Restitution of Property

In addition to the three laws indicated in AJY, p. 379, the Fourth Restitution Law (Das Vierte Rueckstellungsgesetz), dated May 21, 1947, was promulgated in the Fall of 1947. It dealt only with the restoration of firm names which were changed or canceled under the Nazi rule. The much more important Fifth Law on Restitution was still pending. It was supposed to deal with claims originating from leases on apartments, offices and business premises. On August 21, 1947, a law (Wiedereinstellungsgesetz) was enacted which provided for the reinstatement of workers and employees who had been fired from their jobs for political or "racial" reasons. Moreover, a special law (Opferfuersorgegesetz) went into effect on September 2, 1947, which guaranteed victims of the Nazi regime favorable treatment as well as certain rights facilitating their adjustment to the prevailing circumstances. It is too early to evaluate the practical significance of all these regulations.

In general, the Jewish conditions in Austria and the problems debated within the Austrian-Jewish community were similar to those in Germany.

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POLAND

By Leon Shapiro

Recent Political Developments

The general elections held in Poland on January 19, 1947, marked the end of the government of national unity in which, following the agreement between the Western Allies and Russia, members of the London Polish government-in-exile sat
together with the leaders of the Soviet-sponsored Lublin committee. The conditions surrounding the elections—arrests of members of the opposition, exclusion of some of them from the lists of candidates and the pressure of government officials applied particularly in the remote villages—made it difficult to determine accurately the extent of popular support for the government.

Assured of 383 seats out of the total of 444 in the Parliament, the leftist bloc (Communists, Socialists, pro-government Peasant party and some small groups), immediately began a thorough reorganization of the government under strong Communist leadership, assuming control of the political and economic administration, as well as public education and youth activities. The government-imposed agreement among various youth organizations, viewed only as a first step toward a larger state-controlled youth body, provided for ideological training and control of the broader aspects of education.

Although divided into three sectors, state, co-operative and private, the vast ramifications of the Polish economy were largely under the authority of the state. Partly as a result of the frontier changes, Poland now had a far better chance of coping with its economic problems. The relation of population to natural resources was much more favorable than it had been before, and in addition, the industrial capacity of the country increased noticeably.

Toward the end of 1947, the political regime in Poland underwent profound changes. With the flight from Warsaw of Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the leader of the Peasant party opposition and former prime minister of the London Polish government-in-exile, the legal opposition ceased to exist, and an overtly Communist regime was consolidated. The decision of the Polish socialists to liquidate their party (the PPS) and join the Communists in a united workers' movement was the logical development of the policy of collaboration followed by their leader, Joseph Cyrankiewicz. There were still various political groups in the government, but with the elimination of the opposition and exertion of constant pressure on other
groups, the Polish Communists were unobstructed in their program.

**Population**

The year 1947 was a turning point in the life of the Polish Jewish community. For the first time in a decade, the Jews found it possible to return to the normal pursuits of daily life.

After the mass exodus at the end of 1946, the emergency period was over and the Jewish community in Poland entered upon a period of stabilization and adjustment to the new conditions. Except for small groups still on the move, the Jewish population became fairly stabilized, with communities and families well-entrenched in the cities of their choice. The constant shifting from one town to another characteristic of the past year or two practically ceased.

Few changes were registered in the number of the Jewish population in the course of 1947. During the special Passover registration, conducted by the Central Committee for the purpose of matzot distribution in 1947, the total of registered Jews was about 88,000. It was estimated that 10,000 to 12,000 Jews did not register, which would indicate that in the spring of 1947, there were about 100,000 Jews in Poland. According to available data, during 1947 some 6,000 Jews left Poland legally and, in addition, a few thousand slipped out to Germany on their way to Palestine, thus leaving in Poland a Jewish population of about 87,000 to 90,000, or about 0.4 per cent of the total population. Geographically, the Jews were living mostly in the western part of the country, with about half of them in the newly incorporated areas. There were Jewish groups in 135 cities and towns, with some 50,000 to 60,000 in ten big cities. There was a fair chance that Jews who would wish to emigrate in the future would be able to do so in an orderly fashion, though at the end of 1947, the Polish authorities introduced restrictions in the issuance of passports to would-be emigrants, and made the passports conditional upon the presentation of a written promise of a visa. The time limit for passport applications
was extended until June 30, 1948; every Jew who intended to emigrate had to obtain a certificate of registration from the Central Jewish Committee, where the applications were filed and passed on to the Foreign Ministry.

