertain whether these autonomous developments would continue. Jews well remembered the words of Lenin: "The idea of a separate Jewish people, which is utterly untenable scientifically, is reactionary in its political implications." The Jews were neither a nation nor a nationality but a caste, he taught, and castes were not to be tolerated.<sup>3</sup> It was the Communist conviction that the repeal of restrictions, which had taken place in April 1917, would, by an irresistible sociological process, lead to complete assimilation of peoples.

### III

IN JANUARY 1918, a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was established as part of the People's Commissariat for National Affairs, which was

3. Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 50-53.

under Stalin's direction. The Commissariat organized subordinate provincial Jewish Commissariats, administrative in purpose, and Jewish Sections, intended as means of winning the Jewish people to the Communist Party. However, great difficulties were encountered in the organization of these groups, for hardly any practicing Jews had been members of the Bolshevik Party in its early days. While quite a few party members were of Jewish parentage, they were estranged from their origins and were not even familiar with Yiddish, the language then spoken by the overwhelming majority of Jews.

As Solomon Schwarz points out, the Commissariat-Section plan "implied the establishment of extra-territorial organs for the administration of Jewish affairs, thus virtually subscribing to that principle of national-cultural autonomy which the Bolsheviks abhorred."<sup>4</sup> But these were only temporary concessions, meant to win over the reluctant Jews to Communism. In July 1918 all non-Communist elements were eliminated from these groups, all autonomous tendencies were uprooted, and the Sections were wholly subordinated to the Communist Party. Furthermore, these agencies were appointive rather than elective, thus giving the Party greater control over the Jewish minority.

At first, Jewish reactions to the Communist campaign were unfavorable, for the Party threatened the newly found independence of the Jewish community. But the early reluctance was soon overcome, not so much by Communist concessions as by the anti-Semitism of those who fought the Soviets in the Civil War of late 1918. The cruel pogroms and the looting of Jewish property by the counter-revolutionaries literally forced the Jews to a position of greater co-operation with the Communists. Yet almost immediately the Communists began to show less interest in the Jews: in 1920 the Jewish Commissariat was reduced to a mere department, and in the following year all Jewish parties were finally liquidated. The administration of Jews would be dealt with locally by the provincial, district, and municipal Soviet authorities, not by any separate administrative body. For a few more years, the Sections were permitted to exist in ever decreasing importance, being finally dissolved in 1930. Since their disappearance, "no political, administrative, or cultural organization representing the Jewish minority as a distinct national or ethnic group has existed in

4. *Ibid.*, p. 96.



the Soviet Union.”<sup>5</sup> Although some Sections lingered on for another decade, it was evident as early as 1921 that the first step in the Communist campaign against the aspirations of the Jewish community had been accomplished: all democratic Jewish institutions had been destroyed, and any future concessions would be nothing but the freely bestowed favors of the Communist Party.

#### IV

THE policy of the Soviet government toward the Jews in the years between the wars may seem erratic at first glance. But only at first glance: advancing and withdrawing time and again, its ultimate object was to detach the Jews from their ancient loyalties, national, cultural, and religious. To a considerable extent this policy was successful; those who failed to be absorbed were to be dealt with in later years by sterner measures.

An examination of various aspects of Jewish life may serve to bring these statements into sharper relief. As far as organized religious life was concerned, the Jews suffered along with all Christian bodies, for in a regime whose philosophy is built on the “dogma” that God does not exist, religion is at best barely tolerated and at worst openly persecuted. Hence the Soviet government suppressed all churches and synagogues; though groups of fifty or more citizens could be licensed to form private religious associations, they were subjected to oppressive surveillance. Religious instruction of youth was punishable by law; in fact, any form of religious activity put those engaged under the suspicion of being “counter-revolutionary.” Those who were known to persevere in their faith were victimized in their livelihood. The result for the Jewish community was that membership in the synagogues drastically declined in the '20s. In spite of this considerable leakage, many—of whom the statistics will never be learned—secretly continued in their faith.

