

10

YEARS OF BIRO-BIDJAN

by

S. ALMAZOV



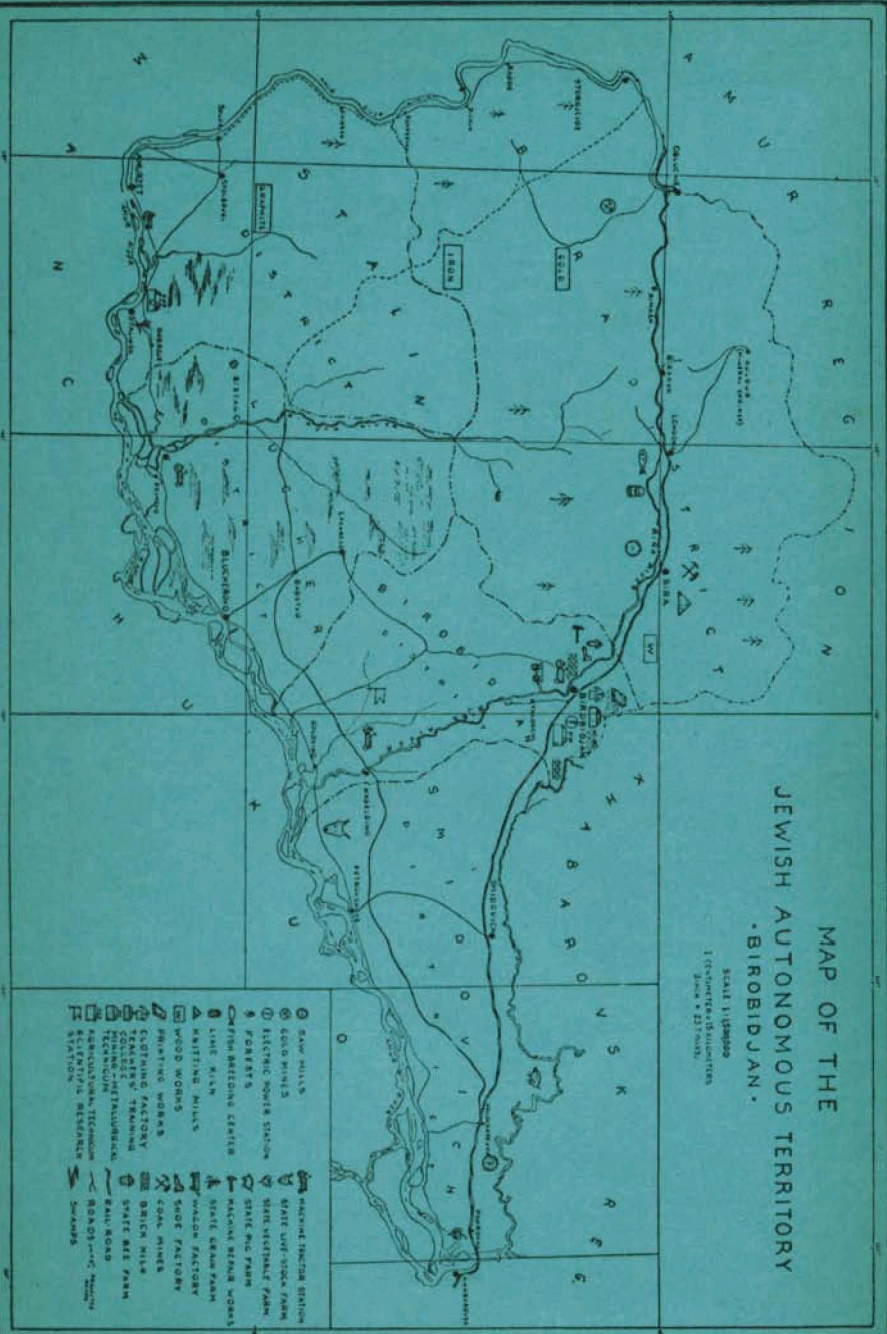
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# MAP OF THE JEWISH AUTONOMOUS TERRITORY • BIRIBIDJAN •

SCALE 1:150,000  
1 centimeter = 1500 meters  
1 inch = 25.4 meters

- SAW MILLS
- ⊙ GOLD MINES
- ⊙ ELECTRIC POWER STATION
- ⊙ PRINTERS
- ⊙ CARPENTRY CENTERS
- ⊙ LIME KILN
- ⊙ KNITTING MILLS
- ⊙ WOOD WORKS
- ⊙ PRINTING WORKS
- ⊙ SCOTCH FARM FACTORY
- ⊙ GLASS & TRUSSING
- ⊙ FERRIC METALLURGY
- ⊙ FERRIC METALLURGY
- ⊙ AERONAUTICAL RESEARCH STATION
- ⊙ MACHINE TRACTION SECTION
- ⊙ STATE LIVESTOCK FARM
- ⊙ STATE VEGETABLE FARM
- ⊙ STATE PIG FARM
- ⊙ MACHINE REPAIR WORKS
- ⊙ STATE GRAIN FARM
- ⊙ WOLLEN FACTORY
- ⊙ SHOE FACTORY
- ⊙ COAL MINES
- ⊙ DAIRY MILK
- ⊙ STATE BEE FARM
- ⊙ RAILROAD STATION
- ⊙ ROADS
- ⊙ SWAMPS