**Poles and Jews**

Local observers and persons who had recently visited Poland testified to continued animosity toward Jews. The superficial calm, they reported, was a result of strong police measures rather than of a genuine change of mind on the part of broad segments of the population.

The unmistakable trend toward social stabilization among Polish Jews ran parallel with the disappearance of anti-Semitic outrages, stopped by stern measures by the government. Now and then incidents occurred, but of a rather local character. Thus, on the night of October 19, 1947, vandals desecrated the cemetery in Szedliz, where the remains of several hundred Jewish victims of German terror were buried (*Dos Naye Lebn*, Lodz, November 30, 1947). Acts of vandalism were performed in the Jewish cemetery in Bialystok (*Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 10, 1948).

Of late, a strong awareness of the dangers of anti-Jewish prejudice appeared in some strata of Polish society. Men prominent in science, politics and literature were trying to do educational work in this field, through the “All-Polish League for Fight against Racism.” The League had ten sections throughout the country, and published a periodical, *Prawo Czlowieka* (“Human Rights”). Recently, the League issued a pamphlet by its General Secretary, Julian Gorecki, on social, religious and economic sources of anti-Semitism (*Dos Naye Lebn*, January 16, 1948). Likewise, the *Wiedza* (“Knowledge”) recently published a book entitled *Martwa Fala* (“The Dead Wave”) combatting the anti-Jewish prejudice of the population. The book featured articles by well-known Polish writers such as Stanislaw Dobrowolski, Jerzy Andrzejewski, Stefan Flukowski, Julian Przybos and others (“Jewish Life in Poland,” published by the official Polish
Research and Information Service in the United States, April, 1948).

In the field of intergroup relations, the following facts may be of interest: During 1947, the Central Committee of Polish Jews extended special assistance to non-Jewish children's homes, monasteries and other institutions, which had harbored Jewish children during the occupation. Also, during the flood in the spring of 1947, Polish children were given food and shelter in Jewish children's homes, in addition to food and clothing distributed to victims of the disaster.

A curious side light on the morale of Polish Jews was thrown by the existence of a relatively significant number of Jews who either lived under assumed Polish names or became Catholics and did not consider themselves a part of the Jewish community. These modern "Marranos" try to do away with every vestige of their Jewishness; according to local observers, they come from every stratum of the Jewish community. Their number was estimated at about 10,000—they lived mostly in big cities like Warsaw, Lodz and Cracow.

**Economic Status, Welfare Activities, Restitution**

Against the background of devastation and disorganization in the post-liberation years in Poland, the recovery of the Polish Jewish community represented a truly remarkable achievement. Most able-bodied Jews were now gainfully employed, mainly as workers, artisans and employees. Jewish independent business was insignificant, while the number of Jewish producers' co-operatives rose from about 160 at the beginning of 1947 to 203 in 1948. Ninety-three co-operatives were located in Lower Silesia, twenty-three in Lodz, twenty-two in Szczecin; Cracow and Katowice had sixteen co-operatives each. There were also producers' co-operatives in Warsaw and in other cities of central Poland. About 6,000 persons were occupied in producers' co-operatives, which were actually private enterprises owned and managed by their members who received basic pay for their work. All
the profits, after appropriation for share payments and reserve capital, were divided among the members.

There was no substantial Jewish agriculture in Poland. According to available data, only 200 Jewish families representing 532 persons were farmers (334 were in Lower Silesia and 198 in other regions). A new development was the appearance in Poland of Jewish so-called "shock-workers" (Udarniki), patterned after the Soviet example of model workers. On April 25, the first congress of Jewish shock-workers was held in Wroclaw, Lower Silesia, at which 300 delegates represented various light and heavy industries (Dos Naye Lebn, April 30, 1948).

