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# Eastern Europe

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## INTRODUCTION

**D**URING THE PERIOD under review (July 1, 1955, through November 30, 1956) the Soviet rulers were striving to overcome the widespread confusion and unrest brought about by the denunciation of Stalinism at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party held in February 1956. No changes took place in the top collective leadership of the party, but significant shifts were made in the government. Vyacheslav Molotov was replaced as foreign minister by Dmitri Shepilov, and Lazar Kaganovich resigned from his post as chairman of the state committee on labor and wages. Both men, however, remained in the presidium of the Communist Party, and both remained vice premiers. Nikita Khrushchev continued as secretary of the Party. Factional differences within the Presidium apparently remained unresolved, and Khrushchev did not seem to have won the position of power to which he apparently aspired.

### *The Thaw*

*The Thaw*—the title of a recent political novel by Ilya Ehrenburg—continued in the Soviet Union. While nothing changed in the fundamental structure of the totalitarian state, the day-to-day pressure on Soviet citizens was increasingly relaxed. The powers of the secret police were curtailed, and the practical application of penal law gave more weight to regular judicial procedures. A larger number of released slave laborers and other prisoners were permitted to return to their homes. Some returnees, who had been arrested for various student plots, came back to their universities and apparently were fully rehabilitated. *Socialisticheski Vestnik* (New York, June, 1956) reported that the returnees had become a familiar part of Moscow life. Writers and artists objected to the rigid rules governing art in Russia. Dmitri Shostakovich assailed the “dogmatists” and asked for “bold innovations” in the field of creative work. This type of criticism was apparently tolerated, but the party’s theoretical organ, *Kommunist*, made it clear that nothing had changed in the fundamental attitude toward the arts, and that “unhealthy trends” were no more acceptable than in the past.

Wider contacts were established with non-Soviet countries. Several hundred Soviet delegations attended conferences abroad. Large numbers of foreign travelers, including official guests, were admitted to the Soviet Union. Though their reception was more friendly than in the past, contacts with Soviet citizens were still limited by restrictions and discreet supervision. The relaxation

of domestic policies was felt chiefly in the cities; the peasantry continued to endure all-pervading demands on their life and economic activities.

### *Denunciation of Stalin*

Immediately after Josef Stalin's death in March 1953 a quiet campaign of de-Stalinization was begun by his "faithful friends and successors." Khrushchev's speech to a secret session of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow (February 24 or 25, 1956), brought the process to its most dramatic stage. Khrushchev denounced Stalin for crimes even worse than those charged by his enemies. (See Khrushchev's speech, as released by the United States Department of State, *The New York Times*, June 5, 1956.) Yet the detailed inventory of Stalin's crimes presented by Khrushchev omitted the murder of hundreds of Jewish intellectuals and writers and the total extermination of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's speech was followed by the publication of the "Lenin Testament," as well as other documents showing Stalin's strained relations with Lenin, and by articles detailing Stalin's "errors" in the conduct of the war, his relations with Tito, etc.

Within a few months after Stalin's demise, his heirs began a limited "rehabilitation" of the victims of his purges. After the Twentieth Congress the tempo of rehabilitation increased, and for the first time in decades the Soviet papers published names of dead persons whose very existence had in the past been obliterated. Among those thus resurrected were such leaders of the Russian Revolution as Leon Trotsky, Gregory Zinoviev, Leo B. Kamenev, and Alexei I. Rykov, but none of these was rehabilitated. Only scant information reached the free world on Russian reactions to the degrading of Stalin. In March 1956 violent riots were reported in Stalin's native Georgia (Tiflis). Several hundred individuals were said to have been killed by the police (*The New York Times*, March 17 and July 21, 1956).

### *Reaction in the Soviet Satellites*

While the anti-Stalin campaign had apparently been prepared in advance, it nevertheless caused bewilderment both in Russia and among Communists in the West and in the satellite countries. Palmieri Togliatti, Communist chief of Italy, questioned Khrushchev's basic thesis that the regime's crimes were due solely to the excessive "cult of personality" introduced by Stalin. Eugene Dennis, in the *New York Daily Worker* (April 18, 1956), criticized Khrushchev for not admitting the anti-Semitic outrages committed in the Soviet Union. In the satellites, leaders who for years had ruthlessly pursued Stalinist policies had to reverse themselves without wrecking the power structure they had based on dependence on Stalinist Russia. The situation was further complicated by Moscow's reversal of its policy of opposition to the government of Marshal Josef Tito of Yugoslavia. On June 20, 1956, Khrushchev and Tito jointly agreed on the possibility of "different roads of Socialist development in different countries." The satellite empire felt enormous popular pressure for a change. Demonstrations and student riots took place in Prague, Czechoslovakia. A sudden workers' revolt broke out in Poznan, Poland on June 29, 1956. The subsequent Poznan trials were held in open court, and were totally unlike the familiar Soviet pattern. Despite

Soviet Premier Nikolai A. Bulganin's advice to the Poles to curb their press and to use "strong measures," the unrest among the intellectual groups continued unabated, and leading writers in Poland and Hungary clamored for a break with the past and for more freedom of thought and discussion. This was accompanied by the posthumous rehabilitation of such victims of Stalin's rule as Laszlo Rajk in Hungary and Traicho Kostov in Bulgaria. While at this writing (December 1956) neither Vladimir Clementis nor Rudolf Slánský (executed in Czechoslovakia for "Titoist conspiracy" and "Zionist plots") had been cleared, the anti-Semitic charges made at their trial were repudiated. De-Stalinization also brought about changes in the ruling personnel in Poland and Hungary, but had little effect on the leadership in Bulgaria, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia.

### *Foreign Policy*

The Twentieth Congress reaffirmed "peaceful coexistence" and the "rejection of the inevitability of war" as basic to Soviet foreign policy. The much-publicized Cominform was dissolved in February 1956, and the Soviet leaders tried to resuscitate the idea of a popular front with the Socialists of the West. A French Socialist delegation visited Moscow in 1956, as did leading Swedish and Norwegian Socialists. However, Communist efforts in the West were met by firm if polite refusal. But Soviet policy made gains in the underdeveloped countries of Asia and Africa. During 1955-56 the Soviets signed a military aid agreement with Afghanistan, and during the visit of President Sukarno, provided for economic aid to Indonesia. In June 1956, the new Soviet foreign minister Dmitri Shepilov visited Egypt, and affirmed "the complete uniformity of opinion" between the two countries. The Soviet Union repeatedly condemned Israel as a "tool of imperialism." The Soviet leaders sought to build up their position in the Middle East by promising aid to Arab states and supporting Egypt on Suez. They continued to reject German unification and effective disarmament.

### *Jewish Situation*

The Soviet government ceased to sponsor anti-Semitic campaigns, and there were signs that a more organized Jewish life might be permitted. Popular anti-Semitism, however, apparently increased among the people, including Communist Party members. At the same time a new and ominous trend appeared in the countries within the Soviet orbit. Some official Communist circles suggested that Jews were occupying a "disproportionate" number of positions, thereby creating anti-Jewish feeling among the population. The most outspoken presentation of this point of view appeared in the central organ of the Polish Communist Party, *Tribuna Ludu* (October 10, 1956). It was difficult to say how far this attitude went, but recent visitors reported that insecurity and fear were spreading among the Jews in the Soviet area.

In several cases Jewish leaders who had represented the old Stalinist line disappeared from the ruling groups. This was the case with Matyos Rakosi, Erno Gerö, and Mihaly Farkas in Hungary, and Jacob Berman and Hilary Minc in Poland.

## *Poland and Hungary*

The June riots in Poznan showed that popular discontent in Poland had reached the boiling point. The former Communist Party secretary, Vladislav Gomulka, who had been purged as a "Titoist," was readmitted, and quickly became the symbol of "liberalization." Supported by Polish Prime Minister Joseph Cyrankiewicz and Party secretary Edward Ochab, Gomulka demanded a thorough revision of relations with Moscow and increased "democratization." He called for the resignation of the Stalinist members of the party Politburo and the ousting of the Soviet Marshal Konstantin K. Rokossovsky as a Politburo member and Polish defense minister. On October 19, in the midst of a Central Committee meeting to decide on the new line, a Russian delegation including Nikita Khrushchev, Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, and Anastas Mikoyan arrived suddenly in Poland. Backed by forces stationed in Poland and East Germany, they demanded that the Poles halt "liberalization" and stop the drift away from Russian control. The Poles refused, and for three days Poland was on the verge of armed conflict with the Soviet Union. Armed workers remained in factories, students paraded in the streets and held meetings in the universities, and mass rallies proclaimed their support of Gomulka's policy of "equality" with the Soviet Union. Polish troops headed by General Wacław Komar, a supporter of Gomulka, faced Russian forces which were reported moving on Warsaw. After dramatic negotiations, the Russians backed down and departed for Moscow. Gomulka was elected to the post of first secretary of the party, replacing Edward Ochab. Most of the Stalinists on the old Politburo, including Marshal Rokossovsky and the so-called Natolin faction, which reportedly used anti-Jewish slogans, were ousted, Gomulka called for equality in dealings with Russia, emphasis on consumer goods, further "liberalization," and improvement in relations with the Catholic Church. The Gomulka group was reported to be concerned with growing anti-Jewish feeling, which Stalinist elements used to fight "liberalization."