At the very beginning of the Revolution, the Bolshevists had agreed that minority groups could use their native tongues in the state schools. Yet here again the teaching was to differ “in language only, not in content.” For all the ardent desire of the Jews to implant the seeds of their ancient heritage in their children, the schools were de-

5. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

liberately fashioned as a weapon to achieve just the opposite. In every state school for Jewish children, classes were conducted on the Sabbath, and neither Hebrew nor the national literature and history was taught; it was just another anti-religious Soviet school, but one which used Yiddish as its language. To thwart the religious influence of the privately conducted *heder* (the centuries-old Jewish elementary school usually held in the teacher's own home), all Jewish children were forced to attend the Yiddish state school, at least in White Russia and the Ukraine. But in the late '20s Soviet interest in the Yiddish school fell off, as a passing stress by the government on things Ukrainian (not to speak of its ever present urge to increase Russian cultural influence), together with the moving of many Jews from the old ghetto areas, combined to reduce the number and influence of this type of school.

The same trend was observable in other cultural areas. In the last Czarist generation, the Jewish press had grown by 1914 to a peak of thirteen daily newspapers in Yiddish and two in Hebrew. After the Revolution, the increase in the number of periodicals was at first phenomenal: in 1917-18 there were 171 newspapers and periodicals being issued for the Jews in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian. But after 1921, the disappearance of all non-Communist papers brought a swift decline: in 1935 only four or five dailies remained, and in 1939 only three. A like trend occurred in non-daily periodicals. Scholars and scientific workers produced very little during these years. As the "party line" changed, they were frequently forced to renounce and "correct" their own work to bring it into accord with the latest shift. They were also forced into the repellent position of "exposing" all pre-Revolutionary and non-Soviet scholarship. But the Jewish theater movement saw rapid growth. This aspect of Jewish life, since it was wholly secular in origin, received considerable government support from the mid-'20s on. It flourished in some twenty companies during these years, only to fall a victim in the time of the political purges of the late '30s.

While minority self-government for the Jews was effectively quashed in the first years after the Revolution, a certain measure of autonomy was extended in some areas where Jews were numerous, principally in the Ukraine. These local Soviets were first organized in the late '20s; no figures on them have been released since 1933, however, when they began to decline. For they had been established in the hope that

the young people, indoctrinated in the Soviet schools, would take the lead in their communities; but this was just the group that emigrated elsewhere into industry or agriculture, leaving dominant the older generation, tainted, as the Communists saw it, with "counter-revolutionary influences of clericalism."

Soviet law gives every citizen the right to the use of his native tongue in court, even supplying interpreters where needed. In Jewish districts, special Jewish courts were erected, mainly with the purpose of undermining religion by displacing the old form of justice meted out by the rabbi. On this court system, Solomon Schwarz quotes Soviet writer Yakov Kantor: "The national court divisions have made an important contribution to the eradication of pernicious attitudes, superstitions, and anachronistic religious survivals within the Jewish population; they have driven out the rabbinical practice of justice so widespread in the Jewish *shtetl*."<sup>6</sup> Once organized Jewish religious life was done away with, the government began to abandon the Jewish courts, only a few still existing at the last count in the late '30s.

## V

THE complete reorganization of every department of Russian life effected by the Communist Party brought about a total alteration of the national economy. In Czarist times, the Jews had been kept off the soil and hemmed in by numerous other restrictions, with the result that most of them were small traders or merchants.<sup>7</sup> Under the new, state-organized economy, there was no longer room for private enterprise of this type, and thousands of city- and town-dwelling Jews were on the verge of destitution. To solve this problem, another apparent concession was offered by the government: Jews were to be given a territory of their own in Siberia—a plan first thought of, incidentally, by the government of Czar Nicholas I. Only Jews would be admitted to Birobidzhan, the territory selected by the Soviet government, and

6. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

7. Harry Schwartz, in "Has Russia Solved the Jewish Problem?," *Commentary*, V, 2 (February 1948), pp. 128-136, gives some interesting comparative statistics on the occupations of Jews in the Czarist and Soviet periods: in 1897 more than one-half were small businessmen or traders, 30 per cent artisans and handicrafters, with only 4 per cent engaged in industry and 2 in agriculture; in 1939 almost one-half were professional or white-collar workers, about 20 per cent artisans, roughly 25 per cent engaged in industry, with almost 6 per cent in agricultural work.



the immigrants would be divided between communal agricultural projects on the land and industry in the urban areas.

Birobidzhan seemed at first like all Jewish dreams of the past come true. But soon enough it became evident that the Soviet government had not undergone any real change of heart. Not only would the plan remove large numbers of Jews from the steadily progressing areas of western Russia; it might finally give, the Soviets hoped, the *coup de grâce* to what they liked to call the "internationalist" visions of the Zionists. But above all, and this was the reason for haste in getting the project under way, the Soviets feared the infiltration of the Chinese into Asiatic Russia, as well as its military vulnerability because of underpopulation.