The Joint Distribution Committee played an important role in the process of Jewish economic reconstruction, through its assistance to producers' co-operatives, loan banks and vocational training. In addition, the JDC continued to support an extensive program of social welfare. In view of the betterment of the economic conditions in Poland during 1947, the program of the JDC was revised to conform to the new situation. A number of agencies were consolidated, their program reshaped, and those which served permanent needs were strengthened. Special emphasis was laid on the care of children, the aged and the sick. It must be pointed out in this connection that in recent years the majority of Jewish emigrants from Poland were able-bodied and young people, a fact which had a direct bearing on the welfare needs of the community. In addition, the Jewish population settled in the newly established Jewish centers of the western area still required outside help to maintain its communal institutions, synagogues, etc. Among other activities, the JDC financed the social welfare work of the Central Committee, religious congregations, TOZ (medical and child care), ORT (vocational training) and other agencies. The assistance of the JDC through the major Jewish organizations extended to several hundred functional agencies: In 1947, the JDC appropriated $4,890,000 for Poland, exclusive of the shipment of various supplies.

As regards the economic position of Polish Jews, the un-
fortunate handling of the problem of the restitution of Jewish property must be noted. In a number of cases when property could have been restored to the owners, local courts ruled in favor of persons who had no right to it. The time limit for inheritance claims, which according to previous regulations had to be registered before December 31, 1947, was extended to the end of 1949. It was reported that after this date new regulations would contain limitations as to the persons who might inherit the property.

It was reported by local observers that very little collective Jewish property, i.e., property of Jewish communities, schools, foundations, etc., had been returned.

**Intracommunal Relationships**

The Central Committee of Polish Jews, based on a coalition of parties, continued to be the most powerful organization of Polish Jewry. Its influence upon the community and its role in world Jewish activities was steadily increasing (see *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 49, p. 387). Despite this role, the Central Committee had not yet attained the legal status of an institution of public interest, which would entitle it to certain privileges, particularly with respect to taxation and the recovery of Jewish property. The repeated decisions to hold elections were not implemented, and the Central Committee continued as a coalition of the PPR (Polska Partia Robotnicza—Communist), Bund, Ihud (Zionist), Poale Zion Left, Hashomer Hatzair and Poale-Zion-Hitahdut. The official Committee of Religious Congregations was not represented in the Central Committee. At the national conference of Jewish committees which was held in October, 1947, in Warsaw, eighty-four delegates represented forty-five cities (*Dos Naye Lebn*, October 19, 1947).

Of the Committee’s activities in the field of general Jewish interests, the following are of special importance. After a long discussion and protracted negotiations, the Central Committee decided in January, 1948, to affiliate with the World Jewish Congress. This decision was made by the
majority of all political groups represented in the Committee, as against the Bund which persevered in its fundamental opposition to participation in Jewish world organizations. Also, in agreement with its pro-Palestine stand, the Central Committee repeatedly associated itself with the Jewish demands in Palestine. On December 1, 1947, the Central Committee passed a resolution greeting the United Nations decision on partition (Dos Naye Lebn, December 5, 1947), and more recently, it welcomed the establishment of the state of Israel.

Polish Jewry fully approved of this action. According to Dos Naye Lebn of April 9, 1948, and as of that date, the Central Committee's drive for help to Israel had brought in eighty million zlotys, the Jewish community of Lodz and the communities of Lower Silesia having contributed about thirty million zlotys each.

While the Central Committee possessed a strong leadership and benefited from its quasi-official character, the Committee of Religious Congregations was handicapped by the lack of prominent religious leaders and by its vague status. The religious elements in the community had suffered most in the years of occupation, and even now they were struggling to adjust themselves to the changing conditions. Of religious Jews who had survived the occupation and returned from Russia, many left Poland in search of other homes where they hoped to live in an atmosphere of religious observance and tradition. Substantial groups of Hasidim and others were in France en route to other countries, and even those who stayed behind were anxious to migrate to Israel, United States or elsewhere. The Committee of Religious Congregations was created by the government decree of February 11, 1945. Rabbi D. Kahane, head of the Committee, was also head of the Polish rabbinate and the Chief Rabbi of the Polish army. At the beginning of 1948, eighty-six religious communities were affiliated with the Committee, and twenty-seven rabbis served the religious needs of those communities (Dos Naye Vort, Paris, April 6, 1948).

Since the widespread political, social and cultural activ-
ities of the Central Committee and its affiliated regional and local committees practically obliterated the old Jewish communal structure, the separate existence of the independent Committee of Religious Congregations became increasingly difficult. Plans for uniting the activities of the Central Committee and the Committee of Religious Congregations, laid down some time ago, were not implemented, and the relationship between the two agencies began to deteriorate. According to press reports, in some Polish cities (Warsaw, Lodz), the Central Committee did not consider it necessary to invite representatives of religious congregations to the solemn gatherings which it organized to celebrate the United Nations decision on Palestine. This neglect evoked strong protests from religious Jewry, and in an open letter to Dos Naye Lebn of January 23, 1948, Rabbi D. Kahane profoundly regretted the attitude of the Central Committee.