# TEN YEARS OF BIRO-BIDJAN

1928 — 1938

by S. ALMAZOV



Translated from the Yiddish

by NATHAN FARBER

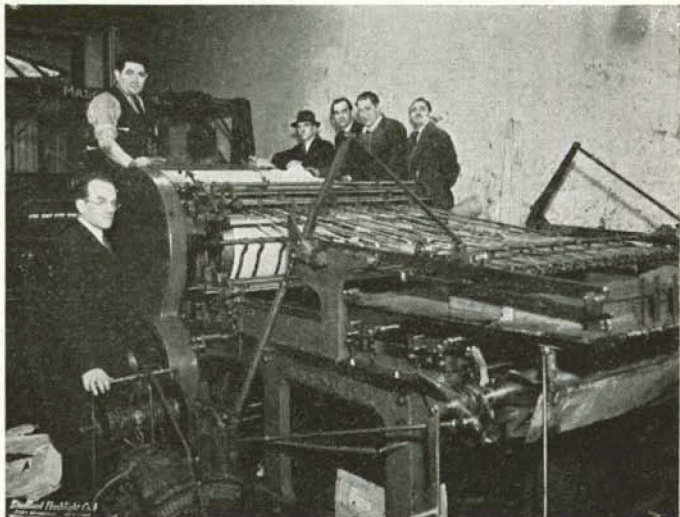


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JEWISH STATE THEATRE IN BIRO-BIDJAN



PRINTING PRESS SENT BY THE ICOR TO BIRO-BIDJAN



WHERE A LIFE OF PLENTY IS BEING BUILT IN BIRO-BIDJAN

## THE SOVIET UNION GRANTS THE JEWISH PEOPLE THE BASIS FOR STATEHOOD

THE 28TH of March, 1928, will be chronicled in the annals of Jewry as the beginning of a new and glorious chapter—as the day when the Jews received the opportunity to build for themselves a new life, and become the equal of any other nationality.

On March 28, 1928, the Soviet government promulgated a historic decree, which meant a turning point in the history of the Jews, for on that day the Soviet Union gave them Biro-Bidjan.

Two principles were made manifest in this famous document:

Firstly, the explicit assertion that Biro-Bidjan was to be given over exclusively to the colonization of Jews. This item read as follows: "*The COMERD [the governmental committee for settling Jews on land] is assured that the Amur Valley and the contiguous region in the Far East is designated as free soil for Jewish workers.*"

Secondly, the highly important specification indicated in this decree, that Biro-Bidjan shall be turned into a Jewish autonomy as soon as conditions will permit. The final point of the declaration which refers to this matter, is stated as follows: "When the expected results, following the colonization of Jewish workers in this region, are realized . . . , the building of a Jewish administered national unity in the territory of this region shall be carried out."

This meant that the broad-visioned Soviet policy in regard to nationals had as its purpose the placing of

all hitherto suppressed minorities on a sound foundation. So in regard to Jews the government, after ensuring for the Jews the right to productive work in field and factory, as well as political equality, and the opportunity for education, did not rest satisfied, but decided to ordain a new phase in the solution of the Jewish problem. This meant making available to the Jews land upon which they might become an independent people; land upon which to develop their own state, an efficient government, and an indigenous culture; a territory large enough to furnish all necessities to a numerous population. That this and nothing else was the intent of the Soviet government is apparent to everyone who studies and understands its policy in regard to minorities. As far back as in the year 1926, Mikhail Kalinin, President of the Soviet Union, declared the following, at a convention of the GEZERD (the People's Committee for Settlement on Land):

Comrades! This gathering is perhaps most revealing as regards the nature of the Soviet Republic. Whatever the criticism of us may be, as it comes from bourgeois lands, is it highly questionable whether a meeting such as this—a gathering of Jewish farmers—would be possible there. This is just the kind of assembly which is possible only in the Soviet Union. What does this signify?

It means, above all, that the Soviet Union is not a country consisting of a large and specifically dominant nationality; this is not a confederacy carrying with it the contents of the *Russia of old*. This is simply a union of all nationalities which have entered the Soviet. The Soviet Union must find a place for every nationality. Were there, in the Soviet Union, a number of nationalities which had no place in the Union, which did not feel themselves to be nationalities, and full-fledged citizens of this Union, which did not consider this Union as their fatherland, the Soviet Socialist Republics would not, accordingly, be a brotherly



concord of all nationals living in it. And this very assembly of Jewish farmers is a true testimony of the character of our Union, in which every nationality receives recognition as such.

President Kalinin's statement makes plain the fact that the Soviet Union approaches the question of minorities in a way which is totally different from that of any other country in the world. At a time when, in all capitalist-imperialist lands, the aim and practice is the assimilation of all minorities which obtain in the respective countries—a policy which treats both the subjugated colonial nationals and the minorities within the dominant nation in the same light; at a time when this policy is in active operation, either in an overtly brutal and murderous fashion or some subtler way, which on the surface seems somewhat less violent, but which nevertheless is aimed toward the same ends (to erase the individual character of each minority group, destroy all vestiges of a native culture, and institute a melting pot, whereby to establish uniformity) — the Soviet Union's approach to this matter is entirely different. As President Kalinin already indicated, the Soviet Union is not a giant country of and for a particular national group seeking to predominate over and engulf all other national groups, but a land composed of a confederation of equal and free peoples. In such a union of nationalities the Jews would be enabled to find a place for themselves, even if they had not a specific territory and their own government.

