

'Pravda' Editors Discuss Jewish Culture in USSR

Here's another article on Jewish culture in the USSR by J. Gershman, a Canadian, who recently visited the Soviet Union. It is reprinted from the Canadian Jewish Weekly ("Vochenblatt"). The first one appeared in the feature section on January 30.

COMING back to Moscow from the south, I began to arrange talks with various representatives of Soviet institutions to discuss specifically problems of Soviet Jews. It so happened that on my arrival, I found out that a delegation from the British Communist Party, which included John Campbell, editor of the London Daily Worker, and Professor Hyman Levy, mathematician and writer, had arrived for talks with leaders of the Soviet Communist Party.

I had an opportunity to go along with the British delegation to the majestic offices of Pravda, for a get-together with some of the editors. The meeting got underway at 6 p.m. sharp, with the chairman, U. Franzev, introducing five of his colleagues: U. Maevsky, U. Zhukovin, A. Zemezov, M. Chernenko and M. Zamjatin.

The editors spoke of the work of this leading Soviet journal, and how important changes in all phases of Soviet life were being brought about following the

20th Congress of the Communist Party.

Pointing to the grave mistakes and crimes that had taken place, Zhukovin said that even in those days, and in the midst of the war, it could not be said that democracy disappeared completely.

They all seemed to recognize how much we had been troubled abroad by what was revealed in the recent period, and expressed a sort of guilt-feeling towards us for this.

They told us how the paper and the Communist Party were now fighting for the establishment of creative thinking in all areas of the Party and the state, which had been held back during the previous years. Then, people mechanically waited for instructions, while now personal initiative was being developed on a wide scale.

We went over to an extensive question-and-answer period, with the British people and myself raising quite a number of points. Then U. Franzev said they knew that I, being the editor of a Jewish paper, was interested in some Jewish problems and we would now go over to those.

Here both I and Professor Levy gave our points of view both in relation to what had happened in the past and the present problems of the full-scale development of Jewish culture in the U.S.S.R.

I brought out my opinion that the incorrect approach to the cultural needs of large numbers of Soviet Jews was a result of a distortion of the general national policy of the Soviet Union as we knew it for many years.

M. Zamjatin, himself a Jew, answered on behalf of the editors. He cited facts in great detail as to the number of Jews occupying high positions in Soviet society, and in general arrived at the same unacceptable conclusions which I have mentioned earlier (See Daily Worker, Jan. 30): there is no natural desire for

Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, 8:45.
Conductor, Dmitri Mitropoulos; soloist, Zino Francescatti; violinist.
Overture to the Creole "Faust"---Gianstra
Symphonie Espagnole for Violin and Orchestra-----Lalo.
Symphonie Fantastique-----Berlioz
Merces de Silva-Telles, pianist;
Town Hall, 8:30. Mercés de Silva-Telles, pianist.
Sonta No. 23, Op. 57-----Beethoven
Variations on Ah' Vous Dirai-Jo' Maman Mozart
Phantasy Op. 15 (The Wanderer)---Schubert

a Jewish theatre, Yiddish paper, etc.

Several of the others also spoke. They said the principled Soviet approach to the Jewish people had not changed.

The remnants of anti-Semitism are the legacy of Tsarism and the Nazi occupation. Beria used one nationality against another.

The Doctors' Case hit Jews harder than others, although there were non-Jews among those framed, too. When the case was exposed, the editors said, the injustices were condemned by all sections of the Soviet public.

IN answering Zamjatin I said that any insinuation that the Soviet government was carrying through an anti-Semitic policy was a criminal distortion of the truth.

But this doesn't answer the problems which interest us most — those of the reestablishment of Jewish social-cultural activity in the U.S.S.R. "Such a Jew as you," I said, referring to Mr. Zamjatin, "who is fully assimilated, doesn't need Jewish culture. But I have met many Jews, even those who no longer know Yiddish, who do want a Jewish publishing house, a newspaper, theatre and so why not call a conference of Jewish social-cultural figures, those really interested in Jewish culture, as well as workers from all parts of the Soviet Union, and discuss the whole question?"

I also pointed out that in 1948, Jewish cultural institutions were closed down, and leading Jewish cultural figures liquidated in an administrative manner.

It was therefore the duty of the Communist Party and the state to correct this and re-establish the institutions whether they agree with those who say there is a strong desire for Jewish culture or not. And furthermore, I said, this has been promised to numerous people from outside the U.S.S.R. who have visited

Conductor, Dmitri Mitropoulos; soloist, Jean Casadesus, pianist.
Symphony No. 5 in B flat major---Schubert
Fantasy for Orchestra (first performance)-----Mann
Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 47-----Beethoven
Overture, "Beatrice and Benedict"---Berlioz
Town Hall, 8:30. Negro History Week.
Participants: Carol Brice, contralto; Leonid Hambro, pianist; Westchester Interracial Fellowship Chorus, David Katz, conductor; accompanist, Jonathan Brice.
Choral works by Margaret Bond, Clarence Cameron White, Florence Price, Thomas Kerr, Samuel Coleridge Taylor; Negro Spirituals arranged by Edward Boatner, John Work, Harry Burleigh, Rolan Hayes, Noah Ryder, Hall Johnson, William Grant Still; instrumental works by Louis M. Gottschalk, Edward Swanson, Nathaniel Dett.
Carnegie Recital Hall, 5:30. Twilight Concert.
New Art Wind Quintet; assisting artist, Emery Davis, bass clarinet.
Quintet No. 2 for Woodwinds (first performance)-----Roger Goeb
Works by Frans Danzi, Milhaud, Leo Janacek.
Carl Fischer Concert Hall, 105 W. 57 St. Guy Carawan sings: 8:30
Kaufman Auditorium, YMHA, Lexington Ave., and 92nd St., 8:40. Quartetto Italiano.
Works by Haydn, Petrassi, Debussy.
Hunter College, 8:30. Claudio Arrau, pianist.
Carnaval, Op. 8-----Schuman
Sonata in C major, Op. 53 (Waldstein)-----Beethoven
Three Pieces, Op. 11-----Schoenberg
Suite "Napoli"-----Poulenc
Metropolitan Museum, 8:30. America Opera Society Preview.
Conductor, Arnold Ganson; soloists, Marital Singher, Denise Duval and others.
El Retablo-----Falla
Les Mamelles de Tiresias-----Poulenc
Washington Irving H.S., 16th St., and Irving Place, 8:30. Vienna Octet.
Works by Haydn, Brahms, Mozart.
Hunter College, 11 a.m. Little Orchestra, Society Young People's Concert.
Conductor, Thomas Scherman; soloists, Jean Altschuler, harpist; Lisl Well, illustrator; Max Leavitt, narrator.
Works by Weber, Charles Widor, Stravinsky.
Brooklyn Academy of Music, 8:30. Anna Russell, concert comedienne.

here recently.

Following this, three of the editors spoke again and stated that they agreed with me. "We don't see why work should not begin immediately in the projects which Mr. Gershman has pointed to," they said.

It thus became clear to me that in the top circles of the Soviet Party, there is no unity of agreement on this question. In later discussions with other Soviet personalities this was corroborated.

I was therefore happy to hear from Shveliagin, a representative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, with whom I had a lengthy discussion the day before I left Moscow, that not a single one of the projects for the re-establishment of Jewish cultural institutions has been rejected. They are all still in the stage of discussion.

—Translated and abridged.



In memory of our dear wife and mother

Bessie Polansky

Died Feb. 7, 1956

We pledge to carry on for you—in the activities for a better world.

David Polansky, Children and Grandchildren