The question of religious Jewry's participation in the Central Committee was widely discussed in the Polish Jewish press, and the national conference of Jewish committees held in Warsaw in October, 1947, devoted much attention to this problem. At this writing, negotiations were proceeding between the two agencies, and, according to the JTA bulletin of May 9, 1948, religious Jewry had put up the following five conditions for its affiliation with the Central Committee: (1) Sabbath observance; (2) kosher food in all Central Committee canteens; (3) autonomy for all religious children's homes; (4) continuation of the Talmud Torah within the framework of the Jewish educational system; (5) financial independence of religious congregations.

Pending the outcome of these negotiations, the two organizations were conducting separately their extensive welfare and cultural activities.

**Jewish Political Parties**

The Jewish political parties, which in recent years had developed large-scale activities, were now undergoing profound changes. Their influence upon the Jewish populace
was still important, but the general political changes in the country and the evolution of some Zionist groups greatly affected Jewish political life. Outwardly, the political parties continued their activities as if nothing were changed in Poland. Thus in the period under review, most political parties convened their national conferences. The Bund held its conference on April 3 and 4, 1948, in Wroclaw, with fifty-seven delegates attending (Folkstzeitung, Warsaw, April 10, 1948). At the conference of the PPR (Communists), held in Warsaw, on October 31, 1947 sixty delegates represented all the Communist groups of the various Jewish committees and institutions (Dos Naye Lebn, November 9, 1947). At the third party council of the Poale Zion-Hitahdut (middle-of-the-road labor group), sixty representatives participated (Befrayung, Lodz, April 19, 1948). The conference at which the Poale Zion Left and the Poale Zion-C. S. (Zionist-Socialists) were merged, was attended by 385 delegates (Dos Naye Lebn, October 31, 1947).

While in the years immediately following liberation the political divisions, sharpened by war and occupation, reappeared with new vigor, the recent months show a reverse process, with the eastern concept of "unity" progressively becoming the prevailing trend. In Jewish political organizations, too, this development gained momentum. In this respect, the decision made by the conference of Jewish PPR officials on October 31, 1947, was most revealing. While reaffirming its non-Zionist stand and pledging continued support of legal emigration to Palestine, the conference declared itself in favor of united action with the Bund and with leftist Zionist parties. The conference further invited its members to fight all forms of "sectarianism"—a political slogan which covered all groups opposed to the communist conception of a "united front"—in Jewish committees, and other bodies (Folkstzeitung, December, 1947). This pressure for "unity" scored a certain success on the Jewish political scene. The central committee of the Jewish Socialist Party (Bund), which recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, decided on March 21, 1948, to secede from the
co-ordinating committee of the Bundist organizations, an international body uniting the party's following in Poland, France, the United States, etc. Similarly, the Polish Bund withdrew from the Committee of Socialist Parties in London, following an identical decision by the Polish PPS (Socialist Party). Thereupon, the Bund decided at a conference held in Wrocław, on the third and fourth of April, 1948, that in view of the general consolidation of Marxist forces in the country, it was highly desirable that co-operation between the Bund and the PPR be strengthened. This co-operation would lead, according to the Bund, to a closer ideological link and more "organic unity" between the Bund and the Communists (Folkstzeitung, April 10, 1948). The consolidation of political parties was paralleled by a political regrouping in the Zionist camp, which, however, was impelled by other reasons. Following the creation of a new united Socialist party in Israel, the Poale Zion Left, the party of A. Berman, chairman of the Jewish Central Committee, and the Poale Zion-C. S., a left-of-center Zionist labor group, were united into one party. The new party adopted a leftist platform. At the moment of writing, a further merger was contemplated between this group and Hashomer Hatzair, a Marxist Zionist group whose counterpart in Israel was united with Poale Zion Left in the movement called "United Workers party of Israel." However, some middle-of-the-road Zionist labor groups, as well as a rightist faction, had so far escaped this process. It would be little short of a miracle if the small Jewish community could conserve its manifold structure and withstand the powerful currents which were now molding the social conditions of the country. The Eastern European political process increasingly dominated all the aspects of Jewish life in Poland. Only the future will show what the ultimate fate of the Jewish community will be.