The October Revolution emancipated the Jews from all the shackles which the Czarist regime had forged for them. The Soviet government gave them land in those regions (or near-by areas) where they had once

lived in compact numbers. There sprang up successful colonies in the Ukraine, Crimea, and White Russia. The Jews who under the Czar were robbed of the opportunity of settling on farm land, obtained this very chance under the Soviet government. Not only did the government give the Jews land, but like a solicitous mother cared for the Jewish colonizers. Besides, the Jewish settlers receive tracts of land and money. The Jewish settlers also received the greatest encouragement from their non-Jewish neighbors.

If today we have prosperous Jewish colonies in the Soviet Union, which might very well serve as examples of what Jewish initiative and energy can create, thanks are due to the illimitable aid furnished these Jewish colonists by the Soviet government—and the steadfast determination of this land of liberated nationals to transform and reconstruct the Jew, whom the Czar had driven to a barren and unproductive existence, into a useful citizen. For the same purpose of making the Jewish masses productive, the Soviet government opened wide the doors of all the factories and social institutions to hundreds of thousands of Jews, who obtained employment there.

The material condition of the Jews has become sound. From a people consisting of an overbalancing majority of *Luftmenschen*, the Jews have been transformed into a people of farmers and workers in the heavy industries. From a people without civil or political rights, defenseless and subject to frequent pogroms, the Jews have been changed into enfranchised, completely secure citizens of a country in which pogroms are but a memory of a dismal past. Surely in this respect alone has a tremendous revolution been effected in the

lives of the Soviet Jews! It began with the renowned ordinance of the Assembly of People's Commissars, which aimed at stifling the anti-Semitic movement. Among other things, that decree, in respect to which nothing in the history of another land serves for comparison, states:

The Assembly of the People's Commissars orders all the Soviets to use the most drastic means to stifle and uproot the anti-Semitic movement. Those who participate in pogroms and pogrom agitators are declared outside the pale of the law. (Announced in IZVESTIA, July 27, 1918.)

This decree was signed by the immortal Lenin, who was the presiding officer of the Assembly of People's Commissars.

The Soviet government did not rest satisfied in ringing the death knell of anti-Semitism and every form of racial persecution, but made it its business to secure for all groups the fullest opportunity to use the newly won liberty to their best advantage and for sound development. This is emphasized unequivocally in the following resolution passed during the tenth convention of the Communist Party in Soviet Russia:

Now that racial prerogatives have been demolished, and the equality of all nationalities is a realized fact, and the right of national minorities to self-directed development is guaranteed by the very nature of the Soviet system, the duty of the party must include encouraging the working masses of these minorities, and assisting them to use fully their guaranteed right to evolve independently.

In regard to the Jewish masses, the problem of ensuring their authenticity as a national unity was complicated. In the above-mentioned address delivered by Mikhail Kalinin, we also read the following:

The Jewish race endured dire oppression in Old Russia and throughout the entire world. Had it not been for

the fact that compact masses of Jews were isolated under compulsion in a specific area, a good part of the Jewish population of old Czarist Russia would to this very day have been quite thoroughly assimilated.

The old Czarist regime did in truth strive toward that end, but its tactics apparently did everything to subvert assimilation; for, believing that with injustices and police tyranny, national solidarity would be destroyed, the Jews actually were hemmed in by means of territorial boundaries and limitations, thereby preserving their identity. But the Soviet government has no desire or need to destroy, assimilate or interfere with this or any other nationality.

The Soviet government makes it its obligation not only to do away with the unnatural conditions under which the Jews have heretofore labored, and create favorable circumstances whereby some three million Jews in the Soviet shall feel themselves to be free and productive citizens, but also to make it possible for them to preserve their identity. That is the fact of the matter, and there can be no diversity of opinion regarding it. The Soviet Union, through its President, has already stated clearly the outspoken policy of the government. This means that the Soviet government did not find it sufficient that the Jews were supplied with land, inducted by the hundreds of thousands into industrial life, allowed to assume governmental positions, and given access to all educational facilities—although these things alone were vast steps forward, as compared to the condition of the Jews not only in the defunct Czarist Russia, but also in the democratic capitalistic countries, where they are never safe from masked and very often quite undisguised discrimination, and where, by various underhand means, they are side-tracked from the basic industries, governmental posts, a great portion of social life, and various institutions of learning.

The newly won status of the Jews in the Soviet Union had most certainly afforded them the advantage of living unhindered among the diverse peoples of the country. But they lacked that which all the other national minorities possessed: a sure warrant for preserving themselves as a distinct national group — a national center. In the address from which we have already quoted, Kalinin states the following, regarding this matter:

The Jewish nation is faced by the great task of preserving its identity, and for this reason a good portion of the Jewish population must be transformed into a well-knit population of agricultural workers, which should run into the hundreds of thousands. Only through such means may the Jewish masses look forward to the continued existence of their nationality. In this the Jews are confronted by a huge task, to accomplish which will demand great exertion of effort on the part of the masses who are not accustomed to farm work, since the work of urbanites differs from the work of the farmer.

