

# We Will Mourn Our Dead

By DORA TEITELBOIM

*The following is a commentary on the admission in the Yiddish Communist newspaper, Folk-Shtimme, April 14, that the leading Yiddish cultural figures of the Soviet Union had fallen victim to a criminal conspiracy violating the principles of Socialist justice. Dora Teitelboim is a leading Yiddish poet whose books are well known to Jewish readers in many countries.—The Editors.*

**D**READFUL days. Bleak tidings—. Events which have no parallel in the history of socialism—. A fresh calamity has fallen upon us, lying heavily upon us, searing. . . .

Heroic fighters on the fronts in the great war against fascism, pillars of Soviet Yiddish literature, have been torn down.

And the wheels of history turn

*"and her unnumbered mouths are open  
and swallow up  
and vomit out. . . ."*

And they, the hardened enemies of peace and the Soviet Union, blow up the fires and stir their venomous brew over our anguished hearts. They pick with long beaks at our wounds. They anoint themselves with our blood.

And our eyes and ears are fixed upon the scene of those dread events, and we wait. . . .

The clock of time rotates, tapping out its signals on an expanse of newspapers. . . . And we search . . . we search . . . in anger and in grief.

The flames of crematoria have consumed our tears. The ashes of Maidanek have filled up our throats.

How shall we mourn the new martyrs?

With what shall we sound this great anguish?

Upon which mountain shall we stand and lament so that the whole world will hear?

We are a generation that has lost its tears.

With what requiem shall we weep the perishing of our Yiddish writers who have raised up, inspired and enriched the Jewish masses everywhere on this earth; lifted our literature to the loftiest heights; who poured courage into the Yiddish poet and creative worker in the countries where he is humiliated, trodden underfoot—writers who filled us with faith in the future; who endowed us with the capacity to see the light of the dawning . . . to be able to see in the very deepest darkness—who taught us to draw strength from the people in the most difficult times?

**WITH WHAT** joy and eagerness we followed each new creation of the Soviet Yiddish writer, that not only mirrored life but showed us how to change life, how to build life.

Through them and their work we saw so clearly. We recognized and followed step by step the great contest between two worlds; the yesterdays and the tomorrows—the civil war in all its phases; the building of socialism; later, the partisan battles in the war against fascism—the uprising in the ghettos; the concentration camps—the devastation, the inconceivable suffering that the fascist beast visited upon the Soviet people, including the Jews.

With what pride did we mark the scores of Yiddish writers who volunteered, taking their places in the Red Army, pen in one hand and gun in the other, who went to the battlefield. Some, like Viner, Rosin, Olevsky, Godiner, Zeldin and others, heroically gave their lives in the defense of Kursk, of Tula, Rostov and Stalingrad. In contemporary Soviet literature such Jewish figures abound: heroes—simple workers and intellectuals, who showed immense courage and self-sacrifice in the defense of their socialist homeland.

In Soviet Yiddish literature there was an outpouring of sublime war ballads, novels, stories, epic poetry—works which revealed for us the profound humanism of Soviet patriotism; works whose events their authors had lived through, suffered through; works filled with rich realism, towering truth.

In these works we found new content, new forms; new rhythm and imagery; a literature permeated with the immediacy of burning battlefields, with the struggle between the human and the beast—works written in the most harrowing times, yet with no trace of despair, frustration or futility. Every page of Itzik Feffer, of Peretz Markish is woven through with love for the people, inseparability with the people, with oneness of deed and thought, and with the morality and ethics of the new Soviet individual.

**S**TANDING before my bookshelves, I leaf through the works of the heroic fighters against fascism, the masters of Soviet-Yiddish literature, heroes who fell by the hand of the same enemy as did their colleagues on the fronts . . . the hand with a thousand fingers that for over thirty-eight years has manipulated the nooses with which to strangle socialism and its creations.

David Hofstein wrote:

*O great world  
I have won.  
All my fate  
Was at stake.  
I know  
Countless pains  
Still are lurking to ambush my children.  
In every corner, at all the gates of the world . . .  
O great world  
I have won . . .  
I have won.  
My being is confirmed,  
And among the most beautiful things of the world  
Will be deathless.*

David Bergelson, following the Nazi attack, issued a call to the Jewish people:

*"The craven has challenged the noble, and the noble shall conquer."*

Leib Kvitko wrote:

*"The wind laughs in the corn:  
Who has wings ascends.*

*None can enslave him."*

Itzik Feffer, in his *Shadows of the Warsaw Ghetto*, wrote:

*"The shadows, proud shadows of Warsaw's ghetto,  
They live in us with disaster, with pain,  
And not like the mists of calm days of snow,  
And not like the lightning in harvest leaves,  
Nor like sphinxes hacked out of stone.  
They live like the footprints of goodness and manhood,  
Like sparks that will never be quenched,  
Like armor compounded of courage and tears."*

**O** MY brothers! With your glowing works the death-marked, tormented Jews in concentration camps and bunkers, in ghettos and forests, nourished themselves as with morsels of bread, frugally measured out, to be able to endure the great tortures, to be able to survive until the day of liberation.

O Peretz Markish! prophet of my generation, Beethoven of our Yiddish literature! From you I learned how to write the first lines of my songs. To you I came in the terrible days for renewal of confidence, inspiration, strength.

You kindled poets and readers the world over. Who can forget your heroic figures of the Jewish people: the Margolises, the Goor-Aryes, the Daudis, who fought alongside the Vasilis, Rakitis and the Sadvovskis in the awesome battles near Moscow and Stalingrad, until the victorious march on Berlin.