It was in 1926 that the Soviets devised the Birobidzhan plan; in the years immediately following, emigrants from the West gradually moved in, and in 1934, the region, roughly the size of Connecticut and Massachusetts combined, was erected as a Jewish autonomous district. Even then the Jews constituted less than 20 per cent of the total population. The incoming Jews soon discovered that what was held out to them as a promised land was a wilderness of forests and swamps. Most of the emigrants, traditionally urban dwellers, found themselves unfit for the work and climate of their new home. Further, there had been no surveys or allotments of land by the central government. The result was that many returned to the West.

Voluntary colonization was obviously a failure, so after 1934 a new plan was tried, of more or less compulsory recruitment by the government, not of the destitute, rather of those Jews already active in industry and agriculture. But of the fifty thousand families expected in Birobidzhan during the next three years, only twenty thousand arrived. Less was now heard of Jewish autonomy, which had patently been a mere inducement to entice emigrants; indeed, the year 1937 saw the purging of the entire administration of the Jewish Autonomous *Oblast*. Though no exact statistics are available for the years following the purge, we know that immigration ceased or was reduced after the Soviet pact with Hitler in 1939, and that it was resumed after the war, many thousands—including ex-servicemen, evacuees, and slave laborers—entering without official authorization. In mid-1948, Birobidzhan was mysteriously cut off from the outside world, and since then there has been almost no contact with it.

However, the Tel Aviv *Haaretz* is quoted by Solomon Schwarz as stating on March 29, 1951, that in 1949-50 a further purge of leaders took place in Birobidzhan, whose population then was 130,000 and almost 30 per cent Jewish. Jews were constantly being charged with the crimes of "Jewish nationalism" and "cosmopolitanism," and only regard for world opinion prevented the official liquidation of Birobidzhan as a Jewish district.<sup>8</sup> Another break in the official silence was the permission granted the *New York Times* correspondent Harrison Salisbury to enter Birobidzhan in the summer of 1953. He reported that almost the only vestiges of Jewish culture were street signs in Russian and Yiddish, and one small newspaper, the *Birobidzhaner Shtern*. The whole district had become part of the Siberian slave-labor territory under the rule of the secret police. Mr. Salisbury even found a slave-labor camp adjoining the principal street of the capital.<sup>9</sup>

## VI

IN EXAMINING the relations between the Soviet state and Russian Jews in the period from the Revolution to the mid-'30s, we have not noted any sign of official anti-Semitism. To the Party the Jews represented an obstacle, but this obstacle was regarded as one that could be eliminated in time by clever strategy. As we have seen, the strategy was to a great measure successful, for Jews gradually became assimilated to Soviet society or at least took on the protective coloring of their surroundings. This does not mean, however, that anti-Semitism was nonexistent during this period. But it was a popular mood, a mood at first opposed by the state as contrary to Marxist principles, later tolerated, and finally, in the period just before World War II and up to recently, taken over and used as a definite instrument of policy.

I have already mentioned the anti-Semitism manifested in the Civil War of 1918. This hatred was no doubt a carry-over of the anti-Jewish feeling of Czarist days, which the upper and middle classes had copied from the imperial house. In July 1918, the Soviet government took immediate action against it, and anti-Semitism was outlawed.

8. *Op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.

9. *The New York Times*, September 29, 1954; see also *American Jewish Year Book*, 1955 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1955), pp. 407-408.



Oddly enough, though the upper and middle classes were completely crushed in the following years, anti-Semitism did not die out. In the mid-'20s a whispering campaign accusing the Jews of flocking to the larger cities, especially the capital, and of taking "Soviet jobs," soon developed into open violence. Numerous anti-Semitic incidents were related in Soviet newspapers, while many others doubtless remained unmentioned. This new anti-Semitism seemed to flourish even among Party members, although the government tried to pretend that non-Communists were responsible. Schwarz declares:

Jew-baiting and anti-Semitic violence, it is plain, were not confined to backward regions, to the "non-proletarian" countryside or to the traditionally anti-Semitic Ukraine. All incidents reported by the Soviet press took place in industrial plants, with Young Communists—"even active members"—again and again singled out as having initiated or encouraged the persecution of their Jewish fellow workers.<sup>10</sup>