The first phase of this task, to preserve the Jewish nation, consisted of settling Jews on land, and this led to the creation of Jewish colonies in Crimea and the Ukraine. Today we have the Jewish national regions of Kalinindorf, Stalindorf, New Zlatopol, and Larindorf, which in themselves are small autonomous Jewish states. Here the Jews already have the opportunity of learning in the school of self-government. In these national territories the Jews have their own Soviets; they build their own cultural institutions; they manage their own economic life. In short, they are the administrators of large areas of land, and are fully independent politically, economically, and culturally. Yiddish is the official language here, and the children

grow up in an environment which assures them of the chance to identify themselves completely with the Jewish national culture, and makes certain for them the circumstances favorable to a full life as completely free Jews.

The Soviet Union did not stop with the above-mentioned first phase of providing land for the Jews, with the possibility of operating their own economy and building a Jewish national culture. The Soviet Union took further steps, and decided that if the Jews were to have the fullest chance possible for building an independent national state, it would be necessary to furnish them with a large territory where both agricultural occupations and a wide variety of industrial enterprises, as well as a well-rounded culture could be established. For this purpose the Soviet government sent out scientific expeditions to explore and determine the various regions of the country. After a many-sided, exhaustive study Biro-Bidjan was decided upon as a suitable place where the aim of creating a permanent center for a Jewish nationality could be made a reality. And in this lies the true significance of Biro-Bidjan—the opportunity created there for Jews to realize their two-thousand-year-old dream of becoming a nation containing in itself the essentials for a safe, normal, and sound life.

IN BIRO-BIDJAN THE JEWS OBTAINED THIS OPPORTUNITY AND THIS LONG-LOOKED-FOR INDEPENDENCE.

In their attacks upon Biro-Bidjan, its enemies try to ignore his fact. They put forth all sorts of arguments (which will be carefully considered later): "intense cold," "far removed from the center," "mosquitos," "close proxi-

mity to Manchuria and the consequent danger in case of a war with Japan," and so on. Its enemies attack Biro-Bidjan as though it were some sort of real estate venture concerning which the bargain of the transaction is the point at issue—the question as to whether or not one has overpaid; whether it will be salable, when the time comes; or whether, possibly, a poor bargain has been struck. Such a consideration is ridiculous as well as malicious, in the light of what the Soviet Union has done during the years to transform the Jews into productive workers, establishing them on farms, giving them access to the basic industries and governmental positions. The Soviet government gave Biro-Bidjan to the Jews without any misleading reservations, but simply with the single purpose of giving them the status of a nation—an attribute which they lacked—so that they might be equal with all free, self-determining nationalities in the great Soviet Union.

### HOW SHALL BIRO-BIDJAN BE EVALUATED?

When it is a matter of laying the foundation for the reconstruction of a people, the arguments put forth by enemies shrink into insignificance, and it becomes apparent that Biro-Bidjan must be considered from a very different angle. Two questions need to be asked:

(1) *To what extent is the proclaimed Jewish territory politically secure?*

(2) *Are the natural resources adequate for supporting a large population?*

Naturally, the question also enters here as to the funds available for developing an as yet lightly populated region, but this matter, which is not as significant as

the first and second questions, will be easily answered (as will be seen later) by Soviet practice. The important point is to establish the political condition in and about Biro-Bidjan, as well as to rate accurately the attributes of Biro-Bidjan as a territory for colonization.

In regard to the first question, it is necessary to ascertain to whom Biro-Bidjan belongs, what the native population's attitude is toward the immigrating Jews, what the Soviet government expects to accomplish by giving over Biro-Bidjan to Jewish colonization, and what the contingencies are for an autonomous Jewish area.

To these questions but one answer is admissible: Biro-Bidjan is a part of the Soviet Union. No one has any prior rights to Biro-Bidjan. Biro-Bidjan is not a strategic point, as is Palestine, which is situated on the highroad where the interests of a number of imperialistic nations, armed to the teeth, and ready to grab each other by the throat, cross. The Soviet Union is at complete liberty to do with Biro-Bidjan as it wishes. The native population is not only small in number (in 1928 Biro-Bidjan had a population of about 30,000, or slightly less than one person per square kilometer), but as a part of the Soviet peoples, it is permeated with an understanding of, and friendly feeling toward the new immigrants. The native population could only profit by the influx of Jews and the subsequent development of Biro-Bidjan.

As regards the aims of the Soviet government, enough has been said. It is clear that the designation of Biro-Bidjan for Jewish colonization had in it the single purpose—and no other—of serving the interests of the Jewish masses. The Soviet Union did not introduce Jews



into Biro-Bidjan in order to create a buffer state, as its enemies insinuate. For such a purpose it would have certainly been needless to start colonizing Jews, which might very well have turned out to be a long, drawn-out business. Nor will anyone deny, that for the purpose of security the government could have picked army reserves, instead of placing its trust in a prolonged process during which Jews will migrate into Biro-Bidjan, with their wives, children, grandfathers and grandmothers.

No, this was not at all the purpose. The Soviet Union has its mighty Red Army to guard it, although the Jewish toilers, too, will surely take their places to defend the only land in the world which gave them freedom, equality, security, as well as a national territory.

At this juncture, it should also be mentioned that the cries that the Jews in Biro-Bidjan are in a particular danger, are nothing more than smoke screens, or evil figments of the imagination created by foes. Are the Jews of Minsk and Homel safe, in case of a war with Poland or Germany? Are the Jews in Warsaw and Vilna safe, in the event of war? Are Bronx Jews and Jews from Brownsville secure, should the United States be attacked by an army? Is anyone anywhere not endangered, in the event of a war toward which the Fascists are madly rushing?

