

STALIN AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The leader of the Soviet peoples guided the state toward full equality for all nations and minorities. The Jews shared in this liberation

By Louis Harap

IT is no wonder that the illness and death of Stalin stirred the entire world to the depths. No one doubts that he was one of the pivotal figures of the last 30 years of world history. His impact on the world was so profound and many-sided that any assessment of his significance would demand an estimate of the entire era.

But we are here concerned with only one phase of his significance: the implications of his work for the Jewish people. This cannot be understood apart from his influence on the movement to liberate subject nations from the age-old bonds of oppression, of backwardness and from every form of chauvinism. For the Jewish question is part of the national question and was in these larger terms dealt with in the Soviet Union. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver gave this estimate of this Soviet policy: "In the past thirty years of its existence the Soviet Union has a good record in which no racial or religious intolerance was practiced." Rabbi Silver made this statement on February 17 in Los Angeles in reply to the hysterical charges of "anti-Semitism" in the Soviet Union. "I have no evidence that the Soviet Union is launched on an all-out anti-Semitic policy," he added. "I therefore am inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt, particularly so long as evidence to the contrary is so inconclusive."

A scrutiny of the evidence shows any observer, whose answer is not distorted by false propaganda, that the evidence is conclusively to the contrary—that every bit of evidence points not to "anti-Semitism" but to a strict policy of enforcing equality of all peoples, Jews included.

Stalin, together with Lenin, led in shaping the theory of the national question as well as the translation of this theory in actuality. Already in 1904, Stalin was fighting through labor struggles for the unity of the nationalities of Russia against the tsar. In the multi-national oil center of Baku, Stalin addressed the workers in a leaflet issued by the Russian Social Democratic Party in which he called out: "To strengthen its throne, the tsarist government has invented a 'new' remedy. It is sowing enmity among the nationalities of Russia, it is inciting one against the other, it is organizing pogroms of Jews, Armenians, etc. . . . Hold out your hands to one another and, united, rally round the proletariat, the true grave-diggers of the tsarist government."

Out of practice such as this and the experience of the entire revolutionary movement in Russia, Stalin formulated the basic Soviet theory on the national question. Stalin's

essay, *Marxism and the National Question*, published in 1913, and regarded by Lenin as "in the forefront" of Marxist writings on the subject, has been the basis for Soviet practice ever since. Stalin's position as the leading authority on this phase of the Marxist movement was recognized by the fact that from 1917 to 1923 he was Commissar of Nationalities in the new Soviet state. During this period and the following period, when he was the leader of the whole Soviet country, Stalin led in the conversion of the many nations and nationalities into equals among equals, something unprecedented in the history of man.

How did this general approach to the national question affect the Jews? To end oppression suffered by the Jews in tsarist Russia, it was necessary to wipe out anti-Semitism and to remove all obstacles to free Jewish participation in Soviet life. On these questions the position of the Communist Party and of Stalin was simple. Anti-Semitism must be extirpated along with every form of racist and national oppression. It is now a matter of history that the Soviet Union fought hard and long to wipe out the anti-Semitism engendered and exploited by ruling classes of Russia. Stalin expressed himself quite unambiguously. In an interview with a representative of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 1931, Stalin uttered his classic denunciation of anti-Semitism:

"National and racial chauvinism is a vestige of the misanthropic mores peculiar to the period of cannibalism. Anti-Semitism, as the most extreme form of chauvinism, is the most dangerous survival of cannibalism. Anti-Semitism is useful to the exploiters as a shock absorber, pulling capitalism out from under the blows of the working class. Anti-Semitism is dangerous to the working class as a false path leading them off from the correct road and leading them into the jungles. Therefore, Communists, as consistent internationalists, cannot but be irreconcilable enemies of anti-Semitism. In the USSR anti-Semitism is most severely prosecuted as a phenomenon deeply inimical to the Soviet order."

In 1950, when the 13th volume of Stalin's collected works (writings from 1930 to 1934) was published in Moscow, a hitherto unknown letter of Stalin was included in which Stalin reaffirmed, said a reviewer in *Pravda* (May 15, 1950), that in the Soviet Union "all expressions of national hate or hostility to foreigners is prosecuted by law" and Stalin "pillories anti-Semitism, pointing out that Communists, as internationalists, are determined enemies of anti-Semitism."

THE "OF JEWISH ORIGIN" HOAX

AMONG the many devices used by the commercial and reactionary press to distort the meaning of the trial in Prague, falsification of texts is not the least. A prime example is a falsification launched by *Commentary*, published by the American Jewish Committee, in its January number.