Though officially condemned by the government, this attitude made its appearance in industry and the universities; it even led to the mistreatment of Jewish invalids in rest homes. Local Communist authorities often ignored the law in their treatment of the Jewish populace: discrimination was shown by the discharge of Jewish employees, in the distribution of living quarters, and in tax assessments. A popular slogan of this period was "Kill the kikes, save White Russia," and once again the ancient lie was spread that at Passover time the Jews kidnap Christian children to make matzoth out of their blood.<sup>11</sup> In the Dagestan Republic, the local Communist officials not only tolerated anti-Semitism but even took an active part in it, supporting "our own people" against the Jewish "strangers." Anti-Semitism in this region was uninterrupted from the early '20s, and yet the frequent complaints of the Jews to the central government—which was ostensibly opposed to, and working against, anti-Semitism—were met with indifference. In 1928 an investigation of the charges was finally made, they were admitted to be true; still, no action was taken.

Much of the antagonism was due to the belief that Jews were coming to the cities in disproportionate numbers, taking jobs and living quarters from non-Jews. There was jealousy, too, since it was thought

10. S. M. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

11. See *ibid.*, p. 253.

that Jews had too large a share of the official positions. These charges are easily refuted by the official statistics which show that, while the general urban population was increasing between 1926 and 1939, the Jewish urban population declined from 8.2 per cent to 4.7 per cent; likewise there is no basis in fact to the charge that the Jews were monopolizing official posts.

When anti-Semitism manifested itself, first in 1917-18 and again in the mid-'20s, the government attempted to repress it by legal and educational means. *Izvestia* of July 27, 1918, contained an official order which declared pogroms a crime. "There is no place," it read, "for national oppression. The Jewish bourgeois is our enemy, not as he is a Jew, but as he is a bourgeois. The Jewish worker is our brother . . . Incitement to hatred of any nation whatever is intolerable, shameful, and criminal."<sup>12</sup> A further statute was promulgated on February 25, 1927, during the second wave of anti-Semitism. More precise definitions of racial hatred were given; the possible punishments, in time of war or popular disturbance, ranged from loss of freedom for two years, through forfeiture of part or all of one's property, to death together with such forfeiture. Severe in its threats, this law was rarely invoked. The government's plans for political re-education of the people were not much more effective. Schemes were outlined for the use of the various media of radio, press, stage, and screen to diffuse constructive propaganda, but little was actually attempted even in the peak period of anti-Semitism, 1926-30.

## VII

THE millions of new jobs created by the Five Year Plans did far more to kill anti-Semitism than did the half-hearted legal and educational methods of the government. In the years 1930-36 the traditional anti-Semitism seemed completely dead, when suddenly, in the summer of 1936, Russia and the world were startled with the news of the Great Purge. The Communist Party as it had come down from the days of the Revolution was almost totally destroyed, and so were its leaders. The "old guard"—many of whom were Jews, such as Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Radek—were charged with treason and espionage, and their alleged plot was made to appear the work

12. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 274.



of "Jewish internationalism." Jews in minor positions suffered also, to such an extent that "the Great Purge virtually terminated the organized life of the Jewish group as a recognized cultural and ethnic minority."<sup>13</sup> After the Purge, anti-Semitism remained prohibited on the books, but no longer was there any official disapproval of it shown.

When, three years later, the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed, the Soviet government kept silent about Nazi anti-Semitism. This policy of silence proved utterly disastrous to Russian Jews when, in 1941, war suddenly broke out between the two countries. The Russian Jews had been kept in utter ignorance of the Nazi persecutions and were thus totally unaware of the mortal danger coming upon them as the German army invaded. The pogrom the Nazis released on those Jews who remained in their path was true to the literal meaning of the word—devastation.

The German press strove to give the impression that the Russian people shared the Nazis' hatred of the Jews in their midst. While such statements can obviously not be depended on, there are strong indications of apathy on the part of most Russians. Some efforts by civilians to rescue Jews from the Nazi onslaught were later publicized by the Soviet press, but the number of such incidents is surprisingly small in comparison with the many rescues in traditionally anti-Semitic Poland. One explanation, surely, is the virtue of practical Christian charity, which certainly should be more in evidence in a nation professedly Christian than in one officially atheist. Another explanation might be that the Russian people, so long accustomed to totalitarian rule, were completely unused to opposing the powers that be, however much they may have disliked their policy. In addition, there were many, particularly in the Ukraine, either neutral or openly collaborationist.