Biro-Bidjan is not in any greater danger than any other corner of the globe. According to the statement of Lord Marley, the eminent British statesman and recognized expert on military affairs, Biro-Bidjan will not be a battle area, even if a war between Japan and the Soviet Union should come. According to Lord Marley,

who has visited Biro-Bidjan, and who is accurately informed concerning the situation in the Far East, the chief battles will take place in the vicinity of Vladivostok and Baikal.

As far as the possibilities for the development of an autonomous Jewish region are concerned, one may say with assurance that, in regard to political security, Biro-Bidjan is attended by the same circumstances as the territory of every other Soviet national minority that has won its independence.

In the new Soviet constitution the autonomy of Biro-Bidjan is fully assured. It is a matter of pride not only for the Jews of the Soviet, but for the Jews throughout the world as well, that in Article 22, Section 2, of the new Soviet constitution, it is specified that the Jewish autonomous territory is established as a part of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic—a part of the great and powerful Soviet Union. It is a joy to know that at the recently held convention of the highest Soviet administrative body, Biro-Bidjan was represented by its delegates, who spoke in the highest Soviet parliament in the name of the first and only Jewish autonomous territory in the world. The words of Israel Goldmacher, deputy from Biro-Bidjan to the Supreme Council, are plain: "In moments when one is overcome by a feeling of great joy, there comes to mind once again, involuntarily, the cursed existence under czarism." Similar feelings controlled Leah Lishinskaya, who is a milkmaid in Biro-Bidjan, but who, because she is a citizen of the Soviet, was also able to become a representative to the highest parliament of the land which covers a sixth of the globe. She said:

"I told my voters that I will not countenance any mistakes or errors. I will not rest until all that hinders our territory's progress is overcome."

Politically Biro-Bidjan is entirely secure, both as a part of the mighty Soviet Union, and as a structure which is being built solely for the benefit of the Jews—a task which the Soviet approaches with honesty, and not with an ulterior motive of creating friction between nationalities, as was the case in the Balfour declaration. In this very fact lies the guarantee that Biro-Bidjan is secure, and will not be turned into a tool for the Soviet government to use willy-nilly, as is the case with England with her intrigues and manipulations, resulting in hatreds and strife between Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

### THE NATURAL RESOURCES OF BIRO-BIDJAN

The second important question is: are the natural resources adequate to permit a large population in Biro-Bidjan? It is not possible in a pamphlet to render an exhaustive study of all the resources which Biro-Bidjan contains. It is sufficient to indicate that Biro-Bidjan is a vast area of about 36,000 square kilometers. Biro-Bidjan has untold natural resources which may be briefly listed as follows:

(1) Two-and-a-half million hectares (ten million acres) of forests.

(2) A network of rivers, in which fish and caviar are exceptionally plentiful.

(3) Two thousand species of flowers which makes it possible for Biro-Bidjan to produce a great quantity of honey of the rarest quality in the world.

(4) In the depths of the earth are huge deposits

of coal, iron, gold, graphite, magnesium, and a rare kind of marble which is now being used to embellish the new stations of the world famous subway in Moscow.

The gigantic natural resources of Biro-Bidjan have not been completely surveyed, but the portions that have been measured yield figures that are well nigh astronomical in magnitude. Thus, for example, it is reported that Biro-Bidjan possesses 600,000,000 tons of iron ore; the lime deposits in Londoko and Birokan are reckoned at several billion tons; the Sutar gold mines are regarded as significant gold reserves. It is estimated that along the shores of the river Belaia alone, near the village of Soznaia, there are a million tons of graphite.

The figures quoted are taken from a report of the geological expedition which the DALGEOTREST (FAR EAST GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY) undertook in 1933, along with a group of Leningrad scientists.

Biro-Bidjan can support a population of many millions, because agriculture and varied industries can be developed there. The climate of Biro-Bidjan is approximately the same as in North Dakota, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. The winters are very cold, but dry. Not only is the cold quite bearable, but because of the dryness of the atmosphere there are a great many sunny days, and many kinds of occupations can be carried on even during the winter months. Work in the forests, and road building is never halted for even a single day.

The summers are hot in Biro-Bidjan, with frequent rain. Especially rainy are the months of July and August. In general, the climate of the autonomous Jewish area is very healthful indeed (there are no

diseases peculiar to the locality), and a very favorable one for agricultural pursuits.

The horror stories which have been spread concerning the climate of Biro-Bidjan are beneath contempt. The myth that Biro-Bidjan is "far removed from the center" is most misleading, because while Biro-Bidjan is at a distance from Moscow, it is nevertheless near such large cities as Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and Komsomolsk. The "mosquito scare" is also unfounded, because the "rainy seasons" pass quickly in Biro-Bidjan. In this new land portions of forest are being cut down, and the soil, which due to the dense forests could not be dry, is being drained.

Biro-Bidjan has no swampy stretches of land, and the mosquitos are not long-lived pests. Nor do they carry malaria, as is the case in most swampy lands.