In that issue, one Peter Meyer purports to give an excerpt from the text of the indictment as published in *Rude Pravo*, Czechoslovakian Communist Party organ, on November 20, 1952. By an almost imperceptible yet vital falsification, Meyer seeks to build up a case of obvious anti-Semitism in the very text of the indictment itself. How does Meyer do this?

He lists the defendants by name and year of birth, and then informs us that next to certain defendants there are the words "of Jewish origin," while next to others there are merely the words, "Czech" and "Slovak." Therefore the argument has been made that the indictment itself is discriminatory against Jews in its very form, since a Clementis and a Frank, by being described as "Slovak" or "Czech," are being designated by national origin while the Jews are regarded as aliens, and are described in a different manner. Therefore, it is proclaimed the indictment is anti-Semitic on its face.

The *fact* is, however, that the original text of the

indictment in *Rude Pravo* of November 20, 1952, proves that exactly the opposite is true. Next to each defendant there is *exactly the same technical phrase*: "*puvodem Slovak,*" "*puvodem Zid,*" "*puvodem Cech.*" This means: "by origin Slovak," "by origin Jewish," "by origin Czech." *The formula reveals that all are referred to in the same way, with no trace of discrimination.*

Further to underline the nature of Meyer's and *Commentary's* falsification is this fact, derived from no less a conservative source than Ismar Elbogen's *A Century of Jewish Life* (Jewish Publication Society, 1944, p. 546): "The Republic of Czechoslovakia was the only new state [after World War I] whose government was absolutely free of anti-Semitism and would not even countenance the boisterousness of students. Regardless of their language it allowed the Jews to acknowledge *Jewish nationality*" (italics added). Then Elbogen goes on to point out that in the census of 1921, over half the Jews in Czechoslovakia "had themselves recorded as of the Jewish nationality."

In short, each of the defendants is defined in terms of his nationality, as was the custom in the capitalist democratic state of Czechoslovakia and as is the practise in the socialist democracy too. As for Peter Meyer's deft piece of work, what a commentary on *Commentary!*

That this was no mere pious sentiment has been demonstrated by social fact. The doors of equal opportunity have been thrown open to the Jews in the Soviet Union. One of the first measures taken to ensure this equality was to correct the occupational maldistribution into which the Jewish people had been forced during centuries of persecution. After the revolution Jews were settled on the land in the Crimea and the Ukraine in the thousands. Jews entered many trades and into basic industry hitherto closed to them. Jews enjoyed an open entry into all the professions, as is demonstrated every year by the number of Jews, far higher than their ratio to the whole population, to whom Stalin prizes are awarded in the arts and sciences.

When Jewish Marxists in 1927 proposed that a territory be set aside for Jewish colonization on which a Jewish state could be built on a socialist foundation, the government agreed and assigned Birobidjan as such a Jewish territory. In 1934, voluntary immigration had established a sufficient base and Birobidjan was declared a Jewish Autonomous Region. Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin said at that time that the future development of the region "depends on the efforts of the toiling Jews themselves." In the absence of anti-Semitism, the traditional stimulus to Jewish migration, Kalinin also suggested that if 4,000 Jews a year in the 10-15 years went to Birobidjan, that would be a good record. The war, of course, intervened but the Jewish Autonomous Region is prospering and overfulfills its production plans.

The constancy and integrity of the Stalin policy was further demonstrated during the anti-fascist war. When Hitler's armies were advancing, a special decree was issued

to give first priority in transportation to the evacuation of Jews and many thousands of Jews were saved. In a saner time, this was readily admitted. In 1943, James N. Rosenberg, an American Jewish communal leader, said: "Russia has saved over ten times as many Jews from nazi extermination as all the rest of the world put together. Let that also sink into your minds, my fellow Jews." By his iron-nerved and masterly military strategy at Stalingrad, Stalin saved the Jews of Palestine from nazi massacre. **And the monumental war effort of the Soviet people under Stalin's leadership saved European Jewry from annihilation.**

The spirit of Stalin which animated Soviet policy of wiping out the centuries-old persecution of the Jewish people, as well as all national oppression, still reigns in the Soviet Union and has been extended to the people's democracies. The hysterical campaign against "anti-Semitism" in these countries is the unenviable feat of standing facts on their head. As the venerable leader of the Negro and American people, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, said in his tribute to Stalin on March 9, "Let all Negroes, Jews and foreign born, who have suffered in America from prejudice and intolerance, remember Joseph Stalin. This son of a slave in Georgia, as Commissar of Nationalities fought prejudice and particularism, and helped build the first modern state which outlawed race discrimination."

As the years pass, the stature of Stalin as one of the great men of this century will emerge ever more clearly, and his leadership in the liberation of peoples, including the Jewish people, from centuries of oppression will take on greater clarity.