Harrison Salisbury, in his series of articles "Russia Reviewed," has this to say on the first anti-Semitic outbreak in nonoccupied Russia shortly after the beginning of the war:

Its most spectacular manifestation was the circulation in Moscow of rumors that "the Jews are deserting Moscow." It was said that rich Jews had bought places on the evacuation trains and fled to the East. The

13. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

truth was that the Government itself had evacuated a number of "rich Jews"—artists, singers and writers—in a general organized movement of certain classes of intelligentsia. The rumors actually had been started by the Government in order to divert the resentment of the vast majority of Muscovites, who were being left behind. Possibly to the surprise of the Government, the anti-Semitic reports snowballed to such an extent that many department chiefs began to discharge all Jews from their staffs. Professors were relieved of their university posts. Many Jews lost their deferred status and were inducted into the Soviet Army. Apparently this anti-Semitic outbreak served some obscure Government purpose, because it was allowed to mushroom without interference for more than a year. Finally it was brought to a summary end by the propaganda chief of the Communist party, the late Alexander Shcherbakov. He called in the Moscow party leaders and bluntly told them that the Government was against anti-Semitism and that the whole thing had been started by "German propaganda leaflets." No one but Shcherbakov, it would appear, had ever seen these leaflets.<sup>14</sup>

In complete contradiction to what the Soviet constitution avowed, but not to the real spirit that animated the government, the Soviet press made almost no mention of the Nazi atrocities against Jews, maintaining the same sphinx-like silence it had begun in the days of the Hitler pact. The fact that Jews were the prime target of Nazi wrath was passed over, all the emphasis being placed on attacks on "Soviet citizens." When the great Jewish centers of Kiev and Odessa were attacked, no mention of Jewish victims was made. Only toward the end of 1944 were a few anti-Jewish incidents reported. But shortly after, a *Pravda* report on the Auschwitz concentration camp, where over four millions, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish, met cruelest deaths, did not so much as refer to the Jews.<sup>15</sup>

The Nazi persecution of the Jews influenced, directly and indirectly, Soviet anti-Semitism. Very great, especially among the Soviet army, was the effect of German propaganda. Prisoners and slave laborers returning to Russia at the war's conclusion were gravely infected by it. And the wholly negative attitude of the official press permitted their hatred, already nourished by the anti-Jewish feeling inculcated by the pre-war purges, to continue its growth.

14. *The New York Times*, September 29, 1954.

15. *Pravda*, May 7, 1945; quoted by S. M. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

## VIII

AFTER the war, the Soviet government permitted Polish Jews who had fled into Russia before the Nazi armies to remain as Soviet citizens. But their awareness of the threat of anti-Semitism was no doubt at least partly responsible for their almost unanimous decision to return to the new Poland.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the few and utterly impoverished Jewish survivors of central Europe naturally expected, on their return to their old homes after the dread war years, to receive restitution of, or compensation for, the property stripped from them by the Nazis. But they were bitterly disappointed to find their small factories, their shops, their very homes, occupied, and to find themselves regarded as "Jewish intruders," "looters of national property," and supporters of "capitalist restoration." Moreover, perhaps because the new possessors were so many, the post-war Communist bureaucracies took no action on behalf of the Jews, with the result that many sought to emigrate to Israel. But even this door was soon closed to them when emigration was prohibited.<sup>17</sup>

In the Soviet Union itself, little active anti-Semitism was observable in the years after the war, except that Jews appeared to play a constantly smaller role in official life. The emphasis on nationalism, evident from 1949 on, carried with it a corresponding anti-Semitic spirit. In 1948, Stalin, who before had always stressed the international aspect of Communism, now conferred special praise on the Russian nationality as opposed to less advanced groups within the state. The corollary of the new nationalism was a vigorous campaign against the "cosmopolitans," a euphemism for the Jews, with their family and cultural ties in western Europe, America, and Israel. The extensive purge which followed, while never admitted to have been anti-Jewish, was waged largely against people with Jewish names. The implications were obvious to all.

Beginning in January 1949, the Soviet press suddenly "discovered" and "exposed" that notable figures in the literary world, especially critics, were using "aliases," hiding their Jewish origin behind non-committal or Russian-appearing pen names. The fact that Lenin and

16. See H. Schwartz, *loc. cit.*

17. See Peter Meyer, "The Jewish Purge in the Satellite Countries," *Commentary*, XIV, 3 (September 1952), pp. 212-218.



Stalin and many other non-Jewish Russian leaders had also used aliases was of course ignored. Jews, now generally suspected of "cosmopolitanism," of "American imperialism," of "subversive and treasonable connections" with "world Jewry," completely disappeared from the Soviet foreign service. In almost every phase of life, anti-Jewish discrimination was making its advances.

