

'Greater Sensitivity' by USSR On Jewish Question Is Urged

(The following appeared as an editorial in Yiddish in the progressive New York Jewish daily, Morning Freiheit on Aug. 1 and on the Freiheit's English page on Aug. 11.)

THE NEW YORK TIMES carried a report about a statement made by Nikita Khrushchev the first Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to a group of American tourists headed by Prof. Jerome Davis. The same report was broadcast by the radio networks.

In reply to a question whether it is true that Soviet Jews cannot depart from the country, Khrushchev—according to these reports—said, that passports are issued only in cases when that serves a useful purpose.

Professional Soviet-haters seized the opportunity to clamor: "Anti-Semitism". The truth of the matter is, that this Soviet attitude is not in any way discriminatory. The same rule is applied equally to all Soviet citizens. The Russians and citizens of all other nationalities, too, get passports only in cases when their travels are considered to be useful to the country.

According to the same reports Khrushchev remarked during the same interview that,

"Recently we gave Jews passports for repatriation to Poland, but we know they went straight on to Israel. We consider Israel is pursuing an aggressive policy".

THIS REMARK if quoted correctly, is bound to raise a number of questions. That the Ben-Gurion Government is following a harmful policy is quite clear. It carried out its invasion into Egypt in collusion with Great Britain and France (the fact of this partnership is now openly admitted). The entire world was exposed to a serious war-danger. Ben-Gurion himself, speaking in the Knesset two weeks before the invasion, pointed to that danger. At that time he argued that no "preventive war" against Egypt must be undertaken. However, it appears that at the moment he delivered that address the war had already been decided upon, and steps had already been taken to prepare the invasion.

Forcing Israel to accept the Eisenhower Doctrine was another dangerous step. It demonstrated again how harmful the Ben-Gurion policy was both for Israel and the entire Middle East Progressive elements everywhere emphasize these facts.

With all that, it is still hard to discern any direct connection between these harmful Ben-Gurion policies and those Jews who wish to go to Israel. Many of the Jews who recently came to Israel from Poland and other countries have joined the camp of the progressives. Others have followed such Zionist leaders as Itzhok Greenbaum and Nahum Goldman who insist that Israel must be neutral. The fact that one goes to settle in Israel does not imply that he approves of the policy of the Israeli government. Nor should the fact that a certain government follows a harmful policy be considered as a proper reason for interfering with an individual's right to enter such a country, if he wishes or must settle there.

Suppose Polish Jews were to go to England or France, both of which countries made a colonialist aggressive attack on Egypt, would these Jews be held responsible for that aggression?

WE WERE opposed to the "exodus from Poland" in 1946, and we are now, too, opposed to such a slogan. But at the same time we could not close our eyes to the developments in Poland



BEN GURION



KHRUSHCHEV

during the last year when the anti-Semites went riot and when many Jews unfortunately decided to emigrate. We believe that the Polish government and the leading Jewish social workers who were concerned with building up Jewish life in Poland followed a correct policy when they made it possible for such Jews to emigrate as they pleased. It is our fond hope that now, after the Polish government has taken measures to curb anti-Semitism by means of public statements and law enforcements, the Jewish community of Poland will grow stronger. A strengthened Polish Jewish community with a flourishing Jewish culture, would be helpful in combatting the propaganda of the enemies of socialism who never ceased clamoring that it is impossible to develop Jewish life under socialism.

While the remark about Polish Jews attributed to Khrushchev, is bound to raise certain questions, even more serious questions are involved in the very fact that these Jews did want to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Immediately after the war, when some 400,000 Jews who were saved by the Soviet Union from the Hitlerite gas chambers decided to repatriate and go back to Poland in order to find out what had happened to their homes, a large number of Jews did not go back and decided to stay in the Soviet Union. Why then do they want to emigrate now? There must be some reason.

Just as we were and are opposed to the slogan of "exodus from Poland", so we were and are opposed to the slogan "exodus from Europe". That naturally includes the Jewish community of the Soviet Union. But just as in the case of Poland one had to consider the reasons prompting Jews to emigrate—rightly or wrongly—so we must also consider the causes that prompt Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

DURING the years when Jewish culture flourished in the Soviet Union, when national Jewish districts were formed and the Jewish Autonomous Region was established foreign Jews including American Jews went to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union attracted the Jewish masses everywhere, including non-Communist Jews. As far as the Soviet Jews are concerned, they never gave the slightest thought to emigration. And immediately after the war, when Yiddish cultural institutions—Yiddish newspapers and journals, Yiddish theatre—existed; when another migration to Birobidjan started with a view to the development of the Jewish Autonomous Region, thousands of Polish Jews, too, preferred to stay in the Soviet Union rather than be repatriated.

If these Jews are now emigrating, it is because Jewish cultural institutions that had been wiped out have not yet been restored. These Jews, as the So-

viet Jews in general still have no opportunity for self-expression as Jews. The synagogue is not enough for them. Many of them are non-religious.

Besides, it seems that there is also an additional reason for the desire to emigrate. The recent resolution of the American Communist Party points out that in the Soviet Union, where there is no official anti-Semitism, there are, however, vestiges of anti-Semitism, vestiges from Czarist times and, especially from the time of the Nazi occupation. If these vestiges were publicly combated by an educational campaign and legal measures as vigorously as it was done during the time of Lenin, this too would strengthen the spirit of the Soviet Jews. Such a policy would also be an inspiration to those Jews in America and other countries who have always emphasized the historic role of the Soviet Union in the outlawing of anti-Semitism.

So far no such public campaign against the vestiges of anti-Semitism has been initiated. The clause in the Soviet Constitution banning anti-Semitism is undoubtedly very important. It is indeed of historic importance. Still, it is not enough. From a Socialist government—a government of the first land of socialism—a great deal more is demanded.

WHAT is needed is a special Jewish institution created by the Soviet Government (such, for instance, as the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee that existed up till the end of 1948)—an institution that should help carry on Yiddish cultural activities and that should also be helpful to the Government in the process of repairing the injuries inflicted upon the Jews as a result of the vestiges of anti-Semitism. Such an institution would also be able to arrange for cultural relations with Jews in other lands.

To sum up: What is wanted is greater and more immediate attention to the Jewish question on the part of the Soviet Union, greater sensitivity to the feelings of a people that has just lost six million of its numbers in Hitler's slaughterhouses and that, in addition, has for years suffered as a result of the distortions and illegalities during the period of the "cult of the individual",—suffered together with all Soviet peoples, and to a certain extent, more so both in the field of its cultural institutions which were wiped out in other ways.

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