On November 15-18, 1956, a delegation headed by Gomulka went to Moscow. A joint Russo-Polish statement in Moscow on November 18 stressed that future relations would be based on "complete equality." Russian forces were to remain on Polish territory, with increased Polish jurisdiction over Soviet personnel and prior consultation on troop movements. Russia also cancelled Polish debts incurred since World War II, and promised new credits. The Poles stressed their intention to remain within the Soviet orbit as equal partners with Russia, and to preserve Communist rule.

The events in Hungary, like those in Poland, had a background of growing popular discontent. As early as October 6, 1956, during the reburial of László Rajk, 200,000 Hungarians marched past the grave of the "rehabilitated" former Communist leader in an obvious protest against the Russian-dominated regime. On October 22 and 23, sympathy for the new Communist regime in Poland was voiced in a number of resolutions. On the evening of October 23, the police opened fire on a demonstration in front of the Budapest radio station, and from this point on sporadic demonstrations grew into a full-scale revolt. In a move to avert the spread of the riots, Prime Minister

Andreas Hegedus and Party Secretary Erno Gerö were dismissed. On October 24, Imre Nagy, who had been expelled from the Communist party and not readmitted until October 14, 1956, was installed as the head of the new government. On the morning of October 24, Soviet troops entered Budapest and fighting spread to the provincial cities, with the rebels demanding the withdrawal of the Red Army. Nagy immediately appealed to the rebels to stop the fighting, and promised a general amnesty and democratization of the regime. When this was insufficient, he formed a new cabinet including former leaders of the suppressed Smallholders and Social Democratic parties, promised free elections, announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, and asked for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and a United Nations guarantee of Hungarian neutrality. On October 28, the Russians indicated that they were prepared to withdraw their troops. But as the rebellion continued, it became evident that this, unlike the Polish fight for independence within the Soviet orbit, was a popular revolution of the whole people against the Communist regime. (On November 2, Radio Budapest broadcast the following message from the Budapest Board of Rabbis: "Hungarian Jewry enthusiastically salutes the achievements of the revolution, pays reverent homage to the heroes, and identifies itself with the free and independent homeland." *New Statesman and Nation*, London, November 12, 1956.) On November 4, reinforced Soviet troops began a methodical assault on Budapest, crushing with armed might what had looked like the first successful revolution against the Soviet Union. Soviet repression continued throughout the country; some estimates placed the toll of victims as high as 65,000 (*The New York Times*, December 2, 1956). Imre Nagy was ousted, and a new government headed by Janos Kadar was installed by the Soviet forces.

At the time of writing (December 1956) the Hungarian revolution was in its fifth week. The workers, who had proclaimed a general strike, continued their resistance, and there was only a partial return to work. Scattered guerrilla fighting was reported in the provinces, and sporadic demonstrations continued in Budapest and other cities. The Kadar government was completely dependent on the Soviet forces. Large numbers of Hungarians were fleeing westward to Austria, away from Soviet repression and the threat of deportation to Siberia. Their number exceeded 100,000, including some 4,500 Jews.

Soviet policy seemed to be involved in continuous shifts, and the revolts in Poland and Hungary may have caused further realignments of forces within the ruling group in Russia. Some members of the dominant group apparently felt that de-Stalinization had brought the Soviet position in Eastern Europe to a dangerous point. The Russian leaders again challenged Tito's doctrine of "different roads to socialism," but they seemed to have accepted "democratization" in the satellites, provided that it did not interfere with close relations between them and Russia. At this writing (December 1956) the balance of power among the various factions in the collective leadership of the Soviet Union had apparently not been upset, and the policy of domestic relaxation had not been reversed. However, it would seem that the Kremlin had reverted to the old Stalinist line of force and intimidation in foreign affairs only eight months after the Twentieth Congress had promised the world "peaceful coexistence."

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## SOVIET UNION

*Jewish Population*

Reliable information on the Jewish population of the Soviet Union was not available. Moscow Chief Rabbi Solomon Schlieffer estimated the Soviet Jewish community at between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 (*Jewish Chronicle*, London, September 26, 1956). The manager of the Central Statistical Office in Moscow estimated it at 3,000,000 at the end of 1955. He assumed that the Jews killed by the Nazis had been replaced by natural increase and by the Jewish war refugees from Poland, Rumania, and other countries who had remained in the Soviet Union after World War II (*Jewish Daily Forward*, New York, January 27, 1956). While there was no way of ascertaining the rate of natural increase among Russian Jews, the assumption that Jewish war refugees in great numbers had remained in Russia had no support from the ascertainable facts. Though the presence of Polish Jews was reported in Birobidjan, their numbers were exceedingly small and did not indicate any large-scale settlement by Jews from countries neighboring the Soviet Union (*Folksztyme*, Warsaw, September 21, 1955). From the available information on the number of Russian Jews who perished under the Nazis, and on post-war shifts from the Soviet Union back to Poland and Rumania, the lower estimate of Rabbi Schlieffer, i.e., 2,000,000, seemed more realistic (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1948-49 [Vol. 50], p. 696-97).

Some estimates of the Jewish population in various cities came from newspapermen and foreign visitors in the Soviet Union. Thus, it was reported that Moscow, with an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 Jews, was the largest Jewish center; that Kharkov and Odessa had each 100,000, and Minsk, Riga, Vilna, Tashkent, and Kutais had each 30,000 to 50,000 Jews (*Forward*, January 27, 1956). In addition, 50,000 Jews were reported in Kishinev (*The New York Times*, April 22, 1956), 20,000 in Mogilev (*Forward*, March 19, 1956), 150,000 in Kiev (*Forward*, April 28, 1956), and 200,000 in Leningrad (*Jewish Chronicle*, September 28, 1956). Israel sources were informed that there were 80,000 to 100,000 Jews in the province of Bessarabia (*Forward*, March 2, 1956). Fifty thousand were reported in Bokhara (*Forward*, July 2, 1956), and 60,000 in Georgia (*The New York Times*, August 8, 1956). The figure for Georgia differed somewhat from the figures given for Tashkent and Kutais in the *Forward* of January 27, 1956. The estimates for Birobidjan varied from 25,000 to 30,000.

*Communal Organization*

Soviet policy with respect to its Jewish community appeared to continue along the old line of forced assimilation, modified somewhat by various cultural projects. No laws were enacted changing the minority status of the Jews, but little or nothing was done to alter the conditions which prevented the Jewish community in the Soviet Union from living a full Jewish life.

The only Jewish organizations permitted to function were the religious corporations. These had to be registered with the local authorities, and were under the supervision of the Council of Religious Cults in Moscow, which had jurisdiction over all minority religions. Their activities were strictly limited to organization and conduct of religious worship in synagogues, and burial services. As no central religious body existed in the Soviet Union, official information on the number of Jewish religious corporations was not available. A report by a recent visitor mentioned some 500 (*Forward*, January 27, 1956). The reporter did not indicate the source of his information, and there was no way of checking the accuracy of his figures, or ascertaining whether he was referring to officially registered corporations or private prayer quorums (*minyanim*). Not all cities with Jewish residents had synagogues; in small Jewish centers communal worship was practiced in private prayer rooms, with or without the services of an ordained rabbi. All foreign visitors who participated in religious services saw only old people in attendance. The younger people, who in the last two decades had received no Jewish secular or religious education, were rapidly losing all connection with their fellow-Jews.

During 1955-56 contacts between Russian Jews and the Jewish communities of the West increased notably. A delegation consisting of Rabbi Schlieffer, General David Dragunsky, and the Leningrad writer Alexander Tchakovsky, visited France for the dedication of the monument to the Unknown Jewish Martyr on October 3, 1956. This was the first official trip abroad by a Russian Jewish delegation since the visit to the United States of representatives of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee during World War II.