The inner insecurity of the post-war Soviet government was first visible to the outside world in a series of purges, both in Russia and in the satellite countries, beginning in 1948 and continuing intermittently under various forms. The years 1948-51 saw the removal of many satellite officials who were accused of nationalist tendencies. It was feared that the Tito rebellion might be repeated unless the least deviation was immediately uprooted. Although numerous Jews were the victims of these purges, little public emphasis was placed on their origin. Only in 1951 did anti-Semitism raise its head again when Vaclav Kopecky, Czechoslovak Minister of Information, accused several Jews, including Otto Sling, a Party secretary, of "cosmopolitanism." Kopecky's campaign—he liked to call Jews "scum" or "bearded Solomons"—soon resulted in the overthrow of Rudolf Slansky, the Secretary General, and in a general purge of Jews in public office and in nationalized industry.

To trace the purges and persecutions of the Jews in the satellite lands is outside the province of the present paper. Suffice it to mention the removal of Ana Pauker in Rumania, the execution of Slansky in Czechoslovakia, the many arrests, trials, deportations that followed in Hungary, Poland, and, to a lesser extent, in East Germany. The multiplicity of these Jewish "plots," allegedly inspired by a world Jewish conspiracy and controlled by the Jews of America and Israel, set the stage for the infamous "doctors' plot," first "revealed" in *Pravda* on January 13, 1953. Charges were made that nine physicians (six of them Jews) had deliberately killed the Soviet leaders Zhdanov and Shcherbakov, and also had attempted to undermine the health of many military leaders, including three marshals, one general, and one admiral. It is interesting to note, since Zhdanov's death was the principal one listed, that he had died at the end of August 1948; at that time *Pravda* published his death certificate, which indicated a natural decease and was signed by five doctors, none of them Jewish. Actually, Zhdanov had become too popular for his own good and had



been officially liquidated. Four years later when scapegoats had to be found for failures of the administration, Zhdanov's death was made to appear the focal point of an international Jewish-British-American conspiracy. Here are a few excerpts from the *Pravda* article—they speak for themselves:

Some time ago agencies of state security discovered a terrorist group of doctors who made it their aim to cut short the lives of active public figures of the Soviet Union through the sabotage of medical treatment. . . . Among the participants in this terrorist group there proved to be: Prof. M. S. Vovsi, therapist; Prof. V. N. Vinogradov, therapist; Prof. M. B. Kogan, therapist; Prof. B. B. Kogan, therapist; Prof. P. I. Yegorov, therapist; Prof. A. I. Feldman, otolaryngologist; Prof. Ya. G. Etinger, therapist; Prof. A. M. Grinshtein, neuropathologist; G. I. Maiorov, therapist.

All these murderer-doctors, who had become monsters in human form, trampling the sacred banner of science and desecrating the honor of scientists, were enrolled by foreign intelligence services as hired agents.

Most of the members of the terrorist group . . . were bought by the American intelligence service. They were recruited by a branch of American intelligence, the international Jewish bourgeois nationalist organization Joint [the American Joint Distribution Committee]. The dirty face of this Zionist espionage organization, concealing its foul work under a mask of charity, has been completely exposed. Relying on a group of depraved Jewish bourgeois nationalists, the professional spies and terrorists of the Joint spread their subversive activity to the territory of the Soviet Union. . . . Exposure of the band of poisoner-doctors is a blow at the international Jewish Zionist organizations. Now all can see what "charitable friends of peace" are hiding behind the Joint letterhead.<sup>18</sup>

The "doctors' plot" was only the beginning, however. Except for Lazar M. Kaganovich (who, it has often been said, is the brother of Stalin's second wife), no Jew was left in high political office: those who were not arrested and put on trial on trumped-up charges were dismissed or demoted. Jewish professors were purged from the Kiev Medical Institute because of "sabotage, malfeasance, and nepotism."

18. *American Jewish Year Book*, 1954 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1954), pp. 273-274; see also Peter Meyer, "Soviet Anti-Semitism in High Gear," *Commentary*, XV, 2 (February 1953), pp. 115-120.