Cultural and Educational Activities

No important changes occurred in this field during the year under review, although some consolidation of existing
institutions did take place. The educational and cultural institutions maintained by the Central Committee, the Committee of Religious Congregations and other groups, practically covered the needs of the whole population—children, adults and old people. The largest number of schools, thirty-four with 2,942 pupils, were maintained by the School Department of the Central Committee. The curriculum of the schools was identical with that of the government public schools, though the language of instruction was Yiddish; Hebrew and Palestinian geography were part of the curriculum. In a sense, these schools were carrying on the tradition of the pre-war Cisho and Szul-Kult (schools maintained before the war by Yiddishists of both socialist and nationalist wings). Another type of school—the elementary Hebrew schools—took care of 1,001 students in eleven institutions. Their teaching plan resembled that of the pre-war Tarbut (pro-Zionist schools). The thirty-six Talmud Torahs supported by the religious congregations had a total of 1,100 pupils. These schools stressed the study of the Bible and other religious subjects, and tried to continue the tradition of the pre-war religious schools of Yavne, Yesode-Torah and others.

The general stabilization and the awareness in some quarters of the community that the children represented the future of the Jewish community in Poland brought the problem of education to the forefront of public discussion. Some persons debated not only the language of instruction—Hebrew versus Yiddish—but even more, the whole approach to the education of children. One opinion maintained that education should be oriented toward eventual emigration to Palestine, while the other wanted the education of children to be conducted with a view to their staying in the country of their birth. This discussion was complicated by the charge made in some sectors of the community that institutions under leftist direction shifted Jewish matters to the background and created a breach between parents and children.

The Jewish organizations also maintained an extensive system of cultural institutions with clubs, libraries, sem-
inaries, etc. Two Jewish theaters were operating on a permanent basis, and toward the end of 1946, a group of Jewish artists, painters and sculptors who survived extermination organized a Society of Jewish Art. The Society planned to publish an encyclopedia of Jewish artists of Poland, containing over four hundred biographies of Jewish artists who perished under the Germans. The Historical Commission, which was transferred from Lodz to Warsaw and recently was transformed into a Historical Institute, had thirty-two publications dealing with the war and occupation to its credit toward the middle of 1947. In addition, the Historical Commission succeeded in saving a number of communal archives and private collections of documents dealing with the Jewish past.

Fifth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

On April 19, 1948, Polish Jewry celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. On this occasion a monument representing the historic struggle—the work of a Jewish sculptor, Nathan Rappaport—was unveiled in the former ghetto in the presence of government, military and municipal representatives, as well as of Jewish delegates from abroad. The monument was erected near 32–34 Zamenhoff Street, where, according to some witnesses, the epic struggle started.
THE TASK OF presenting a clear and more or less complete picture of present-day Soviet Jewry was as difficult for the year 1947–48 as it was for the previous years.

No official data of any kind concerning the Jewish population in the USSR were published. No new population statistics were made available, and while many publications in the United States continued to quote the figure of three million Jews in the USSR, the estimate likely to be closest to the facts would be less than two million.

It was equally impossible to find any statistics concerning the professional breakdown or economic status of the Soviet Jews. A booklet by L. Singer entitled, *Dos Oyfgerikhte Folk* ("The Regenerated People"), published in 1948, contained no material that shed light on the picture.

One could carefully read the Soviet press for long months and find no mention of Jewish problems (with the exception of the Palestine problem in the last months).

This was not accidental. There was no longer any doubt that Soviet Jewry did not form a community of its own, in the sense in which a community is understood in other countries: that is, an entity possessing distinct forms, specific organizations, committees, institutions etc. The only Jewish organization was the Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow, created after the German attack on Russia in 1941. This Committee, which was in fact a government agency, published *Aynigkeit*, ("Unity") edited by S. Zhits, the only Yiddish periodical in the USSR, which appeared in Moscow three times a week. (The other Yiddish paper, the *Birobidjan*
Shtern ["Star"], was published irregularly.) But even the four-page Aynigkeit devoted only a relatively small part of its space to Jewish problems, giving a prominent place to translations of general official propaganda. Like all other Soviet newspapers, the Aynigkeit printed the usual anti-American material, but there was almost no information about the fate of Jews abroad, especially in Western Europe and America, about their life and problems. The Jews in the Soviet Union were completely isolated from Jewish life outside the borders of the USSR.