### *Religious Life*

For the first time in many years, first-hand information on the religious life of Russian Jewry became available from the reports of rabbinic groups which visited the Soviet Union in the summer of 1956 (*see* articles by Rabbi Morris Kertzer, *The New York Times*, July 1956, and a series of articles in the *New York Journal-American*, August 1956). Rabbis representing the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America and the New York Board of Rabbis (NYBR) reported that, despite the basic Soviet antagonism to religion, there was great yearning for Jewish religious expression and identification. They agreed, however, that it was extremely difficult to lead a Jewish religious life in the Soviet Union. There was no direct interference with worship in synagogues, but religious activities outside of synagogues were forbidden. There were no Jewish religious schools for either children or adults. Prayer books were so scarce that hand-printed ones sold at \$100 each. A foreign visitor saw in a Moscow synagogue a tattered prayer book, kept under lock and key and taken out only for privileged worshippers. Circumcision, banned for many years, was again being practiced, but only by limited groups. The Sabbath was rarely observed, since Saturday was a normal working day. The visiting rabbis gathered that the government intended to open kosher meat cooperatives, but in the meantime kosher food was difficult to obtain. Though on the first day of Shavuot (May 16, 1956), Rabbi Schlieffer announced from the pulpit the projected opening of a yeshiva in Moscow, at the time of writing

(November 1956) no progress had been made toward establishing it. This was apparently likewise true of the projected publication of a prayer book which was much publicized in the Jewish press throughout the world. Recent visitors to Russia reported less fear to participate in religious services. According to an Israel delegation which was in Kiev on Yom Kippur eve, 25,000 Jews congregated in the synagogue and the surrounding area for the Kol Nidre services. Although antireligious drives were now rare in Russia, the Kiev radio chose this day for an attack on the "reactionary nature" of the Jewish faith (*Forward*, October 24, 1956). Other visitors reported that of Leningrad's 200,000 Jews, 10,000 to 15,000 attended holiday services in the main synagogue and six smaller houses of prayer. Adherence to religious practices was stronger in Asiatic Russia, where Jews and other groups held to traditions that had remained almost untouched by the regime. Thus, on August 8, 1956, *The New York Times* reported a circumcision in Kutais (Georgia) performed in the synagogue in the presence of some 500 persons.

On May 10, 1956, the Soviet delegation to the United Nations issued a statement that Jews in Russia enjoyed full religious freedom, and that "the Soviet Government sees to it that they are able to exercise this freedom." In reality, the extent of religious freedom in the Soviet Union was determined not by law but by the current "line" of the Communist Party, the necessities of Communist propaganda, the influence and pressure of the Communist press, and the lack of appropriate facilities for religious Jews. The Communist Party, in control of every facet of public life, was able to ostracize practicing Jews and threaten their livelihoods. Despite the removal of the former prohibition against the bar mitzvah ceremony, few Jewish adolescents, attending highly competitive state schools, could take the risk of openly espousing the "survival of Jewish prejudices." Young Jews usually married without religious ceremony, not because of legal restrictions, but because avowed godlessness was a necessary precondition for maintenance of their social status and professional advancement.

### *Cultural Situation*

For many years there had been a complete cessation of Jewish cultural activities in the Soviet Union. Yiddish as one of the official languages of a multi-national country had disappeared. Yiddish literature was hardly ever mentioned. For eight years, reported the Communist newspaper *Folksztyme* (Warsaw, May 26, 1956), no Yiddish word had been heard in Moscow. Jewish schools, Jewish newspapers, the Jewish theater, and Jewish publications were closed, and no mention of organized Jewish life was permitted. Hundreds of Jewish writers and intellectuals disappeared. All inquiries about their fate remained unanswered. In 1955 Soviet spokesmen intimated that some of the Jewish writers who had disappeared had been involved in "plots" and other anti-Soviet activities, but gave no further information. On April 4, 1956, the Polish Communist *Folksztyme* presented the first authoritative account of what had happened. Under the heading "Our Pain and Our Consolation," the *Folksztyme* wrote:

The situation created by the existence of the Cult of Personality permitted a certain distortion of the nationality policy of the Soviet Union. It

became possible for the Beria clique to provoke friction among different nationalities, to breed a certain amount of nationalism and anti-Semitism.

The Jewish writers, artists, and teachers, according to the *Folksztyme*, had been victims of the ensuing era of "repression and liquidation." Among the Jewish intellectuals "liquidated" the article listed Semen Dimanstein, Esther Frumkin, Rachmiel Weinstein, Merezhin, Moshe Litvakov, Michael Levitan, Yankel Levin, Hershl Brill, Yzzy Charik, Moshe Kulbak, Max Erik, Jasha Bronstein, David Bergelson, Der Nistar, Peretz Markish, Leib Kvitko, David Hoffstein, Itzik Feffer, Benjamin Zuskin, Isaac Nussimov, Elijah Spivak, and Samuil Persow. The *Folksztyme* also reported that the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which had been active in the Soviet Union during the war, had been liquidated without warning, and its leaders deported and executed.

A research committee of the World Congress for Jewish Culture in New York, the most authoritative Yiddish cultural body, prepared a list of some 450 Jewish writers and individuals prominent in various professional and cultural endeavors who had apparently fallen victim to anti-Jewish purges in Russia, most of them during the years 1948-53.

Little was known of the circumstances surrounding the execution of Jewish intellectuals. There were reports that some twenty Yiddish writers had been "liquidated" in a group on the night of August 12, 1952, about five months before the anti-Jewish campaign culminated in the so-called Doctors' Plot. Though after Stalin's death Soviet newspapers admitted that there had been "certain racial deviations," they nevertheless remained silent on the fate of Jewish writers; nor did Nikita Khrushchev mention them in his speech to the Twentieth Party Congress (see p. 305). The only official Soviet reaction to the Warsaw *Folksztyme* revelations was a statement by Leonid Ilyitchev, chief press officer of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. He accused the Communist *Folksztyme* of printing "slanderous anti-Soviet material" when it reported that Jewish writers and cultural leaders in the Soviet Union had suffered anti-Semitic persecution. In a Moscow interview with the New York *National Guardian*, Ilyitchev said: "Jewish cultural leaders and writers did suffer persecution, but the motive was not anti-Semitic. Jewish persecutees suffered merely as part of an over-all drive against Soviet intellectuals of many national origins." He stated that the Soviet government would not make public any details about past persecutions (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 25, 1956).

The official explanation for the absence of active Jewish cultural life in the Soviet Union was that the Jews themselves did not want a separate "ghetto life," preferring integration with Russian culture. The only Jewish member of the Politburo, Lazar Kaganovich, told Henry Shoshkes of the *Day-Morning Journal* in New York that "the great majority [of Jews] live happily in the great and mighty Russian culture" (September 30, 1956). In the same vein, Nikita Khrushchev, Anastos Mikoyan, and Dimitri Shepilov told a French Socialist delegation that there was no need in Russia for separate Jewish schools or for a Jewish theater or Jewish publications, as the Russian Jews were in a large part assimilated and Russified (*Unzer Tsait*, New York, July-August 1956). At the same time, however, the ban on Jewish cultural expression and activities was gradually lifted. After several years

of nonpublication of works by Yiddish writers, it was announced that special commissions were preparing editions of works by David Bergelson and Peretz Markish, both of whom had perished during the anti-Jewish purges. The publishing agency Sovietski Pisatel announced a number of forthcoming translations from Yiddish writers: poetry by Aron Vergeles and Aron Kushnir, and Hirsch Dobin's *Stories from Birobidjan*. The literary monthly *Druzjba Narodov* (October 1956, Moscow) published poems by Peretz Markish in Russian translations by Alexander Golemba, M. Tarlovsky, P. Moran, L. Ozerov and Anna Achmatova. The October 1956 issue of *Novi Mir* (Moscow) presented Markish's poems in translations by Sergei Narovtchatov and others. A volume of children's stories by Rachel Baumvol appeared in Moscow in a Russian translation. Professor M. Belinsky, consultant on translations of Jewish works for the State Publishing Agency, stated that the issuance in Russian of 100 volumes of Jewish classical and modern literature was under consideration. The works to be translated included some from the Golden Era of the Jewish renaissance in Spain. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (October 2, 1956, Moscow) reported that the forthcoming *Library of Literary Classics of the Peoples of the Soviet Union* was to contain, among other works, translations from Sholom Aleichem.

According to the Warsaw *Folksztyme* (May 16, 1956) a number of Yiddish writers had reappeared and resumed work in Russia. These included Yitzik Kipnis, Abraham Kahan, Chana Weinerman, Hershl Polianek, Elihu Schechtman, Uri Finkel, Isaac Platner, Yakov Sternberg, and Mendel Lipshitz. Eighty-year-old Zalman Wendroff was reported to be engaged in writing his memoirs; Shmuel Halkin was preparing an anthology of Yiddish poetry and prose, and Noah Lurie was writing a new novel.

Yiddish art also reappeared on the radio and on the concert stage in Moscow and other cities. The performing artists were reported to include Marina Gordon, a singer; Lea Kalina of the Birobidjan theater; and Raya Bronovskaya, a pianist. Clara Waga and Max Resnick-Martov, both from Latvia, toured Russian cities in a repertoire of Jewish works. These concerts, including both modern and classical Yiddish songs, music, and readings, became an important feature of Jewish life.

There was no way of telling, at the time of writing (November 1956), what would happen to all these projects, or how far the policy of relaxation with respect to Jewish literature might go. Soviet policy on this matter was fluid and unpredictable.