The flora of the Jewish autonomous territory are very luxuriant and varied. The colossal forests contain a profusion of cedar, redwood, and fir trees. Also, there are to be found over a wide area, pine, Mongolian oak, white and black birch, Manchurian lindens, Manchurian hickory, cork trees, maple, etc., etc. The widespread varieties of timber would furnish splendid material for building houses, furniture, veneer, for an aviation industry, and the manufacture of chemicals. Included among the wild fruit trees and berry plants are plum trees, apple trees, pear trees, Amur grapes, huckleberries, currants, etc., etc. A scientific expedition of the famous Mitchurin Institute investigated a part of the fruit and berry resources of the region and realized that many of these could be cultivated. This was proved practicable by the Jewish community of Waldheim, which succeeded fully in cultivating wild berries. (A. Kirzhintz.)

It may be confidently stated that Biro-Bidjan possesses all essentials for furnishing food to millions of

people. Were Biro-Bidjan to become as densely populated as Holland and Belgium (and Biro-Bidjan is actually as large as both these countries), it would then harbor a score of millions of people.

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS IN BIRO-BIDJAN DURING THE FIRST TEN YEARS

Biro-Bidjan is a pioneer country. The Jewish immigrants have had to begin at the very beginning. They had to cut down trees, dig wells, build roads, houses, schools, hospitals. No one made anything ready for them. There were many hardships to overcome. Urban habits had to be broken, and people had to fit themselves to the environment of an agricultural community. The patience of true pioneers was required: they had to have faith in their own strength, and not run off because of mosquitos. Perhaps it was a good thing that the Jews of Biro-Bidjan had to start work under pioneer circumstances, because they were thereby able to prove how false are the insinuations of anti-Semites, and the Nazi theories that Jews are unable and unwilling to work. And because of these circumstances their work is also more significant and enduring.

The Jewish pioneers in Biro-Bidjan proved that they could not only work, but also that they could overcome the hardships of pioneering. Of course there were some who retreated, but that is no singular phenomenon in a pioneer country. The important point is that during ten years 30,000 Jews took root in Biro-Bidjan. They established a number of successful cooperative communities, among which are some that have earned a favorable

reputation not only in the Far East, but throughout the length and breadth of the Soviet Union. Such communities as Amurzet, Birofeld, Nailebn, Icor, and others are the proud achievements of the Jewish farmers.

A network of industrial cooperatives also developed in Biro-Bidjan. It is sufficient to indicate that in the five regions of Biro-Bidjans some forty industrial cooperative enterprises are to be found, which already play an important role in the economic life of the young territory. Let us note just a few of the production figures which were compiled for last year:

144,000 chairs manufactured

1,600,000 rubles' worth of deal furniture was made

64,000 cubic meters of wood were sawed

700,000 staves and 16,000 barrels were produced

50,000 back supports and 60,000 seats for chairs were made

4,000 wagons and other vehicles were built

1,000 square meters of marble were mined

The combined production of these cooperative enterprises amounted to very nearly 50,000,000 rubles. This was an increase of about 150 per cent, in comparison with the previous year. It is significant that the cooperative named after Dimitrov produced goods valued at 800,000 rubles in 1934, and two years later its production yielded 1,600,000 rubles; and in 1937 this sum was stepped up to very nearly 2,500,000 rubles. The same is true regarding the "Revolution Wheel" cooperative, which leaped from a production valued at 400,000 rubles in 1934 to 1,400,000 rubles in 1936, and just short of 3,000,000 rubles last year. Similar records were attained by the cooperatives "Second Five-Year-Plan," "Kirpitchiki," "Detal," "Food Products," "Native Effort," and others.

It is also important to state that in all the cooperatives there are many Stakhanovites who have earned widespread reputations in Biro-Bidjan. Some earn 700 to 800 rubles a month. Among the Stakhanovites in the cooperative bearing Dimitrov's name is the Stakhanovite Liametz, who has earned a special reputation, and who, although he is sixty, is not surpassed by his younger comrades.

As regards cultural developments, Biro-Bidjan has attained high levels. A network of schools, technical institutions, libraries, clubs, and reading rooms has grown up. Biro-Bidjan possesses two daily newspapers, and five regional publications. A quarterly magazine, FORPOST, appears regularly. Biro-Bidjan has a Jewish State theatre, and a number of motion picture theatres. Evening classes for adults are conducted. There pulsates a cultural life with which the Jewish pioneers need not be ashamed, even when comparisons are made with long established communities.

The following table should give some idea as to the growth in Biro-Bidjan's institutions of learning:

Year	Schools	Number of Students
1927-28	57	4,794
1931-32	80	7,322
1934-35	85	10,091
1936-37	113	15,914

The number of teachers has risen from year to year, as the following figures show:

Year	Number of Teachers	Teachers with University Training
1931-32	214	4%
1933-35	373	12%
1936-37	600	25%



Today there are more than 700 teachers in the various schools of the territory.

The accomplishments of the Jewish pioneers in Biro-Bidjan are such that they need not feel inferior to anyone in the world. Not only have they, by means of industry and initiative, written a glorious chapter in their own history, but also in the history of the entire Soviet Union. As pioneers, their first attempts have won the confidence of the Soviet government, which on May 7, 1934, proclaimed Biro-Bidjan as a Jewish autonomous state, where Yiddish is the official language of the people.

