

Urge Official Soviet Report on Status of Jews

An authoritative statement on measures being taken in the Soviet Union to reestablish Jewish cultural institutions was "urgently requested" in a memorandum to N. A. Bulganin, chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, and K. Y. Voroshilov, Soviet President, under the signature of 26 progressive Jewish trade unionists, community leaders, writers, editors and educators.

The memorandum was released yesterday by Simon Federman, community leader, who is spokesman for the group. Among the signers, in addition to Federman, are Paul Novick, editor; Gedalia Sandler, community leader; Morris U. Schappes, Jewish historian; Louis Harap, editor and writer; Fannie M. Golos, trade unionist; Abraham Nemiroff, trade unionist, and June Gordon, women's leader.

The memorandum notes that many people, irrespective of view of the Soviet system, agreed that "the Soviet Union set the historic example of the liberation of peoples from all forms of national oppression," and that the Jews "rejoiced" in the outlawing of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, as well as the saving of the Soviet regime of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Nazi extermination.

Recalling the shock suffered by many people at the revelations of injustice to Soviet Jews resulting "from the gross distortion of the Soviet legal system" and the steps being taken toward correction, the memorandum goes on to express concern over current manifestations in relation to Soviet Jews. It points to discriminatory treatment of Jews in the standard Soviet reference work, the new edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, and the absence of any organized spokesmen for secular Soviet Jews.

Evidence for the need for such secular organization, says the memorandum, is the "unprecedented success" of Jewish concerts and the "scores of Jewish writers" currently active in the Soviet Union.

Although the memorandum recognizes the "tremendous efforts" exerted by the Soviet Union to "right the wrongs committed during the years preceding 1953," it registers "anxiety in respect to the reconstruction of Jewish commu-

nal and cultural life."

Hon. Nikolai A. Bulganin,
Chairman, Council of Ministers,
U.S.S.R.

The Kremlin,
Moscow, USSR

Hon. K. Y. Voroshilov,
President of the Presidium of the
USSR Supreme Soviet,
Moscow, U.S.S.R.

Honorable Sirs:

The undersigned are individuals active in Jewish community and cultural life, trade unionists, or members of Jewish organizations which represent an important segment of the five million Jews in the U. S.

We have always cherished the common ties which bind American Jews with their brothers and sisters throughout the world. This bond exists by virtue of the common past and history of the Jewish people, of the creation and common appreciation of cultural values and languages, and for many Jews, of a common religion.

For the majority of the Jewish people in the U. S., whether they agreed with the social-political system of the USSR or not, the Soviet Union set the historic example of the liberation of peoples from all forms of national oppression and discrimination. The Jewish people rejoiced when the Soviet Union was the first country in all history to pass a law making anti-Semitism a crime, and to institute complete equality of all races and peoples.

This enlightened policy contributed to the flowering of a brilliant Soviet Jewish culture in the Yiddish language in the 20's, 30's, and 40's, which enriched Jewish culture generally and contributed to the development of Jewish culture in America.

When the Soviet Union proclaimed Birobidjan as the Jewish Autonomous Region, in 1934, people of diverse viewpoints regarded this as an historic act which aimed at securing the national existence and development of the Jewish people as an equal member among all the nationalities of the USSR.

Not only Jews, but all anti-Nazis rejoiced when the Soviet Union welcomed 400,000 Polish Jews in flight from Hitler's murderers—and as a result of special measures of evacuation succeeded in protecting its Jewish population and proved to be the only coun-

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Jews in USSR

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try where the majority of the Jewish population—two and a half million Jews—survived Nazi occupation.

In the light of this positive approach to problems of the Jewish people, the revelations of the crimes committed against Soviet Jews as a result of a departure from the historic nationality policies of the Soviet Union have caused widespread shock and consternation not only among Jews but among millions of Americans.

We are aware that these crimes resulted from the gross distortion of the Soviet legal system. These distortions, as we have learned, have done great injury to the Soviet population in general. We have noted that in the process of eliminating the former injustices certain steps are being taken to correct the wrongs suffered by Soviet Jews as well. These efforts are all to the good. We suggest, however, that certain considerations still stand in the way of adequate rectification.

The Jewish people of the U. S. are deeply disturbed by the fact that no authoritative statement has to this date been made on the disappearance of Jewish cultural and communal institutions or on the execution and jailing of so many Jewish leaders.

This situation was hardly improved by the remarks of Ekaterina Furtzeva, made in an interview with Tabitha Petran in the American weekly National Guardian (June 25, 1956) to the effect that "if there had been any drive against the Jewish people or Jewish culture, we would have published it ourselves and would not need to have it published in the Polish press."