There was still no official "rehabilitation" of the Jewish writers who had perished during the purges. They were instead indirectly "rehabilitated" by the publication of their works with favorable critical appraisals, preferably by well-known non-Jewish writers. Thus *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow, July 1956) published a translation of six poems by Peretz Markish with a preface by Nikolai Tikhonov praising both Markish and Itzik Feffer (former leader of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, who had visited the United States during World War II). Isaac Babel, purged in 1940, was highly praised by *Kommunist* (August 1956), and a committee for the publication of his works was established in Moscow.

The Russian Jewish writers now active included some who had been

purged during the fight against "cosmopolitanism" but had managed to survive. Thus, the literary critic D. Danin, banned for "cosmopolitanism" in 1949, was again writing for the literary magazine *Znamia*. Pavel G. Antokolsky and G. Brovman, both expelled from the Gorki Literary Institute in 1949, had also resumed their careers, as had the writer Alexander Isbakh, who was now working for *Novi Mir*, published by the Union of Soviet Writers.

While there was some renewal of Jewish literary work, nothing was done with respect to other fields of Jewish creative life. As of November 1956, there were no Jewish schools in Russia, no Jewish theater, no Jewish writers' clubs. On September 4, 1956, the French Communist Yiddish newspaper *Naye Presse* reported plans to re-establish the defunct Soviet Yiddish publishing house, Emes. There were also reports of a project to reopen the Moscow State Yiddish Theater. At the time of writing, only plans were reported. But in February and March 1956 many Jews were brought to trial in Moscow for possessing Hebrew and Yiddish "Zionist literature" (cf. AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1955 [Vol. 56], p. 424). Some of the group, which totaled about 130, received prison terms ranging from three to ten years (*Forward*, July 4, 1956).

### *Anti-Semitism*

In the de-Stalinization period anti-Jewish propaganda disappeared from Soviet newspapers. But anti-Jewish feeling remained strong, not only among the people but also in the new generation of Soviet bureaucrats that had grown up during Stalin's anti-Semitic excesses. Soviet spokesmen admitted that an anti-Jewish policy had been promoted under Stalin (see *Voprosi Istorii*, Moscow, 1956). But they did little to undo the damage to the position of the Jews, who for years had been accused of sins ranging from "cosmopolitanism" and "Zionist treason" to poisoning Soviet rulers. In a conversation with the French Socialist, Marceau Pivert, Soviet leaders denied the presence of anti-Semitism in Russia, but acknowledged that remnants of anti-Jewish feeling might have survived here and there; these they professed to take lightly.

Soviet Jews continued to face an attitude to all intents and purposes anti-Semitic. In June 1956 Yekaterina A. Furtseva, an alternate member of the Soviet Communist Party presidium, defended what amounted to a quota system for Jews in state enterprises. She said that talk of Soviet anti-Semitism had arisen because Jews had made up too large a proportion of the personnel of some state institutions, and the government had taken steps to transfer Jews out of these offices (*The New York Times*, September 17, 1956). According to information received by *Socialisticheski Vestnik* (New York, October 1956), no special laws had been enacted against the Jews, but when a Soviet office cut its staff, those whose passports indicated Jewish origin were always the first to go. In many cases such a "transfer" was tantamount to slow extinction, as the chances of obtaining new employment were slim. A Moscow University student told the French Socialist delegation of strong anti-Semitism in Russia; candidates for better jobs were interrogated to determine if they were

Jewish, and Jewish origin disqualified them (*Christian Science Monitor*, July 20, 1956).

There were also reports of a considerable rise in the traditional chauvinism of the Great Russian population, coupled with openly expressed enmity for all other national groups. The Jews, or "Abrams" (Soviet colloquial for "kike"), as they were now called, were singled out for ridicule and all manner of vexation. Young people had difficulty in obtaining admission to institutions of higher learning, and some had to abandon their plans for study or apply to schools with lower ratings.

There were reports that during the course of meetings with Polish Communists in Warsaw, where he had gone to attend the funeral of Boleslaw Beirut in March 1956, Khrushchev had been overhead passing several remarks with strong anti-Semitic overtones (*The New York Times*, August 9, 1956; *Bulletin Interieur d'Information*, November 15, 1956).

Many foreign visitors in 1955-56 were told by Jews representing various economic strata that while the situation had improved after Stalin's death, anti-Jewish feelings were still widespread and strong. Particularly in the Ukraine, traditional anti-Semitism was reinforced by Jew-baiting on the part of Ukrainian bureaucratic bosses (*Forward*, May 4, 1956).

During the late summer and fall of 1956, and especially after the crises in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, it was reported that a wave of violent anti-Semitism spread over all of Soviet Russia, and that in various cities of the Ukraine it took the form of physical attacks on Jews. This, together with the strong anti-Israel stand taken by the Soviet, was said to have created panic and a feeling of helplessness among the Jews in Russia (*The Day-Morning Journal*, November 20, 1956).

### *Deportations and Labor Camps*

In October 1956 a new wave of deportations was reported from the Polish and Lithuanian border areas. Seven thousand Jews from Grodno and the surrounding area were said to have been deported to Siberia. Some Poles were also involved, but the main victims were reportedly Jews who had lost their former citizenship as a result of border changes or forced evacuation to Russia during World War II. Some applied for repatriation, and were in the midst of long-drawn-out and complicated procedures. While the deportees were told that they were being sent to Birobidjan, they feared deportation to Siberian camps. A *New York Times* dispatch from Warsaw on November 9, 1956, quoted one letter as saying: "We pray to you to send us soon as possible the necessary documents. We know that it is not easy, but you have to understand that it is our only way out." A United Press dispatch from Warsaw reported that the mass deportations of Jews to Siberia had shocked the Jewish Communists of Poland into protesting to the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party.

One theory held that because of the crisis in Soviet-Polish relations after the coming to power of Wladyslas Gomulka, the Soviet Union had decided to remove from the border areas all elements considered unreliable.

There was no reliable information on the number of Jews still in labor camps. Many released prisoners told of large groups of Jews in camps in

European Russia and in various Asiatic regions. Some had been arrested for various "administrative" reasons, while others had been sent to camps because of their Jewish origin during campaigns against "cosmopolitanism," or for "Zionist" activities. There were also former Polish Jews who had been arrested for "espionage and work for foreign powers." Israel sources quoted two released slave-laborers as reporting many Jews still imprisoned in the Vorkuta camps. According to this source, anti-Semitism was widespread in the camps, and the Jewish prisoners had to fight not only the camp administration but their fellow prisoners as well, for their very lives (*Forward*, July 6, 1956). During 1956, reports from Israel indicated that a few of the Russian Zionists arrested in the late 1920's and early 1930's had survived years of imprisonment in prisons and camps and were now "free" in forced residence, most of them in Asiatic Russia.

### *Relations with Israel*

During 1955-56 commercial transactions with Israel continued, and in July 1956 the Soviet Union agreed to increase its oil shipments to that country. The agreement provided for oil deliveries amounting to from \$18,000,000 to \$20,000,000. This agreement was canceled immediately after Israel-Egyptian hostilities began at the end of October 1956. Although in May 1956 Vyacheslav Molotov and Anastos Mikoyan attended the celebration at the Israel Embassy of the eighth anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, Soviet policy with respect to Israel had taken an ominous turn as early as October 1955. In that month Soviet arms began to arrive in Egypt. Relations with Israel speedily deteriorated. The Soviet Union, bidding for position in the Middle East and for the confidence of the Arab bloc and the uncommitted nations of Asia and Africa, made its pro-Arab stand unmistakably clear. The Moscow radio repeatedly promised Soviet help for the Arabs against "Western colonialism." Gamal Abdel Nasser was accepted as a "progressive leader" of Egypt, and Israel was branded "a tool of imperialism." In July 1956 the Soviet Union vigorously supported Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal. Following the Israel incursion in the Sinai peninsula and Gaza strip (October 29-30), and the subsequent British-French thrust into Egypt, Moscow promptly branded Israel an aggressor. Premier Nikolai Bulganin dispatched a message to Great Britain, France, and Israel warning them to cease hostilities or face Russian intervention. The Soviet Union also offered to send "volunteers" to "help Egypt repel the invaders." In a second note (November 15), Bulganin accused Israel of "many armed attacks against the territory of neighboring Arab countries." This note further stated that "the Soviet Government is convinced that the present policy of Israel, based on instigating hostile feelings against the Arabs and the suppression of the latter, is actually dangerous for the cause of general peace and is most perilous for Israel." It also demanded that Israel pay reparations to Egypt. On November 17 Israel Prime Minister David Ben Gurion rejected this demand, and denounced the language and form of the Soviet communication.

From the beginning of the Middle East crisis, *Pravda* and *Izvestia* carried "spontaneous" protest resolutions against the "murderous and perfidious attack on Egypt by Israel and Anglo-French armies." A "spontaneous" anti-

Israel demonstration also took place near the Israel Embassy in Moscow. On November 5 the Soviet government announced the recall of its minister to Israel. It warned Israel to give proper weight to this warning.