**Yiddish Culture**

The only fields of Soviet Jewish life on which we had some reliable information were the Yiddish literary publications and theatre activities. There was no doubt, however, that a steady decline in these areas remained the dominant trend. Manifestations of Hebrew culture were completely non-existent, as in previous years.

Publishing activities revolved around the only existing Yiddish Publishing House, Emes ("Truth"), whose total sale of books amounted to 1,150,000 rubles in 1946. Each printing averaged 5,500 copies.

Among the about sixty publications in Yiddish during the period under review, ten were straight political pamphlets and books; three were popular-scientific works; twelve were collections of poetry; fifteen, novels and collections of short stories; nine, reprints of classics.

The political works consisted of translations of the political writings and speeches of Stalin, Molotov et al. An interesting episode may be mentioned at this point: A minor crisis developed over the fact that the Short Biography of Stalin (234 pages) was printed according to the rules of the old Yiddish orthography, and not the phonetic and simplified rules introduced after the revolution. Aynigkeit strongly attacked the publishers for this. This was not the only attack: Aynigkeit bitterly criticized Emes several times for "bureaucratic practices." Finally, the publishing house yielded
and declared in March, 1948, that, on reconsidering, they were forced to admit the charges leveled by Aynigkeit to be correct, and promised to introduce "bolshevik order" into their work.

The number of books of poetry was relatively large. The basic theme of many poems may be easily discerned from the titles: M. Gelbstein—"A Gun in My Hand"; "M. Grubian—"Song of Courage"; S. Holodenko—"Our Strength"; Binem Heller—"The Road to Warsaw," etc. Even the "Selected Poems" of D. Hofstein were partially propagandistic.

The novels and collections of short stories included: A. Bezymenski—"David Dragunsky" (twice-named Hero of the Soviet Union); A. Stelmach—"In the Southern Urals"; I. Rabin—"My Own" (stories of ghetto and partisan life); C. Melamud—"Earth" (life on collective farms in the Ukraine); L. Login—"My Friends, the Warriors of the Black Sea" (about Jewish heroes of the Black Sea Fleet). The best work of the year, however, was probably the "New Collection of Stories," by D. Bergelson.

The reprints of classics included three works by I. L. Peretz and six illustrated editions of Sholem Aleichem, whose works were still the most popular in the Soviet Union. It was recently disclosed that during the period from 1937 to 1946, 451 publications (4,174,000 copies) of his works were published in twelve different languages.

It must be emphasized that, apart from the classics, only books by Soviet writers were published, and the existence of contemporary Yiddish and Hebrew writers of nations outside the Soviet sphere of influence was never even mentioned.

Only two textbooks were published last year and both were designed for adults: one was a reader for beginners and the other an alphabet book. There were no textbooks for children.

Finally, there were two books of literary criticism: Dobrushin's on Bergelson, and Serebrianis' on Mendele Moykher Sforim.

In addition to these books, the publication of four "almanacs" was initiated in 1947: in Moscow—Haymland (three
issues as of July, 1948); in Kiev—Shtern (one issue); in Birobidjan—Birobidjan (two issues). These “almanacs” (more like anthologies than the familiar American annual almanacs) were collections of works by different writers and poets.

During the second half of 1947 the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Mendele Moykher Sforim was celebrated with special literary soirees in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Wilno, Baku, Kovno and Birobidjan.

The best Jewish theatrical company was in Moscow; the Yiddish Ukrainian Theatre, which could not find a hall in Kiev, was located in Cernauti (Chernovtsky); in Minsk it shared the hall with the Byelorussian theatre; and in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), the Odessa troupe, evacuated from that city during the war, stayed on as the number of Jews in Tashkent grew. There were also small companies which played irregularly in Frunze (Kirghizstan), Riga, Wilno, Lvov, etc.

The general drive for greater political conformity launched by the famous speech of A. Zhdanov in 1946, continued to have its repercussions in Yiddish literary and theatrical life. The trend towards political emphasis was even more pronounced than before. The subjects of the poetry as well as of the prose and plays were mainly war heroism, patriotism, and glorification of postwar Soviet life, leaders and present heroism in the hard task of reconstructing the country.

