



THE LETTER "LIFE" REFUSED TO PRINT

**The TRUTH
ABOUT JEWS
in the
SOVIET UNION**

By SOFIA FREY (Moscow)

With a foreword by J. M. Budish

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NOTE

The text of this "Open Letter" which LIFE magazine refused to publish is reprinted in full from the Yiddish daily, MORNING FREIHEIT. The author, Sofia Frey, is a teacher at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages. J. M. Budish, who wrote the preface, is an editor of MORNING FREIHEIT and author of PEOPLE'S CAPITALISM, recently published by International Publishers.

P R E F A C E

A word about how Sofia Frey came to write her Open Letter to LIFE Magazine.

The December 7, 1959, issue of LIFE published a lengthy article by its staff reporter Patricia Blake under the sensation-seeking headlines, "NEW AGONY FOR RUSSIAN JEWS: Anti-Semitic Drive Brings Suppression and Violence." Even those Jewish publications which are addicted to anti-Soviet cold war campaigns had to admit that the LIFE article may be assumed to be "merely a reiteration of what recently had been published in the general American and also in the Yiddish press." (*Day-Jewish Journal*, Editorial, December 6, 1959.) The Blake article, however, went to much greater extremes even than that section of the daily press that is always ready to pick up any anti-Soviet "information," however questionable on the face of it. All the scattered bits of gripes, rumors and wild reports of "incidents" that never occurred were gathered by Miss Blake in a single, attractively-contrived Madison Avenue package in order to "sell" the stale myth of Soviet anti-Semitism as "crisp and new-smelling" information.

The Yiddish daily, the *Morning Freiheit*, described LIFE's outpouring of "sympathy" with Soviet Jews as a "melodramatic rehash," both "repugnant and discouraging," which is bound to be resented bitterly by Soviet Jews. Indeed, when Miss Sofia Frey, a Soviet Jew and a teacher at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages, came across Patricia Blake's article in a Moscow library, it made her, in her own

words, "deeply indignant." On January 22, 1960, she sent her Open Letter to LIFE magazine with a note stating:

What Miss Blake says about the position of the Jews in the Soviet Union runs completely contrary to the facts. I am a Jewess. I hold a Master's degree in Economics and teach at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages. My life has always been closely connected with the life of my people and my country. I cannot ignore attempts to slander the policy of our Soviet Government and to distort the truth. Counting on your objectivity, Mr. Editor, I ask you to publish my Open Letter.

But in spite of the old and generally accepted maxim "*audiatur et altera pars*" (let the other side be heard), which is customarily observed by responsible journalism, LIFE failed to publish Miss Frey's Open Letter. She then sent a copy of that letter to the *Morning Freiheit* which published it in full (March 13 and 20), and from which it is published here.

The Open Letter speaks for itself. We would like, however, to make two observations throwing additional light on the reliability of LIFE's "information." The LIFE article claims: "The Nazis were able to murder 2,000,000 of their people [Jews] in the USSR partly because the Soviet Government made practically no attempts to evacuate them from the path of the advancing German armies." Compare this brazen falsification with the following two statements. Albert Einstein in an address before a Nobel prize banquet in New York, in December 1945, stated:

We do not forget the humane attitude of the Soviet Union who was the only one among the big powers to open her doors to hundreds of thousands of Jews when the Nazi armies were advancing in Poland.

International Conciliation, published by the Carnegie Peace Foundation, No. 389, April 1943, says:

Of some 1,750,000 Jews who succeeded in escaping the Axis since the outbreak of hostilities about 1,600,000 were evacuated by the Soviet Government from Eastern Poland and subsequently occupied Soviet territory. . . . About 150,000 others managed to reach Palestine, the United States and other countries beyond the seas.