At this writing (November 1956) it was too early to foresee the full development of the Middle East crisis, or to predict its influence on future Soviet relations with Israel. It was clear that the Soviet Union was pursuing a long-range policy of penetration into the Middle East. Its attitude toward Israel in the large scale of things was expressed by Khrushchev in these words: "[Israel] carries no weight in the world and if it plays any role it is to start a fight" (*The New York Times*, November 18, 1956).

In the meantime, the Soviet Union scored new gains on Israel's northern borders. On November 3 the Syrian President, Shukry-al-Kuwatly, visited Moscow and received red-carpet treatment. In November 1956 shipments of Soviet arms and some Soviet technicians were reported to have arrived in Syria, whose army was said to be dominated by pro-Soviet elements.

### *Birobidjan*

Very little was known about Birobidjan, which was still formally called the Jewish Autonomous Region. Current estimates of the number of Jews there, including small groups of former Polish Jews living in the cities and the *kolkhozes*, or collective farms, varied from 25,000 to 30,000. The information available indicated that the *kolkhozes* in the region had mixed memberships of Jews and non-Jews (*Folksztyme*, September 2, 1955). There were no reports on Jewish cultural life in Birobidjan; the Communist press, however, reported that the region had 127 schools, including 25 high schools, and 6 technical schools. These reports did not indicate how many of the schools were Jewish, their curricula, or their language of instruction (*Morning Freiheit*, New York, June 24, 1956). The city's only synagogue had burned down, and had not been replaced. Birobidjan had the only Yiddish newspaper in the Soviet Union, the *Birobidjaner Shtern*, which appeared three times a week. Among the deputies to the Central Soviet of the Soviet Union was Mrs. R. Freidkina, a Jewish agronomist.

LEON SHAPIRO

## POLAND

**E**VEN BEFORE the Soviet New Line, Polish Communist leaders deviated substantially from the policies followed in other East European countries. While generally following orders from Russia, they succeeded in creating for themselves some freedom of movement, at least in the practical application of the general line. This was clearly demonstrated by the relative independence with which they treated their own opposition. No major purge trials took place in Poland (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1954 [Vol. 55], p. 282-87), and the officially encouraged anti-Semitism characteristic in the Soviet sphere during the last years of Stalin's life was absent from the Polish

scene. Collectivization of agriculture was pushed less vigorously than elsewhere and the regime seemed to avoid the worst extremes. Poland gave the impression of being an exception among the Soviet satellites.

In the months following the denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in Moscow (*see* p. 305), Poland took the lead in the moves for liberalization of the regime. After the death of Boleslaw Bierut, the direction of party affairs passed to Edward Ochab. Together with Premier Joseph Cyrankiewicz, he apparently represented a moderate policy. The new administration promised to continue the policy of "democratization" and permitted relatively free discussion of issues confronting the party. The "liberal line" in Poland went so far as to tolerate critical discussion of Communist doctrine, and Polish intellectuals, publicly and in the press, questioned the official view on fundamental aspects of life under Communist rule. Thus the very critical *A Poem for Adults*, by Adam Wazyk, was published in *Nowa Kultura* (Warsaw, August 21, 1955). Though writing of this kind was bitterly attacked by the Party, a number of other writers, such as Zbigniew Florczak and Antoni Slonimski, were able to discuss not only the theoretical foundations of Communist policy but such problems as Soviet concentration camps and the degree of Polish independence. Following the Party plenum held in Warsaw in July 1956, Wladyslaw Gomulka, the expelled former secretary general of the Party and leader of its nationalist opposition, was invited to rejoin the Party without any recantation on his part.

### *Poznan Revolt*

The Poznan uprising came as a great shock to the ruling group of Poland. It started as a strike at the Zispo factory where some 14,000 workers were employed, and it broke out during the Twenty-Fifth International Trade Fair, at which many foreign countries were represented. On June 28, 1956, workers organized a protest march to call attention to their grievances over working conditions, wages, and taxes. The demonstration soon developed into armed street fighting in which anti-regime slogans were shouted. The fighting continued for two days, and when it was put down, by the joint forces of the army and police, the official figure of casualties was 48 killed and 270 wounded (*The New York Times*, July 5, 1956). These figures were later revised upward.

The regime answered the Poznan rising by a combination of force, a purge of local officials, and partial satisfaction of workers' demands. At first it was feared that Poznan might stop the trend toward democratization. But as the time of writing (September 1956) it appeared that the policy of relaxation was continuing unabated.

### *General Position of the Jews*

The "liberal" trend undoubtedly had some effect on the life of the Polish Jews. For the first time since the Communists came to power, the speeches and writings published in the Polish Yiddish press contained frankly critical and even challenging statements. There was discussion of the execution of Jewish writers in the Soviet Union and much soul searching was also devoted

to the future and forms of Jewish life in Poland. The need for some sort of connection with Jewish communities abroad was underscored again and again.

The Cultural and Social Union of Polish Jews sent greetings to all Polish Jewish *landsmanshaften* abroad, and the Communist newspaper *Folksztyme*<sup>1</sup> took notice of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year (5716), by publishing a number of good-will messages received from Jewish organizations abroad (*Folksztyme*, October 1, 1955; January 3, 1956). In connection with the congress of the Cultural and Social Union, greetings were received for the first time from a group of fourteen Yiddish writers in the Soviet Union and from communal organizations in Bulgaria and Rumania. Szymon Zachariach, one of the Communist leaders of the Cultural and Social Union, publicly appealed for closer contacts with Jewish communities abroad (*Folksztyme*, April 26, 1956). It was difficult to say how long this situation would continue. But notwithstanding the difficult conditions inherent in a totalitarian state, the small remnants of Polish Jews strove to conserve their Jewish identity so far as this was possible for a small minority in a not-too-friendly environment. Polish Jewish leaders recognized with misgivings the presence of a widespread trend to assimilation among Jewish youth and spoke openly about the dangers of anti-Semitism (*Folksztyme*, April 26, 1956).

### *Anti-Semitism*

When shifts in the ruling group led to the fall of one of the most powerful leaders in Poland, Jacob Berman, there was a suspicion that his removal was due to his Jewish origin. This was apparently not the case. Berman, an old-guard Stalinist, had to give way to individuals more representative of the new policy. While the Polish regime did not display the worst features of the government-sponsored anti-Semitism prevailing elsewhere in the Soviet sphere in the early fifties, popular anti-Semitism, with its centuries-long tradition, was plentiful in Poland. Jews were subjected to all sorts of vexations in their daily pursuits and in the schools, and strong anti-Jewish feelings sometimes showed themselves among the members of the Communist party (*Folksztyme*, May 5, 1956). When the Lodz synagogue was robbed during the night of May 14, 1956, investigation disclosed that it had been attacked by delinquent youths, who, when arrested on May 30, admitted to anti-Semitic sentiments (*Folksztyme*, June 7, 1956). In June 1956 a delegation of the Jewish Cultural and Social Union was received by Minister of Education Jaroshunsky. The delegation expressed concern about anti-Semitic incidents in schools, involving both pupils and teachers. They indicated that Jewish pupils were being subjected to ridicule and beatings (*Folksztyme*, June 9, 1956). In *The New York Times* of August 8, 1956, Sidney Gruson described the discussion of the "Jewish problem" that took place at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist party soon after the Poznan revolt. Some of the party leaders allegedly claimed that Jewish intellectuals were carrying their fight for democratization in Poland too far, and that a disproportionate number of Jews held positions in the government. The majority of the speakers seem to have repudiated this type of thinking and to

<sup>1</sup> For the impact of *Folksztyme* criticism of the Soviet Union's treatment of anti-Semitism, see p. 311-13.

have appealed for a vigorous fight against anti-Semitism. But the existence of strong anti-Jewish feelings was confirmed by the Polish authorities (*The New York Times*, August 9, 1956). A feeling of uneasiness and insecurity was reported to be spreading among Polish Jews, who only recently had learned officially of the total extermination of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union. They feared that what happened in Russia under Stalin could be repeated in Poland if the anti-Semitic elements in the ruling group got the upper hand in the government.

### *Jewish Population and Emigration*

There were still no accurate data on Jewish population in Poland. It was reported that local leaders had collected demographic material on Polish Jews in twenty-nine localities. Jewish officials, however, were reticent about the results of their research and continued to speak about 100,000 Jews in Poland. They estimated that some 40.6 per cent of the total were in the age group up to fifteen. There was no way of checking these figures, which seemed to indicate a sharp change in the age composition of the Jewish community. However, such a rise in the proportion of young people, one might assume, would have been reflected in the membership of the Jewish Cultural and Social Union. This was not the case. Of 250 registered delegates (out of 264 in attendance) at the congress of the Jewish Cultural and Social Union in April 1956, 205 were forty years of age or older. On the basis of data available from previous years, 50,000 seemed to be a reasonable estimate of the number of Jews in Poland (*The New York Times*, August 31, 1956). Half the Jewish population resided in the western part of Poland, and some 5,000 each in Warsaw and Lodz.