The American Jewish Year Book for 1953 records a "continuous purge" during 1952 of so-called "cosmopolitans" and "petty-bourgeois nationalists," convenient synonyms, recognized by all, for Jews.<sup>19</sup> Deportations of Jews without trial "for their own security" took place on a large scale from the Ukraine and White Russia; at most one or two days' notice was given, and sometimes the victims were deported at once following midnight raids of their homes. They were sent to Georgia and Dagestan, later to Siberia and Central Asia. Some were given a modicum of independence with the title of "free settlers," while the rest, the "politically suspect," were delivered over to slave-labor camps. Birobidzhan, once offered to the Russian Jews as another promised land, now became a vast Jewish concentration camp.<sup>20</sup>

The bitter anti-Jewish campaign in Russia and the satellites was reflected in an unfortunate incident: on February 9, 1953, Israeli extremists, members of an illegal organization, exploded a bomb in the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv. Although the Israeli government apologized and promised punishment of the offenders, Russia broke off diplomatic relations, which were resumed only in August 1953, after the death of Stalin.

## IX

AFTER the dictator's death in March 1953, the charges against the "murderer-doctors" were retracted, and further rehabilitation of all the other victims of the anti-Semitic campaign was expected. This was not the case, however, and in the satellite nations, at least, open persecution continued. As proof that the change in leadership did not mean any change in basic policy, a new anti-religious campaign was inaugurated in the summer of 1954. So bitter were the attacks against religious "superstitions" that *Pravda*, on November 11, 1954, had to call for restraint; propaganda was to continue but on a "scientific" basis and with moderation. Judaism, while not singled out, was of course included in the general attack.

In 1955, after having long kept aloof from the Middle East, Rus-

19. *American Jewish Year Book*, 1953 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1953), p. 330.

20. *American Jewish Year Book*, 1955, pp. 407-408.

sia began to take great interest in it. Denunciations by the press of the Egyptian government were suddenly reversed, and Gamal Abdel Nasser was praised for his stand against the West. An arms agreement was made with Egypt, and other Arab states were approached by Soviet diplomats. Little was said about Israel in the Soviet press; only in one *Pravda* article, on November 5, 1955, was Israel openly denounced as an aggressor. While the new Soviet friendship with the Arab states may possibly be viewed as a further manifestation of anti-Semitic policy—after all, the state of Israel is a perpetual irritant to the Soviet leaders, implying as it does that Communism's claim to end the sufferings of Jews, indeed of all minorities, is vain—another explanation may well be the consistent Communist policy of exploiting in its own interests all conflicts, no matter who the antagonists may be.<sup>21</sup>

During the last year there has been no overt anti-Semitism on the part of the Soviet government. Time alone can tell whether the let-up is to be permanent or temporary. The sudden attack on Stalin's reputation which astonished world opinion in March of 1956 might indicate some possibility of change. But a true change of heart appears unlikely when it is recalled that Lenin himself, now the lone idol of the Communists, could see no place whatever for the Jews as a group in the Communist scheme of things. Communism is by its very nature "anti-Semitic"; even were the Soviet leaders to refrain from ever again persecuting the Jews, Communism works toward, and aims at, the complete disappearance of Jews and of all things Jewish.

A true change of heart appears unlikely, for up to this moment—the summer of 1956—no Soviet leader has clearly denounced the former violence against Jews. It is only the Warsaw Yiddish-language newspaper *Folkshtime* which has spoken out against the anti-Semitic purges of the recent past, publishing a long list of victims: scholars, writers, critics, actors. The fact moved the *Daily Worker* to the following editorial complaint:

We also express our concern that, in the long list of crimes mentioned in the speech [by Nikita S. Khrushchev before the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in Moscow on February 24 and 25, 1956], there was silence on those committed against Jewish culture and Jewish cultural

21. Walter Z. Laqueur, "Soviet Russia and the Arabs," *Midstream*, II, 1 (Winter 1956), pp. 24-38.



leaders. To date, this series of outrages has not been publicized in the Socialist countries except in the columns of a Jewish-language paper in Warsaw.<sup>22</sup>

All that has been heard from Khrushchev about the persecution of the Jews are some remarks made to a delegation of French Socialists in May 1956 to the effect that, in the years just after the Revolution, Jews held an unduly high number of important posts because Russia had too few trained people, but that now, with many Russians suitable for such positions, the former proportion of Jews is no longer needed—which amounts almost to a justification of discharges, demotions, and purges.<sup>23</sup>