We are greatly concerned that such a prominent leader is not even aware of the undeniable facts regarding the disappearance of Jewish cultural institutions and personalities in her country.

Equally upsetting was Ekaterina Furtzeva's statement in the same interview to the effect that certain government departments supposedly contained an excessive proportion of Jews. Coming on the heels of news items quoting other leaders of the Soviet Union in a similar vein, the Jewish people, along with all democratic-minded groups, are deeply shocked by anything suggestive of quotas based on race or nationality considerations.

Another fact which has caused concern is the treatment of the Jewish people in Volume 15 of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, which appeared in 1952. The section on "Jews" (Yevreyi) reduced to four columns as compared to 152 columns in the 1932 edition, negates the very existence of the Jewish people and even makes light of statistics pertaining to Jews. Great figures in Soviet Jewish life as well as world-renowned Yiddish writers, including the classics, have disappeared from all volumes of the new edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia published so far.

We are happy to see that Jewish religious leaders are invited to the USSR by the Moscow rabbinate. But we are constrained to ask: who speaks for the secular Jews of the Soviet Union that comprise the majority of the Soviet Jewish people.

We find it difficult to accept the premise that the communal and cultural life of Jews in the Soviet Union is limited to an exclusively religious status. For over 100 years a secular Jewish people's culture developed in your country. This culture was nourished by the humanist and liberation struggles of the Russian people. After 1917 the Jewish people of the Soviet Union received the opportunity of realizing the full potentialities of their cultural creativeness. A rich Jewish culture flourished, expressed in daily newspapers, literary journals, state theatres, schools, scientific, literary and linguistic research institutions. All those enjoyed full support of the Soviet government.

Now we are faced with the

tragic fact that all these "institutions have completely vanished. It is inconceivable that Jewish culture in the Soviet Union has overnight become obsolete or historically superfluous as a result of supposed "integration." Certainly the concept of "integration" does not explain a situation where all Jewish cultural institutions that flourished many years suddenly disappear completely. Many leaflets prove that this theory of "integration" runs counter to reality.

The unprecedented success of Jewish concerts in Moscow and other Soviet cities in the past months signifies to us that interest in, and need of, Jewish culture are alive in the Soviet Union. Scores of Soviet Jewish writers today engaged in the creative work in the Yiddish language, are additional testimony of the potential for a Jewish people's culture in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet government recently reaffirmed its principle of fostering the general development and flowering of the economy and culture of all peoples and nationalities. This naturally includes, we hope, the developing and flowering of the culture of the Jewish people of the USSR.

It is apparent that the Soviet Union has exerted tremendous efforts to right the wrongs committed during the years preceding 1953. However, we wish to express our anxiety in respect to the reconstruction of Jewish communal and cultural life.

A public and authoritative statement dealing with the injustices suffered and with the measures being taken in the direction of re-establishment of Jewish cultural institutions will go far to allay the apprehensions about the future of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union. We urgently request that such a statement be issued as soon as possible.

In addition, we submit that due to the physical and intellectual losses sustained by the Soviet Jews, the process of reconstruction of their communal life will require the sympathetic and energetic aid of the Soviet leadership.

We are confident that such aid will be forthcoming in accordance with the Soviet principle of strengthening the culture of nationalities.

In submitting this memorandum we are motivated by our interest in better understanding and cooperation among all peoples. It cannot be doubted that increased as well as hastened acts of reconstruction of Jewish life in the Soviet Union will have great value in strengthening friendly relations between our countries and will advance the objectives of co-existence and peace.

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) A. Bergman, Jewish educator; Abraham Bick, rabbi, writer, lecturer; Louis Davidson, trade unionist; Simon Federman, community leader; Fannie M. Colos, trade unionist; June Gordon, women's organizational leader.

Ber Green, poet and journalist; Maurice Grubin, community leader; Louis Harap, editor and writer; Abraham Kalb, trade cultural organizational leader; Naum Kamentzky, educator; Nathan Mack, community leader; Charles Nemeroff, trade unionist; Paul Novick, editor and writer; Sam Pevzner, journalist; Philip Roberts, landsmanshaftn leader.

I. E. Ronch, poet and journalist; Gedalia Sandler, community leader; Morris U. Schappes, Jewish historian; Rubin Saltzman, community leader; Edith Segal, dance, instructor; Sophia Susman, fraternal leader; Rubin Youkelson, journalist and cultural leader; Abraham Wise, trade unionist; Sarel Zipper, Jewish teacher.

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