In the middle of 1956 it became apparent that there had been a relaxation of restrictions on Jewish emigration to Israel. It was reported that the number of exit permits was increasing and that about 100 individuals a month left Poland for Israel during July and August 1956. However, at the time of writing (September 1956) it was too early to assess the importance of this change of policy, which apparently occurred at a time when anti-Semitism was on the increase.

### *Communal Life*

During 1955-56 Jewish communal activities were concentrated, as in previous years, around the Cultural and Social Union of Polish Jews. The union, which in 1956 had a total membership of 11,460, was totally Communist-directed at all levels. There was still a Jewish section of the Polish Communist Party, with operating cells in the various local committees of the union. There had been no local elections in the last three years, and the union had been a self-perpetuating organization (*Folksztyme*, January 24, 1956). On April 15, 1956, a congress of the union in Warsaw was attended by 264 delegates and over 100 guests. A number of the delegates alluded to the horrible fate of Jewish writers in the Soviet Union and demanded an explanation of the official silence on Jewish life in Russia under Stalin. The long-awaited demand for change in the character of the union came in a

special report which emphasized the necessity of closer integration of the union with the so-called National Front; but no immediate organizational changes were effected at the meeting. Hersz Smoliar and David Sfarid continued as president and secretary general of the organization. Its fifty-one-member general committee included Leib Olicky, Ilya Goldfinger, Szmuel Hurwitch, Bynem Heller, Isaac Wasserstrum, Ber Mark, Michal Mirski, Joel Lazebnik, Salo Fiszgrund, and Ida Kaminska. It is worth noting that the proceedings of the congress clearly indicated the wish of the leaders to escape from complete isolation and establish contacts with Jews in other countries, both in the Soviet satellites and in the West.

### *Religious Life*

For the first time in many years some aspects of Jewish religious life were reported in the press. According to available information, there were *kehillot* (religious community councils) functioning in twenty-three cities: Bialystok, Bielsk, Bielawa, Bytom, Dzerzcionow, Czestochowa, Glinice, Cracow, Lignice, Lublin, Lodz, Novy Sacz, Tarnow, Soznowiec, Szczecin, Szawno, Wroclaw, Stalinograd, Szwidnice, Walbrzych, Warsaw, Klock, Przemysl. Among the leading members of the religious congregations were Abraham Banker, the president of the Union of Jewish Religious Congregations of Poland; Draznin, chairman of the *kehilla* of Szczecin; Lichtenstein of Warsaw; and Lefler of Cracow (*Folksztyme*, July 27, 1955). Recent foreign visitors in Poland reported that Jewish religious life had disintegrated to such an extent that the only synagogue in Warsaw was closed week-days, and that even for the Sabbath services it was difficult to assemble the religious quorum of ten persons. The situation was no better in other cities. There were only two qualified rabbis in Poland, Chief Rabbi David Percowitch of Warsaw and Rabbi Weinberger of Lodz. There were no schools for the religious education of children and there were no *yeshivot*. According to press reports, necessary repairs and other work were undertaken at nineteen cemeteries, the religious congregations collaborating in the project (*Folksztyme*, April 17, 1956). In addition to their religious activities, the congregations were induced by the government to participate in "peace" propaganda by a series of public appeals signed by the religious leaders.

### *Jewish Education*

It was officially reported that the total enrollment of Jewish schools in 1955 was 2,301. It was difficult to analyze this figure. According to press reports, the school in Walbrzych had 220 pupils; the J. L. Peretz School in Lodz, 570; Dzerzcionov, 290; Lignice, 400; Szczecin, 350; Bielawa, 174 (*Folksztyme*, June 8, 1955; September 6, 1955). It was also announced that 24 boys and girls had been graduated from the Sholem Aleichem State Lycée in Wroclaw.

### *Cultural Activities*

The American rabbis who visited Poland in the late spring of 1956 indicated the presence in the Polish Jewish community of a "tremendous will

to survive" (*The New York Times*, July 27, 1956).<sup>2</sup> There appeared to have been fifteen Jewish choirs, fifteen dramatic clubs, eleven dance groups, and five amateur orchestras. The Jewish art clubs, with a total membership of about 1,000, held a country-wide conference in Wroclaw on February 18, 1956. Many delegates expressed fears as to the future of these organizations. It was indicated that as the older generations departed, there were no replacements, and cultural activities in Szczecin, Walbrzych, and Bielawa were continually decreasing (*Folksztyme*, March 1, 1956). In connection with the fortieth anniversary of the death of Sholem Aleichem, a special week was celebrated from May 13 to May 20, 1956, throughout the country; twenty meetings were organized in various localities. For the first time, the Polish Yiddish theater, under the direction of Ida Kaminska, was preparing to give thirteen performances in Paris. The repertoire was to include plays by Goldfaden and other playwrights (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, New York, September 5, 1956). The Yiddish Buch continued its publishing activities, serving about 5,000 subscribers, and *Yiddishe Shriften*, which had continued to appear regularly, published its 100th issue on August 15, 1955. The Jewish Historical Institute, which for many years had devoted itself to rewriting Jewish history according to the changing Communist line, during 1955-56 made efforts to contact Jewish scholarly institutions outside of Poland, particularly in other satellite countries. They were invited to collaborate in the planned publication of a history of the Jews in Eastern Europe. Apparently, it was thought necessary to invite the collaboration in this work of specialists in other countries of the Soviet area (*Jewish Chronicle*, London, January 13, 1956).

LEON SHAPIRO

## CZECHOSLOVAKIA

FEW STATISTICS on the Jews of Czechoslovakia were made available during 1955-56. The meager material from Prague did not deal with such matters as the size of the Jewish population, membership in Jewish communities, death and birth rates, age distribution, and social stratification.

Estimates of the number of Jews ranged from 15,000 to 20,000. A figure of 18,000 registered Jews, 5,000 of them living in Prague, was indicated by Rabbi Gustav Sicher in the *Israelitische Wochenblatt*, Zurich, September 20, 1956. Though it probably overstated the registered Jews, it was perhaps close to the total Jewish population, in view of the several thousand non-registered Jews, i.e., persons of Jewish origin not affiliated with religious congregations. The Jewish population of Czechoslovakia was an aging one, and hence in the long run necessarily declining. Emigrants had been drawn disproportionately from the younger members of the population. In some Czechoslovak cities old-age homes tended to become the centers of Jewish life.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller report of the findings of these rabbis, see p. 310-11.

## *Political Developments*

The anti-Semitic campaign in Czechoslovakia continued well beyond the demise of Stalin. Even in confessing that injustices had been done in the purge trials in the fall of 1952, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia played down the anti-Jewish excesses of its recent past. True, those who had not been executed with Rudolf Slánský were quietly, if belatedly, released from prison. But none of the dead or living had been fully "rehabilitated."

On May 12, 1956, Mordecai Oren, the deputy of the Israel Knesset who had been impressed into the role of a witness at the Slánský trial and forced to confess that he had participated in a "Zionist-Titoist-imperialist conspiracy" (see *AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK*, 1955 [Vol. 56], p. 416), together with the Israeli envoy, Ehud Avriël, was set free. Oren was not exonerated and no apologies were tendered to Avriël.

While, officially, the Slánský trial was not repudiated, there were occasional muted references to anti-Semitic errors. Thus in the trade union paper *Práce*, a writer complained on April 26, 1956, that "we went so far as to deprive [people who were not class enemies] of equal rights, people who were not guilty as individuals but had the ill fortune of belonging to certain groups or had relatives who had made mistakes. This was the fate of many Jews after the Slánský trial, and the fate of many soldiers who during the war fought the Nazis in the West." Again, *The New York Times* of April 16, 1956, quoted Premier Viliám Široký's admission that "certain manifestations of anti-Semitism were incorrectly introduced into the Slánský trial."

The net result was a certain easing of the position of the Jewish community. Arrests of Jews for fictitious crimes ceased. Religious and cultural activities assumed a somewhat greater depth. And the government occasionally exhibited a verbal benevolence in sharp contrast to the spirit of the purge period.

## *Communal Organization*

During the period under review (September 1955 to September 1956) the communal framework of Czechoslovak Jewry remained unchanged. The communities of Bohemia and Moravia were represented by the Association of Jewish Religious Communities. There was a rabbinical assembly of four rabbis, Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher of Prague, District Rabbis Emil Davidovič and Bernát Farkaš for the south and north of Bohemia respectively, and Rabbi Richard Feder of Brno for Moravia-Silesia. Slovakia was divided into two districts. Eliáš Katz, chief rabbi of Slovakia, resided in Bratislava, and District Rabbi Solomon Steiner in Košice. Administratively, the Bohemian-Moravian and Slovakian communities respectively were represented by the Council of the Jewish Religious Communities in Prague, under the chairmanship of Emil Neumann, and the Central League of the Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia, headed by Benjamin Eichler.