All deviations were purged. Lately, for instance, two Moldavian Yiddish writers, I. Yakir and H. Rivkin, were sharply criticized. The theatre in Birobidjan was purged of “obnoxious” plays, or, to quote from a Soviet statement: “The theatre has now eliminated from its repertory all plays which aim merely at amusing the spectator with trivial songs and doggerel, and is earnestly concentrating upon the task of creating works of true artistic merit which reflect the heroism of Soviet Jews in fighting the enemy and building a peaceful and happy life.”

The repertory of the Jewish theatre in Cernauti was strongly criticized as ideologically “foreign” and not sufficiently adapted to the new decisions of the Communist party.

An article in Aynigkeit criticized the Yiddish Ukrainian
Theatre for producing Jacob Gordin's well-known drama, *Mirele Efros*. Two weeks later, on June 5, 1948, the Theatre published a letter in *Aynigkeit* stating that a meeting of the whole troupe had discussed the article, admitted that the criticism was correct and agreed that this drama must be eliminated from the repertory.

*Aynigkeit* could state with satisfaction that, apart from the classics, the plays appearing in Yiddish theatres in the Soviet Union conformed to the imposed policy. They were for example: a translation from the Russian called "The Forests Are Rustling" (about Soviet partisans), and the famous play, "The Russian Question," by K. Simonov (an anti-American piece, giving a distorted picture of life in the United States.) Birobidjan Theatre produced "He Is from Birobidjan," by B. Miller, which depicted the part played by the Birobidjan Jews in the war.

S. M. Mikhoels, for many years the central personality in Jewish theatrical life in the Soviet Union, died in January, 1948. Mikhoels' real name was Vofsi. He was born in Dvinsk, in 1890, and was formerly a lawyer by profession. When the famous director, Alexander Granovski, left the direction of the Jewish Governmental Theatre in Moscow, Mikhoels took his post. Under Mikhoels' direction this theatre was considered one of the best in the USSR. He was equally renowned as an actor and famous for his performances as King Lear and Tevye the Milkman.

After the outbreak of the Russo-German war, Mikhoels took part in organizing the Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow. Henryk Erlich, the Jewish socialist leader from Poland, then in Moscow, was designated the president of this committee, but when Erlich was killed by the Soviet Government, Mikhoels took his place.

In the summer of 1943 Mikhoels visited the United States in the company of the Jewish writer, Itzik Fefer, apparently to initiate closer connections between Soviet and American Jewry. But there was no follow-up to this visit.

News reports last year made mention of an ethnographical museum in Tbilisi, capital of the Georgian Republic, with
17,000 exhibits concerning Georgian Jews; Yiddish broadcasts four times a month by the Byelorussian radio station, and a Jewish Department of the Great Library in Leningrad with 60,000 books. G. Krein composed a quartet based upon Jewish melodies.

Education

A thorough investigation of available materials showed that the general decline of cultural activities in Yiddish was reflected in the low number of Jewish schools in the whole USSR. Among the 132 elementary and high schools in Birobidjan, only one or two were really Yiddish schools. In addition, there was one school each in Wilno, Cernauti and Kovno. These cities belonged to Poland, Rumania and Lithuania respectively before the last war, and at that time had a complete network of Yiddish schools. The functioning of these schools was very precarious, as there was a shortage of Yiddish teachers and Yiddish textbooks were almost nonexistent.

The only published figures on the number of children in the Yiddish schools referred to the Wilno elementary school, where 39 pupils were graduated and 120 were promoted to higher classes. There were no schools similar to the American Sunday School or weekday Jewish school.

A new light on the situation of Yiddish culture in the USSR was thrown by a letter published in the New York Daily Forward of May 2, 1948, by S. Kacherginsky, Jewish writer from Wilno (now in Paris), who took part in the activities of the Soviet partisans during the war and stayed in the USSR until 1945. Kacherginsky states that after the liberation from the Germans in 1944, the new Soviet authorities agreed to license only one school with four classes in both Wilno and Kovno, and that all endeavors to get a license for a fifth class were in vain. The writer relates how the Soviet poet, Itzik Fefer, and the renowned theatre director, S. Mikhoels, interceded in 1945 with Kaganovitch, and of the further intercession of Kaganovitch with Zhdanov
to license a Yiddish daily paper in the USSR. The license was refused.

