

Jewish Culture in the USSR Today

An article by J. Gershman in a recent issue of the Canadian Jewish Weekly contains some interesting facts about Jewish culture in the Soviet Union.

A short time ago a group of Canadian Jews visited the Soviet Union. They were informed by representatives of the Soviet Communist Party, writes Gershman, that the "main reason there had not developed widespread Jewish cultural activity in the Soviet Union was the lack of a natural desire for this on the part of Soviet Jews; that even before 1948, few Jewish books had been sold, there was small attendance at the Jewish State Theatre, and the newspaper "Einikeit" (Unity) had a small circulation." The Canadians discussed this with some of the Jewish

writers they met.

Joseph Kerler was the first to reply. He is at present working on concert programs for the touring companies of Jewish singers and actors, and a book of his has just been accepted for publication.

"The recent concert tours in Moscow, Leningrad, as well as in the Ukraine, White Russia and Latvia, have shown that there is a strong interest in Jewish artistic performance," he said. "Why in Baku, a group of Jewish doctors has just formed a drama group. The interest is not only among the older people, but among the younger as well. For example, I could tell you about a 23-year old Jewish student, who hardly knows any Yiddish now, but is interested enough to have begun collecting Jewish folksongs from all

over the U.S.S.R. He has already unearthed over 70 little-known songs and is corresponding with people in many places getting assistance in this endeavor. Don't these things point to the interest in Jewish culture?" Kerler asked.

NEXT, Joseph Rabin took the floor. He told of the joy among the Jews of Vilno when the Yiddish section of the public library was opened recently. "People there hope to have the honor of seeing the first Yiddish journal after many years published in their city," he related. He also told of hearing Yiddish spoken extensively among Jewish holidaygoers at Crimean beaches last summer. These were mainly people from the new areas

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ceded to the U.S.S.R. after the Second World War.

In the town of Babruisk, White Russia, Rabin was told that the 30,000 Jewish inhabitants there will buy up any edition of a Jewish book as soon as it appears. He rejected the argument that there was no interest in Jewish literature before 1948. "Take my own example," he said. "In 1947, a book of mine was issued in 7,000 copies. A few months later it was out of print. And I am not among the foremost writers," he modestly added. "Books of more prominent writers had several editions," he said.

The young writer and poet Aaron Vergelis strongly emphasized that there was clearly a need and a desire for Jewish cultural expression to be seen everywhere. He pointed out that when the Union of Soviet Writers asked Jewish writers for creative material they received reams, and the works were highly lauded, too. Speaking of the pre-1948 period, he said that there was a need at that time to enlarge the circulation of "Einikeit" because the demand and that the literary journal "Homeland", (Hiemland) sold out almost as soon as it was in the bookstores.

Ishike Driz spoke in the same vein, said Gershman. "The Jewish people are waiting for our songs, stories and novels" which truly reflect their life and feelings in the U.S.S.R., Driz said. It was also pointed out that numerous Soviet non-Jewish intellectuals had the same feeling as they did although there are others, including Jews, who don't see the need for particular Jewish cultural expression. All, though, did express optimism that the difficulties and opposition would be overcome.

WHAT struck the Canadian Jews particularly was the deep Soviet patriotism among these cultural figures. Shike Driz, for example, told the Canadians. "Please tell the people overseas on behalf of us, Jewish-Soviet writers, that anti-Soviet elements who want to catch fish in muddy waters will be disappointed. They don't know whom they are reckoning with. Our writers fought in the Civil War; among the

younger ones, many were educated in the Komsomol (Communist Youth), they fought for our homeland in the patriotic war and helped chase the Hitlerites right to Berlin. Let our enemies not think they can make anti-Soviet elements out of us."

Aaron Vergelis added his piece to the same sentiment, after remarking about the need for continued contact with Jewish cultural figures abroad. "We can assure you our enemies won't make much capital out of us," he said. "Let them not think that because our best ones have gone, that we 'lesser people' will be squelched. We will drive out the bad air brought in by the Forverts and the others. We will persevere to do this through our creative pen rather than through polemics. This will be the best answer. We will force our enemies to surrender their anti-Soviet armor."

COUNCIL

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ment during their consideration."

The vote to open the public hearings on the Quinn case was unanimous, with Quinn and Cunningham not voting.

A report of the subcommittee of the committee of the whole stated that all hearings of the committee on the Quinn case shall be in public, "except that executive sessions of the committee of the whole be held in private." The rule adopted states that 13 members of the committee shall constitute a quorum.

Quinn was accused by Tenney and a New York Grand Jury presentment with violating the charter through his representation of the Triboro Carting Corp., which paid him a total of \$30,000 as a liaison man. Quinn introduced legislation in the Council last October which was said to have been aimed at benefitting the firm.

The question of Cunningham's alleged violation of the charter did not come before the Council meeting yesterday. And it was reported that similar charges levied against Quinn and Cunningham were being prepared against Brooklyn Councilman Jack Kranis.