The councils were responsible to the assemblies of delegates which did not meet in Slovakia until March 27, 1955. Elections to the boards of the Jewish

religious communities, each comprising several congregations, were held in Bohemia during February and March 1956.

During 1955–56 *Věstník*, the gazette of the Jewish religious communities in Czechoslovakia, mentioned some form of communal activity in seventy-three localities, thirty of them in Bohemia, seventeen in Moravia, and twenty-six in Slovakia. Since the number of congregations in Slovakia was previously indicated as forty-two (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1956 [Vol. 57], p. 439), it was possible that *Věstník* did not provide full coverage for the more distant congregations, or that some had been dissolved during 1955–56 or existed in name only.

State control over these nominally autonomous religious bodies was exercised not only by the security organs but also by financial subsidies. All Jewish religious functionaries—like those of other religions—were paid by the government. This system had its antecedents in the church organization of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the Czechoslovak Republic between World Wars I and II.

### *Religious Activities*

In the Czechoslovak Republic there had been, before the occupation, more than one hundred rabbis, but only a half dozen were left in 1955–56. The chief rabbi of Prague was seventy-six years old and the district rabbi of Moravia eighty-one; there were no rabbinical students in Czechoslovakia.

Services were held in two synagogues in Prague, and in one large synagogue in Heyduk Street and prayer houses in Bratislava. There were two cantors in Prague, and others in Plzeň, Ústí nad Labem, Brno, Karlovy Vary, Olomouc, Ostrava, and Teplice. In Slovakia, six district *shochetim* (ritual slaughterers) conducted services, under the guidance of the two Slovak rabbis. Owing to the lack of qualified religious functionaries, it was necessary to employ lay leaders of prayer in some of the synagogues. New prayer houses were consecrated in Karlovy Vary, Písek, Tábor, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec, Olomouc, and several places in Slovakia. Kosher meat, *matzot* and *matzot* flour were produced under the ritual supervision of the chief rabbi of Slovakia. *Shochetim* functioned in Prague, Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec, Brno, and most larger communities in Slovakia. In Prague there is a supervisor of kosher meat with jurisdiction over the districts of Bohemia and Moravia, and a supervisor of the ritual bath. There was a ritual supervisor in the Home for the Aged in Mariánské Lázně. Prague had one kosher restaurant, conducted by the Jewish religious community. The chief rabbi's offices in Prague and Bratislava supplied all the communities with the necessary prayer books, taletim, tefilim, fittings for halls of prayer, etc. The larger communities received religious books for their libraries. Kosher eating places also opened during 1955–56 in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) and Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad). This was perhaps connected with the government effort to attract tourists in its drive for foreign currency. *Věstník* sometimes printed news of circumcisions and bar mitzvahs.

## *Cultural Activity*

The monthly *Věstník* of the Jewish religious community in Czechoslovakia continued to be the only Jewish periodical of the country. With some variations in subject matter and authorship, its twelve pages usually featured a religious-philosophical article by Chief Rabbi Sicher or a popular religious one by Rabbi Richard Feder. In most issues, an unsigned political editorial echoed the governmental theme of the month. There was also usually a lengthy article in the Slovak language by the chief rabbi of Slovakia. About four to five pages were devoted to straight religious information, administrative news, letters, obituaries, and reports from the local congregations. Stories, essays, and book reviews on general topics of interest to Jews filled the remainder of the paper. Its editor was Rudolf Iltis, the secretary of the Jewish Council. In 1954, 1955, and 1956, a Jewish almanac was also published.

A new departure during 1955-56 was a slender volume in the English language, *Jewish Studies*, printed in honor of Chief Rabbi Sicher, of Prague, who was seventy-five years old in 1955. Besides articles by four of the six rabbis of Czechoslovakia, it contained a scholarly and sympathetic appraisal of the work of Rabbi Sicher, whose translation of Deuteronomy into Czech was published in Prague in 1950, by the Protestant theologian Miloš Bič. Other scholars who contributed monographs on erudite (and nontopical) subjects were Stanislav Segert, Greta Hort, Hana Volavková, and Pavel Eisner.

## HUNGARY <sup>1</sup>

**I**N HUNGARY, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956 was followed by signs of greater responsiveness to the discontents of the Communist Party rank and file and even of the general population.

Hungary had been the most ruthless of all satellite countries in trying to stamp out "Titoism." In 1949 Laszlo Rajk, who as minister of the interior had protected the Communist instigators and perpetrators of anti-Semitic crimes, had been executed on the dual charge of Titoism and—Zionism! In May 1956, Rajk and his fellow victims were exonerated of the crime of Titoism and their standing as Communists was posthumously "rehabilitated." But in rehabilitating them, no mention was made of the Zionist charge. (As we shall see, a vague and indirect retraction of this charge came much later, without direct reference to the executed victims).

Not only did Titoism cease to be a capital crime, but the Hungarian government paid urgent court to Tito, and there were even some guarded references to the possibility of Hungary's following "her own road" to Socialism. Thus "de-Stalinization" seemed to encompass, in Hungary as well as elsewhere, a certain degree of relaxation in the rigidity of the Communist dictatorship.

<sup>1</sup> For political developments in Hungary after July 1956, see p. 307-08.

To a large extent, this reflected the Hungarian regime's recognition of the danger which confronted it from the dissatisfaction of the industrial workers. In a politically amorphous society where labor constituted the only organized and recognized entity, the regime knew that the real threat to its rule was the desertion of the dictatorship "of the proletariat" by the proletariat itself.

As a result, it made efforts to improve the desperate economic lot of the workers. But these efforts were limited by the policy of forced industrialization and the drive for collective farming. At the same time, manifestations of rank-and-file opinion and desires were tolerated, which, half a year earlier, would have been ruthlessly crushed. Simultaneously, the regime tried to forestall the danger that public criticism of its policies might go too far. While, on the Kremlin's orders, the policy of "democratization" continued, spokesmen of the regime warned the rank and file that the rule of the People's Democracy was absolute, and that there was no place for any opposition to the party dictatorship.

The most conspicuous concession, and the symbol of all the others, was the removal from power of the veteran Stalinist dictator, Jewish-born Matyas Rakosi. After the Soviet Party congress in February, Rakosi was under sharp attack within the Hungarian party. He tried to make some face-saving concessions, and in particular to make his peace with Tito. But he was not able to survive "de-Stalinization"; Belgrade was unforgiving, and the Kremlin felt it necessary to get rid of him as a symbol of Stalinist terror. The elimination from the Politburo of former Defense Minister Mihaly Farkas, another Stalinist of Jewish extraction, in April 1955 had foreshadowed Rakosi's fate.

But when on July 18, 1956, Rakosi finally fell, his successor as secretary general of the Communist Party was not Imre Nagy, the former prime minister dismissed from office and expelled from the party last year for "right deviation," but Erno Gerö, a close associate of Rakosi. Gerö was the last politically surviving important Communist leader of Jewish descent in Hungary.

Under former Premier Imre Nagy, control of religious bodies by party commissars ended, and a trend toward greater religious freedom started. In line with current tendencies in the Soviet Union, this trend continued in Hungary even after Nagy's fall. Thus, on June 1, 1956, Prime Minister Andras Hegedus, while warning against "the use of religious conviction as a force hostile to the People's Democracy," at the same time declared that "the Hungarian People's Democracy continues to guarantee the freedom of religion."

### *Jewish Community*

In the last two years little news about Hungarian Jewish life has been available abroad. In earlier years, the weekly paper of the Jewish community, *Nj Elet* ("New Life") was obtainable on the other side of the Iron Curtain, but early in 1955 its mailing abroad was limited to "reliable" addresses. As a result, only occasional bits of information, supplied mostly by chance visitors, were available.

These reports indicated that attendance at Jewish religious services in Budapest was growing, and especially that Orthodox Jews tenaciously observed their traditions. The Budapest Rabbinical Seminary was reportedly

ordaining two or three "assistant rabbis" a year. A number of Orthodox *yeshivot* existed in the provinces. Most surviving Jews exiled from Budapest to the bleak North Eastern areas were back in the capital, and, according to eyewitness reports, were demanding the restoration of their former homes. The unified National Office of Hungarian Jews and of the Budapest Jewish community had a politically independent president, Lajos Heves. He and Chief Rabbi Joseph Katona were trying to maintain religious life and to interest people in the affairs of the Jewish community. But at last reports barely one-third of Budapest's 100,000 Jews were members of the Jewish community. The rest still felt deterred from participation in Jewish affairs either by their dependence on the government for their livelihood, or by general Communist hostility to religion. The Jewish communities also faced serious financial difficulties, caused by the large number of elderly unemployed among their membership and the fact that even the wage-earning members could not afford to make voluntary contributions to the community.