**Personalities**

Several prominent persons of Jewish origin were in the spotlight last year.

The Council of Ministers of the USSR awarded the first Stalin prize for 1947 to the renowned writer, Ilya Ehrenburg, for his novel, "The Tempest," dealing with the recent Russo-German war.

Another prize winner, Salomon Meilakh, the author of the book, "Lenin and the Problems of Russian Literature at the End of the XIXth and the Beginning of the XXth Centuries," seemed also to be Jewish.

In the long list of scientists, engineers, inventors, etc., to whom the Stalin prize for the year 1947 was recently awarded, we find the following Jewish names:

Professor Marc Grinberg and the engineers Alexander Silberman, Aron Levin and Moshe Heifetz—for collaboration in the construction and technology involved in the production of a high pressure steam turbine of 100,000 kilowatt power; airplane builder Mikhail Gourevich—for collaboration in the release of a new type of a fighter plane; engineers David Shapiro and Isay Rabinovich—for the invention of new electrical machines; Jacob Osnos—for technical inventions.

Mikhail Botvinik won the world championship in chess-playing.

Sergei Eisenstein, the famous film director, died last year.

**Religious Life**

Reliable information about the forms and extent of Jewish religious life in the USSR was almost nonexistent.

The general change in attitude towards religion, observable during the war, brought a certain relaxation of religious curbs, but this new policy based on political expediency is considered by many analysts to be transitory.
Despite the allegiance of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy and the hierarchy of other religious denominations to the government, a new drive against religious influence was presaged in an article in the Young Bolshevik (Moscow, December, 1947). The article declared that religious convictions were only survivals from the past in the “consciousness of backward and inadequately educated and cultured persons,” and that an “intensified struggle against all survivals of bourgeois ideology and morals, including religious superstitions and prejudices” was necessary.

However, an article by Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury, “Religion in the USSR” (Soviet Russia Today, New York, October, 1947), contained a few lines about a visit the author paid in Moscow to the Chief Rabbi, who reassured his guest about the aid the Soviet Union was extending to religion, and showed him the synagogue and the “new bathing rooms for ceremonial ablutions.”

Birobidjan

The twentieth anniversary of the decision of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union to assign the Birobidjan region in the Far East to Jewish settlement was celebrated in March, 1948.

According to official data, agriculture and industry in this region made good progress during this twenty-year period. In 1947, the budget for Birobidjan amounted to 52 million rubles.

Reports about the Jews in Birobidjan were inaccurate and confusing, and often contained deliberate misinformation. The ambiguous figures and estimates of the Jewish population of Birobidjan ranged from 12,000, according to Herschel Weinreich, Soviet writer now in Palestine (Jewish Daily Forward, April 3, 1948), to the figure given by the Ambidjan Committee in the United States of 100,000 Jews out of a total population of 180,000.

In the light of all available material, the report published on February 15, 1948, by Cyrus L. Sulzberger, chief Euro-
Elian correspondent of *The New York Times* seemed to be based on a reliable source. According to Sulzberger, the population of Birobidjan lived poorly and primitively. The town of Birobidjan contained only three cobbled streets, one hotel and a few small factories, with the buildings in a state of dilapidation. The town was built on a swamp and some foundations had sunk. Most of the population subsisted mainly on locally grown potatoes and vegetables.

The most important detail in Sulzberger’s report was, however, the statement that the total population of Birobidjan region was less than 100,000, and that the Jews comprised less than one fourth of the total.

As for recent Jewish immigration to Birobidjan, the number of new settlers was very limited. The first postwar transport of immigrants from Vinnitsa (Ukraine) in January, 1947, comprised 116 families (324 persons). In May, 1947, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union decreed the resettlement of 550 more families (1,580 persons) from Vinnitsa and surrounding towns. Great publicity was given to both transports, all articles and reports emphasizing that the resettlement was “voluntary.” Special committees of prominent people were appointed in Moscow to greet these immigrants at the railroad station on their way to Birobidjan.

A close scrutiny of all available material showed that, as of July, 1948, only three or four more transports of Jews, numbering a few hundred families each, left Vinnitsa, Kherson, Nikolayevsk, Odessa, Voznesensk, etc., for Birobidjan. The semi-official figure for 1947 was 1,500 families settled in Birobidjan (Soviet Russia Today, New York, June, 1948).