As to the tale about "Anti-Semitic Drive Brings Suppression and Violence," this is no less a fabrication than the slanders about the evacuation. About the time of Patricia Blake's article in LIFE, the columnist of the *Day-Jewish Journal*, B. Z. Goldberg, completed a lengthy tour of the Soviet Union. And while Mr. Goldberg has in his reports over-emphasized the inevitable gripes of the surviving pre-Revolutionary generation, he did reach the following conclusion with regard to what he called the problem of those Jews:

But the problem consists not in pogroms, as we are told from time to time by the incompetent anti-Soviet propagandists who are doing us (Jews) a bearish [left-handed] favor. The problem also does not consist of any anti-Semitic policy on the part of the socialist governments. *There are no such things.* (My emphasis—JMB)

In another column Mr. Goldberg adds: "It is not my intention by any means to minimize the economic achievements of the Jews under the Soviet regime." (December 31, 1959)

It is well known that the Jews, like all other Soviet citizens, are guaranteed by the Constitution full equality "before the law, regardless of race and nationality," and that any discrimination because of race, color, religion or national origin, including any anti-Semitic manifestations, are treated as crimes against the state punishable under the law. That the law has been strictly enforced can be seen from the great achievements of the Soviet Jews in all fields of endeavor, which are discussed in Sofia Frey's Open Letter. As to the attitude of Soviet leadership, it is perhaps best described in the following statement made by Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, in his report to the Supreme Soviet, on January 14:

The current fascist anti-Semitic incidents in many cities of West Germany are a characteristic sign of the upsurge of reaction, whose evil maneuvers have long since been widely known to the world community. Many decades ago, during the period when Tzarist reaction was rampant, anti-Semitic pogroms had been organized by the "black hundred" (gangs) from time to time. Lenin, the Bolsheviks and all progressives, decisively combatted that ignominious manifestation.

In Germany Hitler aggressively fanned the flames of anti-Semitism. He suppressed all freedoms, ruthlessly crushed democratic rights. And he perpetrated all that in order to launch his bloody cause—to spark the war.

J. M. Budish

AN OPEN LETTER TO "LIFE" MAGAZINE

You claim in your article that a "campaign against Jews and Judaism" is now being waged in the Soviet Union. What facts do you cite in support of your claim? None. Obviously you could not, since there are none, nor can there be any any. What do you use in place of facts? References to anonymous witnesses and unsubstantiated claims that are, moreover, absurd.

Jews Among MD's

You claim, for example, that Jews in the Soviet Union have at most no access to higher education, government service, medicine, teaching and other professions.

Now, what are the facts? The polyclinic where I go for medical treatment, like all other clinics and other medical institutions in Moscow, has many Jews on its staff. According to official data of the Scientific and Methodological Section of the Moscow City Health Department, 17,936 doctors are employed in the city's medical institutions. Of these 6,709 are Jews. Among them are such eminent doctors, heads of big Moscow medical institutions, as Professor Berlin-Chertov, Professor David Vaz, Dr. Naum Altshuller, Doctor of Medical Science, Dr. Mendel Vaserman, Master of Medicine, Professor Zinovy Lurye, Professor Liber Nisnevich, Professor Yetim Pasyнков, and many others.

Jewish Teachers

As for college students and teachers, I myself teach at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages. Our teaching staff includes professors, docents and senior instructors who are Jews. There are, for example, Professor Ilya Galperin, Professor Elisa Rizel, Docent Isaac Salistra, and Senior Instructor Israel Shekhter. Among the undergraduates in all departments there are many Jewish young men and women.

The Lenin Teacher Training College in Moscow has a student body of 3,269, representing 30 nationalities. Of these 329 are Jews. Forty Jews are on the teaching staff.

Young people of many different nationalities are to be found at all the schools of higher education in the Soviet Union. Knowledge is the only requirement for entrance.

I have many friends and acquaintances among scientists and scholars who are Jews. One is Professor Joseph Braginsky, Doctor of Philology, who is editor-in-chief of the journal *Problems of Oriental Research*. Another is Lev Gatovsky, Doctor of Economics. Then, there are Jacob Khavinson, editor-in-chief of the journal *World Economics and International Relations*, and Elizaveta Khmelnitskaya, Doctor of Economics, who is a senior researcher at the Institute of World Economics.

You probably know, Miss Blake, the position of Jews in tsarist Russia. Before the October Revolution of 1917, only 30 out of every 100 Jews were gainfully employed. Within what was known as the

“Jewish pale” 25 per cent of the Jewish population lived by begging. Truthfully speaking, did you meet any unemployed Jews in the Soviet Union? I’m sure you didn’t, because there is no unemployment in the Soviet Union.