Jewish life was confined essentially to the synagogue. Jewish education and the preservation of Jewish traditions continued to decline. There were no Jewish youth movements, cultural and educational activities, literature, journalism, or art, and, of course, no contact whatsoever with Jewish life abroad.

During 1955-56, no arrest or trial of Jewish leaders was reported from Hungary. While the fate of some of the victims of earlier arrests and sentences was still unknown, a number of these victims were reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency to have been released on April 18, 1956. A mass trial of Jewish leaders, expected after the arrest of Lajos Stoeckler, former president of the National Office of Hungarian Jews, early in 1953, was never held.

According to a JTA despatch of September 18, 1956, Oscar Beten, a member of the executive of the Hungarian Communist Party, told a correspondent of the Tel Aviv daily *Haaretz* that Hungary "no longer considers world Zionism as an agent of American imperialism, and no longer views Zionism as a hostile trend against the state." Zionism was now looked upon in Hungary only as "a rival trend from the ideological viewpoint." The Communist spokesman was reported to have admitted that Zionists had been arrested and persecuted in Hungary, adding that "these were regrettable mistakes of the Stalin era and will not recur." He emphasized that all victims had been released and that individual Zionists could live in Hungary peacefully.

However, he objected to "Zionist propaganda" among Hungarian Jews on the ground that the latter "enjoy full equality, while Zionist propaganda may harm the free Jewish community."

Almost no Jewish emigration was possible from Hungary in 1955 and 1956. Beten told *Haaretz* that in the future Hungarian Jews would be permitted to emigrate to Israel on humanitarian grounds, provided there was no doubt that their emigration would result in reuniting families, especially old people with their children, in Israel.

## RUMANIA

ON THE WHOLE the Communist New Look, which followed the downgrading of Stalin (*see* p. 305), seemed to have had little or no effect in Rumania. There was considerable uncertainty about the fate of Ana Pauker, former strong woman of the Communist Party of Rumania and that country's foreign minister after World War II. The June 1956 issue of the democratic emigré publication, *La Nation Roumaine*, reported that she was to be put on trial after the Communist Party congress of February 1956. However, no reliable information had been received about her at the time of writing (August 1956).

### *Jewish Population*

It has been unofficially estimated that between 200,000 and 250,000 Jews remained in Rumania after emigration came to a virtual standstill in 1950 (*see* AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1956, [vol. 57], p. 446). In February 1956 the Rumanian government took a census. The fragmentary results published as of the time of writing<sup>1</sup> showed that the general population had increased by approximately 10 per cent since the census of 1948, from 15,800,000 to 17,500,000. No statistics had been published about the Jews or any other minorities, and thus it was not known what changes had taken place in the Jewish population. However, in view of the government's rigidly enforced ban on emigration and the rate of increase for the population as a whole, it seemed probable that the Jewish population was not less than 250,000.

### *Religious and Cultural Life*

In December 1955 and during the early part of 1956 the western press published a number of statements by the Chief Rabbi of Rumania, Moses Rosen, concerning the religious life of the Jews in Rumania. The occasions were an official invitation to the Chief Rabbi Kurt Wilhelm of Sweden, at the end of 1955, and Rosen's return visit to Stockholm, as well as his subsequent visit to London as the guest of Agudas Israel in July 1956.

In these statements Rosen fixed the number of Jewish religious communities in Rumania at 100. In 1954 Rumanian officials had mentioned 136 Jewish communities and later, in December of that year, in a statement to a representative of the Israel newspaper *Haaretz*, had spoken of 120 communities (*see* AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, *loc. cit.*). According to Rosen, the Jewish communities were united in a federation, enjoyed full autonomy, and were subsidized by the government. Jewish religious laws were observed. Rosen reported, for instance, that the government allotted wheat to the Jews for the manufacture of matzot for Pesach. Jewish children were receiving religious instruction. Also, according to Rosen, a Jewish periodical of a re-

<sup>1</sup> See BIRE, *Bulletin d'Information des Réfugiés Roumains en Europe*, June 1956.

ligious nature was scheduled to begin publication "next month." At this writing (August 1956) no such publication had been received in the United States.

Apparently in an effort to strengthen Rosen's mission to the west, Radio Bucharest at the same time boasted of the complete equality of the Jews, laying special emphasis on religious education. It mentioned that [several] Jewish seminaries were functioning in the country, "training cadres of young rabbis for the future" (Jewish Telegraphic Agency [JTA] June 19, 1956). Rosen himself spoke of only one such seminary located in Arad, with a total enrollment of thirty-five students.

Nothing was known of the fate of three state schools where Yiddish had been reported as the language of instruction (one each in Bucharest, Jassy, and Timisoara), and which allegedly had existed in 1955. They were the remnant of a Jewish school system which in 1948 had comprised sixty-nine elementary schools and twenty-three high schools, with an enrollment of 13,000 students (*see* AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, *loc. cit.*). In an interview with the Tel Aviv Communist newspaper *Kol Haam* (December 1955), the prominent Rumanian Jewish Communist leader Bercu Feldman stated that 5,000 Jewish children were learning Yiddish in state schools. A small, poorly prepared elementary Yiddish grammar issued by the official educational publishing house in Rumanian in 1954, a copy of which is available in the library of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, seemed to confirm this statement. However, even Feldman said nothing of schools where Yiddish was the language of instruction. On the contrary, his statement in *Kol Haam* that Yiddish was being taught in "purely Jewish schools" seems to mean that the last of the Yiddish schools had been abolished.

As late as 1954 there had still been news of the continuing existence of two Yiddish state theatres, one in Bucharest and one in Jassy (*see* AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1954, [vol. 55], p. 302). For a time no further information was available, but on June 8, 1956, *Adevêrul*, a weekly published in Israel by Rumanian emigrants, reported that the Jewish theatre in Bucharest had recently performed Sholom Aleichem.

There were no Yiddish publications in Rumania at the time of writing (August 1956). *Ikuf Bleter*, the Rumanian Jewish Communist periodical which had been suspended toward the end of 1952 (*see* AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1954, [vol. 55] *loc. cit.*) had apparently not resumed publication. But the previously cited issue of *Adevêrul* contained an announcement to the effect that *Ikuf Bleter* was scheduled to resume publication. Since no American subscribers, including libraries, had received any copies at this writing, it seemed probable that the periodical was not yet back in print. Moreover, Bercu Feldman stated in his interview in *Kol Haam* that in Rumania "The problem of national minorities was solved in the Marxist-Leninist spirit and . . . there is no need for special Jewish papers in Yiddish or any other language because all Rumanian Jews understand and read Rumanian." This was obviously the current Communist line on the matter.

### *Fate of Zionist Leaders*

Some mystery still surrounded the fate of the Zionist leaders arrested and convicted during the anti-Zionist drive of 1949-50. Two amnesties were proclaimed in the fall of 1955, but in the case of crimes against the state they applied only to sentences of up to five years. The Zionist leaders had all been sentenced to much longer terms. There were reports of several Supreme Court retrials of Jewish leaders (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1956, [vol. 57] *loc. cit.*) and of piecemeal releases. Thus *The New York Times* of April 21, 1956, reported that the release of all 200 Jews jailed for Zionist activities had been completed. It quoted Idov Cohen, chairman of the Rumanian immigrants' organization in Israel, as stating that relatives of seven of the last twelve of the Zionist prisoners in Rumania had received telegrams announcing the prisoners' liberation, and that the others were also understood to have been freed.

But there was a great deal of contradiction in the reports of releases. Thus on September 21, 1955, JTA reported from Tel Aviv, on the basis of "authentic information," that "by now all Zionist leaders are released." Less than four months later, on January 1, 1956, the [London] *Jewish Chronicle* reported that eighty Zionists still remained in prison, while the rest had been freed. Among those released at that time the *Jewish Chronicle* mentioned the well-known leader A. L. Zissu; but on January 15, 1956, the usually reliable BIRE reported that Zissu was imprisoned in the city of Pitesti under severe conditions, and JTA confirmed this report on March 8, 1956, in a dispatch from Istanbul.

### EMIGRATION TO ISRAEL

According to Idov Cohen, quoted in *The New York Times* of April 21, 1956, Jewish emigration to Israel was to be resumed, primarily to permit the reunion of families. Between August 1954 and April 1956, only 307 persons arrived in Israel from Rumania. At the same time Rumania instituted a vigorous campaign to induce all emigrés, including Jews, to return. In January 1956, BIRE reported that on the first of that month a special committee was formed in Bucharest for this purpose which included among its members George Tatarescu, a notoriously anti-Semitic former leader of the National Liberal Party and prime minister under King Carol, who had spent several years in Communist jails. Broadcast appeals were beamed to Israel, but returnees were treated very harshly by the Rumanian police. BIRE reported in October 1955 that families were afraid to make contact with their repatriate members. At the time of writing (August 1956) the hopes for a resumption of emigration, expressed by Idov Cohen and others, had not materialized.

JOSEPH KISSMAN