Everything I have stated about the dealings of the Soviet state and so many of its citizens with the Jews is in complete contrast with the official version of these relations. According to the "party line," there is no land where the situation of the Jews is more blessed: anti-Semitism has been illegal since the early days, all religious and racial discrimination are barred by the very constitution; Jews are free in all aspects of life and their culture is flourishing. Giving Communism its due, an objective analyst must agree that in the Soviet Union, Jews have the same rights as all other citizens; they also have the same restrictions and limitations. In the words of one writer: "Where political liberty is dead, as in the USSR, cultural autonomy becomes little more than the right to sing the praises of the existing regime in Yiddish or Armenian as well as in Russian."<sup>24</sup> Jews also are subject to the same atheistic propaganda as their fellow Russians. And, while anti-Semitism is not tolerated in law, it is evident that there is a strong, constant current of anti-Semitism existing among the people; that, from time to time, this feeling has been, in the most cynical way, tolerated, directed, and used to secure the ultimate ends of Soviet ideology; and that all this can happen again. As Harrison Salisbury puts it:

The soil is always prepared for anti-Semitism if, in fear or to inspire fear, a Soviet Government wishes to make use of it. The anti-Semitic feeling aroused by the "doctors' plot" spread like wildfire—so much so, that when, after Stalin's death, it was announced that the case had been

22. As quoted by *The New York Times*, June 6, 1956.

23. *The New York Times*, June 10, 1956.

24. H. Schwartz, *loc. cit.*



reversed and the doctors freed, two in the small circle of ordinary Russians with whom I had conversational contact expressed frank and open regret. "They should not have turned them loose," one Russian said. "I do not care what they say about their being innocent. You cannot trust the Jews."<sup>25</sup>

## X

HAVING given what I hope is a sober analysis of the facts, I think I may now record a passionate Catholic statement of 1953, signed by Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., of St. John's Abbey; Father Laurence J. McGinley, S.J., president of Fordham University; Father Thomas A. Meehan, president of the Catholic Press Association; Father John LaFarge, S.J., associate editor of *America*; Sister Mary Madeleva, C.S.C., president of St. Mary's College; George N. Shuster, president of Hunter College; Clare Boothe Luce, then Ambassador-Designate to Italy; Senators John F. Kennedy and James E. Murray; Representative Eugene J. McCarthy; General William J. Donovan; the poet Alan Tate; the playwright Emmet Lavery; the drama critic Walter Kerr; and many others. Published in *The Commonwealth* of February 20, 1953, it was introduced by an editorial, saying in part: "When Jews are threatened, we are threatened; just as the arrests of

25. *The New York Times*, September 29, 1954. In recent months new evidence of the Soviet attitude toward the Jews has come to light. Khrushchev is reported to have said, during a visit to Warsaw in March 1956: "Even a second-rate Kowalski is more useful than a first-rate Rosenblum," and: "You have too many Abrahamoviches here" (C. L. Sulzberger in *The New York Times*, July 9, 1956). Again, several United States rabbis, delegates of two rabbinical organizations, declared on their return from a study-tour of the Soviet Union that they "found the major institutions of Jewish religion and culture 'all but vanished, leaving a Judaism that is anemic and moribund.'" A series of articles by one delegate, Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer, has brought out a number of interesting points. First, Stalin is referred to by the Jews of Russia never by name but always as "the Terrible One." Second, though religious education and Hebrew language lessons are denied to Jews, as are other privileges accorded various nationality groups, every Jew bears on all his documents, even on his school diploma, the label "Jew." Third, while the rector of Leningrad's Russian Orthodox cathedral learned from Nazism that "anti-Semitism is always linked with the denial of God," the government persists in this denial. From his experiences at the Museum of Religion and Atheism, whose visitors are mostly impressionable adolescents, Rabbi Kertzer "left the Soviet Union with the unhappy feeling that it was almost impossible, in this cunningly devised battleground, for religious forces to withstand the assaults of godlessness. All the machinery of state, the educational institutions, the mass media, the arts and literature are arrayed against religion." (*The New York Times*, July 13, 30, 31; August 1, 1956).

priests and the subversion of Catholic churches behind the Iron Curtain cast a shadow of threat on the Jews, the next group with independent allegiance and a devotion to something beyond Caesar." This was the statement:

We call upon the conscience of the world through governments and the United Nations to protest against the outrageous new Anti-Semitism of the Communist world, and in David's words we pray that God will deliver the Jews from the hands of their enemies and from those who persecute them. Having seen our fellow Catholics persecuted by the Soviets, we offer special sympathy to Jews in their new trial, in this latest threat of genocide in our time.