Your tragic verses of contemporary Jewish history, incandescent with your hatred against all that seeks to debase and besmirch the people, woven through with pathos, with deep love of the Yiddish cultural heritage, with socialist patriotism, with the just struggle of the Soviet peoples, will inspire generations. Your songs of the brotherhood and friendship of all peoples will be treasured forever by mankind.

You are the tall green mountain to which all poets of today and of tomorrow will ever look.

One needs the mighty force of your pen to be able to roar out our wrath for your fate and that of your colleagues—.

**I** RECALL the fateful days when the fascist hordes tramped over Europe, overrunning one country after another, and hurled themselves against the frontiers of the Soviet Union.

To our shores there came, with the cry of the Soviet-Jewish people, Feffer and Mikhoels, the representatives of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, their hands outstretched for unity.

The aura of battlefields came with them. In their eyes there still smouldered the ruins of Soviet cities.

Their first utterance: "Brothers!" pierced through walls constructed by Soviet haters over the years. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish-Americans responded to the call of the Soviet Jews and joined in the common struggle.

What a worthy chapter was then written in the history of American Jews! Thousands of workers, until late in the night, sat in shops at machines and sewed clothing for Red Army men. Mothers and grandmothers knitted for the Soviet front. Jewish sons and daughters enlisted in the U.S. Army and went to the fronts of war. Our people were ennobled by this brotherhood.

But unhappily there were some Jews who spurned this brotherhood of their own people, forged in the limitless sufferings wrought by Hitler's criminals. I think especially of the *Jewish Daily Forward* and other such organs and their writers who today in the face of our tragedy mix crocodile tears with cries of hate. Let no one think they acted differently before. When the emissaries of the Jews of the Soviet Union called upon the Jews of America to join hands with them, these specialists in anti-Sovieteering stuck their hands in their pockets. They would not even permit Feffer and Mikhoels to address the Jewish PEN club and its membership of writers.

I remember walking through the streets of New York with Feffer and Mikhoels. Bewildered, they kept asking why these Jewish writers would not even speak to them. Why they attacked a country which was defending the interests of all humanity? I tried to explain what hatred of Socialism had done to these people, and Feffer remarked: "But they will change, the people's victory over fascism will cure them."

Now Feffer is dead and Mikhoel's fate is a mystery. It is dreadful to think that the enemies of the Soviet Union were able to destroy them in

the midst of their own people. They were my friends, not the friends of those who now pretend horror at their deaths but who dreamt day and night of the destruction of Jewish culture so long as it flourished under Socialism. They were not the friends of such characters as the eminent *Forward* contributor, N. Chanin, who in the midst of war, in 1944, cried: "It is for the United States to fire the last shot in the direction of the Soviet Union."

As for Mr. Chanin's colleague, the journalist, R. Abramovitch, does he not remember and is he not proud that in 1945 he had the foresight to urge the United States to drop the A bomb on Soviet cities? Perhaps he had in mind a selective bomb that would spare Jewish homes?

To such disseminators of hatred and doom I say, "Do not desecrate our martyrs, done to death by conspirators who stabbed Socialism when they stabbed them."

A great tragedy befell the Jewish people of the Soviet Union. A calamity, however, that affected all the Soviet peoples. That evil men could deceive the Soviet people and many of their leaders, that there could be in some circles a lack of vigilance against anti-Semitism, that deadly and classic weapon of reaction, are harsh lessons. But the anguish of the Soviet peoples and their losses are certainly as great as ours. For it is they who toiled and bled to create the edifice of Socialism.

We reject the accusation of the enemies of Socialism that Yiddish writers were struck down by Socialist society. It was the aim of the perpetrators of these crimes, to make people think so. They would smear with the ordure of Capitalism—a system in whose fabric is woven crime, degradation and oppression of peoples—a system that has lifted millions out of darkness and servitude to unprecedented levels of culture and humanism.

Identify anti-Semitism with a country that saved millions of Jews from the Nazi gas chambers?

The Soviet Union which has abolished the barriers and hatreds which separate peoples under capitalism knows of no discrimination on the basis of race or color. Millions of Jews are represented in industry in public office and in all branches of culture and science.

It is a matter of record that in the most critical days of the war the Soviet commanders were ordered to put all trains, all means of transpor-

tation at the service of the Jewish masses threatened by the Nazi advance, as a matter of priority. It is a matter of record that Soviet citizens took in more than a million Jewish refugees, shared with them their bit of bread, welcomed them into community life, and entrusted them with important posts.

I say to my Jewish brothers and sisters: we must not permit those guilty of the crimes in the Soviet Union to gain their ends. We know what these are: to make us cynical and embittered, to sap our fight for peace and democracy.

Our faith in Socialism and human advance, cannot be diminished by mistakes or by the crimes committed in the course of its development. The new society growing out of the old still bears some of the evils of the old order, of greed and brutishness. The dying, as we have learned in bitterness, still lingers and has potency.

But the socialist peoples are fearlessly correcting their errors of the past. They are unmasking the crimes done by men they entrusted with power. The social system with the moral stamina to admit the worst about itself will not betray our hopes and expectations. Distortions of socialist teachings in regard to Yiddish culture are being corrected. The great legacy of David Bergelson, Peretz Markish, and Itzik Feffer, and the other martyrs is being gathered up for publication. Steps are being taken for Yiddish literature to assume its rightful place among those of the other nationalities of the USSR.

It is for us to renew our faith in culture, democracy and Socialism. We shall honor the memory of our fallen brothers by continuing the struggle for brotherhood and friendship with all those who want a world of peace. In that struggle the Jewish people through the depth of their suffering can bring their strength.

—Translated from the Yiddish by Martha Millet