On August 29, 1936, the Soviet government took the opportunity to make public a special statement that the Jewish workers in Biro-Bidjan had earned the government's complete confidence, and that greater effort would be exerted to develop the Jewish autonomous territory with all possible speed. It ought to be mentioned at this point, that saboteurs who have greatly hindered various projects in the Soviet's program of development, have not overlooked Biro-Bidjan either. Here, too, there have been Trotskyist criminals who have done a great deal of damage, but did not succeed in wrecking the marvelous building of the Jewish autonomous territory, the foundation of which was laid on March 28, 1928.

## THE NEW CHARACTER OF THE IMMIGRATION INTO BIRO-BIDJAN

On February 15, the Moscow EMES (Yiddish daily) published a report concerning immigration into Biro-Bidjan for the year 1937. It reveals that because of sabotage immigration was not carried out to the extent which the plan had prescribed. The EMES does indicate, however, that:

Regardless of that, the Jewish autonomous region received, during the year 1937, a fair number of immigrants who actively joined in developing the territory. This proves that in spite of all obstacles the Jewish autonomy grew, went ahead with its construction, and admitted a sizeable contingent of immigrants — useful builders of the Jewish autonomous territory. This is evidence of how popular and highly regarded the Jewish autonomous territory is, in the eyes of the masses of workers of the Soviet Union.

In spite of a colossal improvement in the material welfare of the Jewish masses in town and village, at a time when the material factor has become significantly smaller as a prime stimulus to immigration, the Jewish masses of the Soviet Union nevertheless show a great impulse and desire to immigrate and build their very own Jewish autonomous territory.

For example, let us take some figures regarding immigration during 1937. Let us consider a group consisting of more than 600 families, and a thousand individuals—3000 persons altogether. Of whom does this significant group consist? It consists of 136 collective farmers, 145 construction workers, 129 metal workers, 23 drivers, 147 clothing workers, and 160 men for various administrative and cultural institutions. These are qualified people, who did not hesitate to join in developing and working in the territory.

In the year 1937 the Jewish autonomous area had an

influx of valuable groups of qualified immigrants, who had taken various courses, and who were organized by the COMERD and the GEZERD at Moscow, Kiev, and other centers. After the three-month courses in joinery at Kiev, 44 persons were sent to the Jewish autonomous area; and from Moscow, the joiners' group sent 122 persons. In 1937 the Jewish autonomous territory received a notable group of 95 tractor operators, and 14 people from the combined courses. They entered into the agricultural work of the Jewish autonomous territory.

One momentous point in the immigration of 1937 was the opportunity of sending a significant group of railroad workers into the Jewish autonomous territory. From the railroad courses (Poltava and Naivorn) offered by the COMERD and the transportation department, came, in 1937, 32 conductors, 21 switch men, 18 repair shop workers, etc., etc.; a total of 109 railroad workers. This is of great importance to the Jewish autonomous territory. In 1938, it is expected, the courses in transportation will yield new groups of railroad workers of varied training, for the Jewish autonomous territory.

In 1937 the Jewish autonomous territory also admitted a number of other kinds of workers. There arrived 20 accountants and bookkeepers, 41 technical engineers, 9 agriculturists, 23 cultural directors, 7 teachers, 3 musicians, 23 medical aides, etc.

All this indicates a sound condition. In contrast to previous years, when a great deal of vigilance was required to prevent the sending to Biro-Bidjan of old people, large families with many children and with but one or two ablebodied members—there is today an influx into Biro-Bidjan of a new type of immigrant: young, trained workers, who will be of incalculable value in developing the new country. The fact that trained workers are available, ready to enter into railroad work, telegraphy, and factories, is a very important development.

The immigration should not be measured quantita-

tively alone, but its quality, too, should receive consideration. The latest report verifies that Biro-Bidjan is developing on a sound foundation. The Jewish autonomous territory is receiving trained workers. They will make it possible for the immigration to increase steadily in numbers.

Biro-Bidjan is growing. It is a source of pride to record that the world's masses of Jews have observed the chapter of Biro-Bidjan with fitting attention, and with readiness to help in every way possible, and in a way which such a historic accomplishment truly deserves. We are proud of the fact that in this country the ICOR, from the very outset, has done everything in its power to cooperate with the Jewish pioneers in Biro-Bidjan, and to align the Jewish masses in friendship with the Soviet Union which made Biro-Bidjan possible. On April 7, 1928, the ICOR sent the GEZERD a telegram of greeting in connection with the proclaiming of Biro-Bidjan. In this greeting the ICOR stated its enthusiasm for the resolution concerning Biro-Bidjan, and assured that all its activities, hitherto devoted to the colonization of Jews in the Soviet Union, would be redirected in behalf of Biro-Bidjan.

In 1929 the ICOR sent a commission of experts to Biro-Bidjan. Upon its return the commission brought a report concerning the tremendous possibilities of Biro-Bidjan for supporting a large population.

In the ICOR's official report regarding its reason for sending a commission, the following was stated:

In spite of the fact that the ICOR supported the colonization of Biro-Bidjan without any reservation, it decided, due to existing differences of opinion, to carry out an investigation, first, in order to ascertain the possibilities

of Biro-Bidjan, and second, to study ways and means whereby the ICOR, as an American organization, might best help in the colonization, should the territory prove suited for that.

For this purpose the ICOR, in the Spring of 1929, organized a special commission of American scholars and specialists.

