

this magazine are largely reprints of older articles without Jewish content from Tass and Pravda; and of the 16,000 issues printed, some 12,000 are exported — leaving 4,000 copies for the entire Jewish population.

In contrast to this situation, one need only look at the state of other minorities even smaller than the Jewish one. The Maris, an Asian group numbering 540,000, have seven newspapers and published 49 books in their language in 1962, while no Yiddish books at all were published from 1959-1964. The Yakut, another Asian group of 236,000, have ten newspapers and in 1962 published 109 books in their language. Even a group as small as 132,000, the Gypsies, have a state theater, while Jews do not.

For the Jews, Hebrew is also banned and Jewish contributions to the Russian past are officially ignored or minimized. The first edition of the "Large Soviet Encyclopedia" carried 116 pages about Jews. The second and present one reduces this to two pages.

Contact with foreign Jews banned

Although the Soviet Communist Party is officially against all religions, the state, as distinguished from the Party, does claim to guarantee the right of religious freedom (Decree of the Council of Peoples' Commissars, January 23, 1918). This includes the right exercised by the Russian Orthodox, Protestant, and Islamic groups to establish official ties with coreligionists abroad.

In 1962, for example, the Orthodox Church entered the World Council of Churches. In contrast to this, official ties between Soviet and foreign Jews are totally banned. Although Moscow's Chief Rabbi did visit North America in 1968 on a strictly supervised tour, no other contacts with foreign Jews are permitted. Jews who do meet with visiting Jews inside Russia are denounced as "loafers and traitors" by the Soviet press (Trud, Soviet Trade Union paper, June 1, 1963).

Judaism alone of all other religious groups is not allowed to have a central coordinating body. Unlike other religions, it is unable to publish periodicals and devotional literature, or manufacture ritual objects.

Although both the Christian and Islamic churches have published editions of their Bibles in the thousands, since 1917 the government has not permitted the publication of a Hebrew Bible. Prayerbooks too, which are available to other groups (eg. in 1956, 25,000 copies of the Baptist hymnal were printed), were not printed for Jews from 1917 to 1956. Even then only 3,000 copies were printed and as late as 1968, only 10,000 more had been added.

While the Orthodox Church has seven schools for the training of priests and the Moslems are able to send students to Cairo, the Jewish community has one seminary in Moscow from which nine of the 13 students were banned in 1962 because they were supposed to lack proper residence permits. This leaves Soviet Jewry with about 60 elderly rabbis. In addition, 4/5 of all synagogues have been closed; so that only 60 or so remain open today.

All of this is not to say that the situation for any religion is a good one; but the facts point out clearly that in addition to the disadvantages other religions may suffer, Judaism is the object of a deliberate attempt at religious oppression.

Is the Jew in general Russian society penalized for being Jewish? It appears that he is. Soviet Jews, a high proportion of whom are professionals, depend heavily on higher education, but a 1964 report by Nicholas DeWitt, a specialist formerly of the Harvard Russian Research Center, noted that the quota system in university admissions policies works "to the particularly severe disadvantage of the Jewish population."

Since 1935 the percentage of Jews in higher education has dropped over 10% although the Jewish proportion of the population decreased only .4%.

In political life too, Jewish involvement has been curtailed. In 1937, 5.6% of the deputies in the Supreme Soviet were Jewish, while only .5% were Jewish in 1967. There has also been a decline in the number of Jews with leadership positions in the Party and fewer Jews than ever are now members of the Soviet diplomatic corps.

Blatant anti-Semitism can also be found on the Russian scene. Circumcision is denounced as barbarous, synagogue leaders

are accused of using kosher slaughtering to exploit their congregations, and Passover like other holidays is accused of "giving rise to nationalist feeling, poisoning Jewish minds, and killing love for the motherland (Sovietskaya Moldavia, official government paper in Kishinev, June 23, 1964)."

Jewishness is thus linked to political subversion. The tragedy is however not only that such distortions do appear, it is that the Soviet authorities do nothing to expose them as fraudulent. Their silence betokens their support of these attacks.

The largest actual anti-Semitic campaign took place from 1961 to 1965 as part of a series of "economic trials" which saw the reintroduction of capital punishment for embezzlement and bribery. Of the several hundred executed, more than 50% were Jews — who constitute 1.09% of the population.

The Soviet press focused almost exclusively on the role of Jews in the "crimes" and produced so much in the way of propaganda that a wave of protest followed, highlighted by Bertrand Russell's appeal to Khrushchev (Pravda February 28, 1963.) In 1965, the International Commission of Jurists concluded that there had been an insidious anti-Jewish campaign, that a disproportionate number of Jews had been sentenced, and that "the primary object of Soviet policy is to find scapegoats" in the Jews.

The present trials in Leningrad, with their mention of Zionist conspiracies et al, are reminiscent of earlier such crudities by the Soviet authorities. Although Jews are being attacked as traitors, past experience with Soviet use of this and other such epithets should alert the world to the true nature of the Soviet trials.

The evidence seems conclusive. Singled out as both religion and nationality, the Jews of the Soviet Union are undergoing an unremitting programme aimed at their obliteration as a people. But a turning point may have been reached. For a while Soviet authorities claimed that the decline in Jewish cultural and religious life was a result of the rejection of Judaism by young Soviet Jews; however the opposite seems true.