Letter from Jewish Tailor to Khrushchev

A book called *Face to Face With America: The Story of Premier Khrushchev’s Trip to the United States*, recently came off the press. It contains many letters to Khrushchev from ordinary people. One is from a tailor, S. M. Shapiro. He writes: “I have five children: three sons and two daughters. Three of them have finished secondary school in Moscow. My daughter, Nina, is in her fifth year at the Institute of Forestry. My son Leonid is a fitter at a factory. He is studying at college by correspondence. Another son, Boris, works at a printshop and also studies by correspondence, in the mathematics department of a teacher training institute. The twins Misha and Ganna are in the seventh grade in secondary school; they also attend a school giving sports training. All this education is free of charge. Could an ordinary tailor in the West with a family this size afford to give even one of his children an education?”

Jews in All Walks of Life

In the USSR you will find Jews among the scientists who built the Sputniks and among iron and steel

workers, among miners and collective farmers, among teachers and musicians, among all trades and professions!

It would take many pages of *Life* to list the names of all the prominent Soviet statesmen and civic leaders who are Jews. One is Veniamin Dymshitz, formerly chief engineer of the Bhilai steel mill projects in India, who was recently appointed a Minister of the USSR and head of the capital construction department of the State Planning Committee of the USSR. Colonel-General Jacob Kreizer, who holds a high post in the Soviet Army, was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation in 1959. Cabinet Minister Ilya Beliavicus, member of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian Republic, has been appointed to a leading post in the Republic's Economic Council. Leonid Paperny, once a building worker in Minsk, last year became Deputy Minister of Construction of Byelorussia. Israel Kazhdan is Deputy Chairman of the Minsk City Soviet. Ilya Egudin, chairman of one of the biggest collective farms in the Crimea, was recently elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine.

But you closed your eyes to all these facts, Miss Blake. You talk of "an alien nationality!"

Feeling, evidently, that your "arguments" won't hold water, you refer to Soviet newspapers, which you do not name, in which Jews are allegedly called "thieves" and "enemies of socialism." Which newspapers? I have never seen such things in Soviet publications. They could not have appeared in them. It is true that the Soviet press lashes out against persons

who steal public or personal property, against parasites, swindlers and other anti-social elements. But certainly no distinction is made concerning nationality. A thief is exposed because he is a thief, no matter what his nationality.

Jewish Culture

You say that Jewish culture is being suppressed in the USSR. That is just another invention. Here are some facts and figures giving a picture of the true state of affairs.

In 1959 the State Publishing House of Fiction and Poetry in Moscow put out, in Yiddish, editions of the classics of Yiddish literature, Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Moicher-Storim and I. L. Peretz. Between 1956 and 1958 the same publishing house issued a number of Sholem Aleichem's books in Russian translation in a total printing of 1,020,000 copies. Last year, to mark the centenary of the birth of that great Yiddish writer, several of his works were published as well as a six-volume edition of his collected works, in a total of 1,230,000 copies. Books by S. Galkin, Peretz Markish, L. Bergelson and Nister are published in Russian translations.

The Sovetsky Pisatel (Soviet Writer) Publishing House in Moscow has put out Russian translations of 50 books by contemporary Soviet Yiddish poets and prose writers in recent years. The total printing of these books amounts to more than 4,000,000 copies.

Yiddish Concerts

Yiddish concert groups and companies perform in cities all over the Soviet Union. The company directed by Nekhama Lifshitzaita, winner in a country-wide variety contest, has shown its dramatization of "Wandering Stars" in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kherson, Nikolayev, Kharkov, Lvov and many other cities. Mikhail Alexandrovich, Emmanuil Kaminka, Zinovy Shulman, Emil Gorovitz, Anna Guzik, Sidi Tal, Pantofel-Nechetskaya and many other well-known stage artists perform with great success in Yiddish concerts. Riga has a Yiddish choir of 100 persons that is highly popular. It is led by the prominent musician Israel Abramis. In Vilnius a Yiddish theatre company is presenting "Tevye the Milkman."