The commission consisted of Dr. Franklin S. Harris, agriculturist, President of the Brigham Young University, chairman of the commission; Benjamin Brown, farmer and expert on farm cooperatives; J. Brownlee Davidson, agricultural engineer, professor of agronomy, Iowa State College; Keefer B. Sauls, B. S., business administrator of Brigham Young University. They were accompanied by the chairman of the ICOR, Professor Charles Kuntz, sociologist and agriculturist, as well as the former secretary of the ICOR, Leon Talmy.

The work of the commission did much to create a better acquaintance with Biro-Bidjan, and helped to squelch the evil arguments of its foes. The accomplishments of the commission are invaluable. And in the same way the ICOR brought about many other benefits in behalf of Biro-Bidjan. These include the art collection which the ICOR recently sent to Biro-Bidjan. To have bought such a collection would have meant the expenditure of several thousand dollars. It is a beautiful gift to the young Jewish autonomous territory.

Aside from all this, mention should also be made of the historic work, carried out in the United States, of gathering signatures in a people's book, which was intended to convey greetings from American Jewry to the Jewish pioneers in Biro-Bidjan. This book is now completed, and will be sent to Biro-Bidjan shortly. This

is a historic document, which cements the friendship between the Jews of America and the Jews who are building their own land in Biro-Bidjan.

Fifty thousand signatures were entered in the book; it contains photographs of organizations; it expresses touching loyalty to Biro-Bidjan and the Soviet Union. It is an accomplishment of which ICOR may well be proud.

A great deal of activity entered into choosing a people's delegation to visit Biro-Bidjan. Over a quarter of a million Jews took part in the voting. The persons chosen represent a cross-section of the Jewish population. Union leaders, well-known social workers, authors, famous professionals, and such familiar personalities as James Waterman Wise, and Congressman Sirovitch.

Due to the dangerous situation in the Far East, and because of the destructive work of those who sought to introduce disharmony in the ranks of the Soviet Union, the delegation could not leave at the expected time. But it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the large numbers of people who have taken part in the choice of delegates have thereby demonstrated their interest in the development of Biro-Bidjan.

The ICOR held thousands of mass-meetings in the United States, enormous national celebrations, symposiums, debates. It distributed millions of copies of literature on Biro-Bidjan; the ICOR's magazine, NAILEBN (NEW LIFE), which is primarily devoted to information concerning Biro-Bidjan, has developed into the most widely read Jewish journal in the entire world. The ICOR sent \$300,000 worth of machines and tools to Biro-Bidjan. And at the same time, the ICOR continued its work in

behalf of Biro-Bidjan, and to promote friendship toward the Soviet Union.

It should also be said that the Soviet Union's enemies in Jewish circles have not ceased prating against and defaming the only Jewish autonomous territory in the world. Only very recently, hostile Jewish newspapers came out with a story that Biro-Bidjan is being liquidated. The story of the achievements of Biro-Bidjan during the first decade of its existence, the firm foundation on which Biro-Bidjan rests, the boundless support which Biro-Bidjan is receiving from the Soviet government (more than \$600,000,000 in cash), as well as from all the Soviet states, is the best assurance that the Jewish autonomous territory in Biro-Bidjan will thrive and bear fruit. The first ten years are but a beginning in a golden chapter in Jewish history, which began to be written on that memorable date of March 28, 1928.

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## POPULATION, IMMIGRATION AND GROWTH OF THE CITY OF BIRO-BIDJAN

The increase in population in the Jewish autonomous territory, in the past ten years, was as follows:

Year	Population
1926 .....	32,266
1932 .....	48,938
1936 .....	65,000

The growth of the city of Biro-Bidjan (up to 1930 it was the R. R. Station Tikhonkaia) in the same ten years was as follows:

Year	Population
1926 .....	881
1929 .....	1,288
1933 .....	7,000
1936 .....	17,000

In April, 1937, the city possessed a population of about 20,000.

Jewish immigration which began in 1928, proceeded as follows:

Year	Number of New Settlers
1928 .....	850
1929 .....	1,420
1930 .....	1,186
1931 .....	3,230
1932 .....	8,234
1933 .....	3,130
1934 .....	5,267
1935 .....	8,347
1936 .....	7,000



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**THE HISTORIC DECLARATION CONCERNING THE  
CREATION OF BIRO-BIDJAN AS A JEWISH  
AUTONOMOUS TERRITORY**

**Decision of the Central Executive Committee  
of the Soviet Union**

Regarding the ALL-RUSSIAN CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S proposal concerning the transformation of the Jewish territory of Biro-Bidjan into a Jewish autonomous region, the CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Soviet Union has declared:


The proposal shall be carried out, and the Biro-Bidjan settlement shall be turned into a Jewish autonomous territory, as part of the Soviet Far East.

Chairman of the Central Executive Committee  
of the Soviet Union  
**M. KALININ**

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Comments on the Declaration of Biro-Bidjan as a  
Jewish Autonomous Territory

M. I. KALININ:

"... the founding of the Jewish autonomous region is, in my opinion, the result following the carrying out of the national policy of the Soviet government, which is aimed at safeguarding the economic and cultural blossoming of all nationalities living among us in the Union."

MAXIM GORKI:

"... it should be pointed out that at the same time that these people [the Jews] are being driven out of Germany by the Fascist bourgeoisie, and the Fascists of England are also beginning to preach the shameful doctrines of anti-Semitism—an independent Jewish republic, a Jewish autonomous region, is arising in the land where the working class has the power." (Quoted from an article, "Proletarian Humanitarianism," May 23, 1934.)

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