Underground schools springing up

Each year the crowds of Jews at Simchat Torah rallies in the Soviet Union grow, as they express their growing sense of selfhood as Jews. Letters from the Soviet Union indicate that underground Hebrew classes are sprouting up among young Jews. Although most of their applications have been turned down, tens of thousands have also applied for exit permits to emigrate to Israel. Several hundred of the more daring have circulated open letters to the Soviet government, the UN Human Rights Commission, U Thant, the Red Cross, and Golda Meir asking that they be allowed the guaranteed right of emigration to Israel.

The issues are therefore clear cut. For those Jews who wish to remain in the Soviet Union, the demand is that they be given a measure of religious and cultural freedom equivalent to that which is possessed by other Soviet minorities. The Soviets are being asked to live up to their own and international law by giving Soviet Jewry rights equal to those of other groups.

For those Jews who wish to emigrate to Israel, the demand is that they be allowed to do so. The UN Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination both guarantee the right of any people to leave any country; and therefore in desiring to exercise this right, Soviet Jews are fully justified.

After two refusals from the Soviet government for an exit permit, D.S. Drabkin, a Moscow Jew, captured the frustration and determination of Soviet Jewry in the following appeal to the government:

We would like to understand on what grounds the departure of Jews is forbidden in the USSR. It is clear to us that trees which have grown on Soviet soil belong to the Soviet State. But we are not gifts of nature to Russia. We were born of, and reared by, our Jewish parents, and not by the Russian soil. We know of no legislative act by which the Jews, residing on the territory of the USSR, have been made the possession of any persons or organizations. We have the right to be the masters of our own fate and we have not ceded this right to anyone.



People mass at a recent Toronto rally to protest the oppression of Soviet Jews.

Bertrand Russell's letter to Pravda

Between 1961-1965, the government of the USSR conducted trials aimed at those accused of economic crimes. It was at this time that the death penalty was re-instated in the USSR for economic offences. More than half of the defendants were Jewish and the Soviet newspapers played up the fact with many anti-Jewish editorials and articles. There were a large number of executions with practically none of the Jewish defendants acquitted. Most of the others were either pardoned or let off with light sentences.

One of the greatest champions of the Russian Jews during this period turned out to be a friend of the Soviet Union, the late Lord Bertrand Russell. Martin Buber had convinced the British philosopher of the plight of the Jews. An example of one of the several correspondences sent by Bertrand Russell to the Soviet government follows.

To the Editor of Pravda:

Dear Sir,

I am a friend of the Soviet Union, of her people and of her desire to improve and advance the conditions under which her citizens live. I am an ardent campaigner for close and genuinely co-operative relations between the people and governments of Western countries and the Soviet Union. I am a passionate opponent of the cold war and of all attempts to increase hostility, exploit differences and add to the terrible dangers facing mankind today. I know that no Soviet citizen will misunderstand me or think that when I speak frankly I wish to harm the Soviet Union or cooperate with those who promote the cold war.

One of the tests of true friendship is the ability to speak frankly without fear of being taken for an enemy or of being misunderstood. I hope, therefore, that you will appreciate the spirit in which I am now writing — one of concern for the Soviet people and not a spirit of condemnation.

The Jews have been subjected to a long and continuous persecution in the history of Europe. The culmination of this cruelty was the wholesale extermination of millions of Jews during our lifetimes, one of the most barbaric crimes in all human history. If ever a people were deserving of understanding and sympathetic treatment after harsh suffering, it is the Jews of Europe.

I should hope, therefore, that the Jews would be permitted full cultural lives, religious freedom and the rights of a national group, in practice as well as in law.

During the last years of Stalin's life, Soviet Jews were totally deprived of their national culture and the means of expressing it. Leading intellectuals were imprisoned or executed by extralegal practices which have since been condemned.

I am a lifelong non-believer in any religion. I have written and campaigned against superstition. Nonetheless, I believe that the freedom to practise religious views should be allowed Jews of the Soviet Union in the same manner that such freedom is granted people of other religious persuasion. I am concerned that the process of restitution of much smaller groups are more plentiful and the closure of synagogues and shortage of religious facilities have impaired Jews in the pursuit of their beliefs. I am troubled that there should be articles in Soviet journals of many Republics expressing hostility of Jewish people as such.

I understand the objections to economic offences such as were expressed in the letter to me by Premier Khrushchev. I feel, however, that the death penalty upon citizens accused of these crimes harms the Soviet Union and allows those hostile to her to unjustly malign her. I consider the fact that 60 per cent of those executed are Jews to be gravely disturbing. I fervently hope that nothing will take place which obliges us to believe that Jews are receiving unjust treatment in contradiction to the law, and that those who break Soviet laws concerning economic offences will be rehabilitated instead of being put to death. I cannot too strongly appeal for understanding of the difficulty experienced by those in the West who are working dedicatedly to ease tension, promote peaceful co-existence, and to end the cold war. These objects are harmed by events which those who desire the cold war can exploit and which trouble us who wish peace and good relations. I write as a friend, but one whose friendship requires honesty.

Yours sincerely,
Bertrand Russell.

(In 1965, when the executions had already taken place, the International Commission of Jurists published a report which labelled the entire series of trials as legally illegitimate and travesties of justice.)