Religious Jews

You devote much space in your article, Miss Blake, to the position of the Jewish religion in the USSR. Here, too, you distort the truth, to say the least. In Zhitomir Region, for example, there are six synagogues; in Poltava Region there are three, in Vinnitsa Region five, in Khmel'nitskaya Region three, in the Transcarpathian Region three, in Chernigov Region three, and in Moldavia eleven. There are synagogues in Leningrad, Minsk, Lvov, Odessa, Kherson, Nikolayev, Berdichev, Dniepropetrovsk, Kirovograd and so on. They fully satisfy the requirements of the religious Jews.

You also claim that the Moscow synagogues are

neglected and dilapidated. How could you have made such a claim. I have visited all three of the capital's synagogues and they are all in excellent condition.

At the Central Synagogue you could have seen a book with words on the cover in Russian and Hebrew: "The Moscow Jewish Religious Community. Visitors' Book." It contains hundreds of entries made by foreign visitors. Here are some of them:

"I was very happy to discover that the Jewish people in the USSR can profess their religion as guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution," says Mr. Holsman, of Boston. "Your synagogue is amazing!" write Mr. and Mrs. Gammler, of Buffalo, New York. "We were happy to find that Jews in the USSR have such freedom of religion." Another American, Mr. Shwartzbard, says: "The synagogues in Moscow made a brilliant impression on me and my children." Conrad Russel, of Lancashire, England, and Jimmy Riordan, of Portsmouth, England, emphasize in their entries that "the Jewish people in the USSR are equal among all the other peoples. They have a great future."

As you can see, Miss Blake, the opinions of foreigners, including those of your fellow-countrymen, differ from yours. My friends who are orthodox Jews tell me that before the Passover matzoh is baked at state bakeries under the supervision of the religious community. It is sold in state bread stores. Consumer cooperatives supply kosher meat under an agreement with the Community. Religious calendars are printed in state printshops.

From all this it is clear that the Soviet State does

not put any obstacles in the way of the Jewish religion. In the Soviet Union freedom of worship is guaranteed by the Constitution. This is true for all religions, including the Jewish.

“Pogroms”

As for your “reports,” Miss Blake, of Jewish “Pogroms” that are supposed to have taken place in the Ukraine, it would be hard to imagine a more ridiculous assertion. You did not indicate where they took place, of course, for the simple reason that in the Soviet Union there have never been pogroms nor could there be. The very soil of anti-Semitism has been eliminated in the USSR. If a chauvinistic attack against persons of Jewish or any other nationality ever did take place, it would immediately be investigated, like any criminal act, and the guilty would be made to answer for it according to the full severity of Soviet law.”

That is generally known, in my opinion. It is also well known that an end has been put in the Soviet Union, to the negative phenomena of past years, when unjustified repressive measures were taken against some citizens, among whom there were Jews. These phenomena were resolutely condemned by the Communist Party, the Government of the USSR and the Soviet people, and stern punishment was meted out to the guilty persons. Violations of Soviet legality have been ended once and for all.

Evacuation of Jews During Nazi Invasion

You go to monstrous lengths in your efforts to prove

that anti-Semitism exists in the USSR. You assert, for instance, that during the war the Soviet Government made practically no attempt to evacuate the Jews from the path of the advancing German armies. But the truth of the matter is that, notwithstanding the exceptionally difficult conditions, the Soviet authorities made truly heroic efforts to save Soviet citizens, Jewish families included, from extermination by the Hitlerites. No one before you has ever even thought of questioning that fact. I can tell you what Andre Blumel, President of the Zionist Federation of France, who recently visited the Soviet Union, said. He declared at a press conference in Paris that millions of Jewish survivors owe their lives to the Soviet system.

You hardly can be unaware of that, Miss Blake. One can therefore only draw the conclusion that your article is not the fruit of accidental delusions or misunderstanding. You deliberately distort the truth. The sole purpose of your article is to misinform public opinion. What is especially regrettable is the fact that it has appeared at a time when Soviet-American relations are beginning to improve. Your article pursues the opposite aim—of inciting distrust and enmity—and this, I feel is detrimental to the interests of both the Soviet and American peoples.

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