



We do not wish to pass judgement on the Soviet Union with respect to the principles on which its political and economic systems are founded. Beyond the problem of ideologies, our concern is for the rights and freedoms of the 3,000,000 Jews in the Soviet Union. As Jews we would protest discrimination against our brethren in any country, and therefore we take our stand at this time against the repression of our people in the Soviet Union.

We have two demands: neither of them require the Soviet government to allow its Jewish population extra privileges; both of them only ask the Soviet government to live up to its own and international law.

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.

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 of which have been signed by the Soviet Union, guarantee the right of any people to leave any country; and so in desiring to exercise this right, Soviet Jews are fully justified.

Action Committee

By MARK SHAPIRO

At 8:30 am on June 15, 1970, nine Riga Jews were apprehended at Leningrad's Smolny Airport as they were walking from the terminal to the airplane. At about the same time, eight Leningrad Jews were arrested in scattered places: at work, at home, on assignment some distance from the city, and on vacation as far away as Odessa.

That same morning police searches were made in the homes of those arrested with the given aim of removing "the tools of crime." What were these "tools?" They consisted of the following: Hebrew grammars, Jewish history books, letters of appeal to leave for Israel and post cards from Israel. In other words, those materials by which the newly arrested men identified themselves as Jews were the materials that seemed to constitute their "crime."

But what reasons have we for believing that the Soviet government is carrying on an anti-Jewish campaign? What reasons are there for believing that more than all other minorities in the USSR, the Jewish community has been singled out for persecution? The facts as they follow should speak for themselves.

According to the official Soviet census of 1959, there are 2,268,000 Jews in the USSR. However, most observers contend that the actual number is at least three million, since the census takers accepted respondents' answers without checking their documents and because of this a good many Jews, particularly those married to non-Jews, may have suppressed their Jewish origin. Be that as it may, according to the census, Jews comprise 1.09% of the total Soviet population.

As a minority, the Jews are unique in the Soviet Union in that they are officially given the dual character of both nationality and religion. Therefore, like the Ukrainians, Georgians and so forth, they have a fixed legal status as a nationality, although they alone lack a continuous geographic territory.

Children born of Jewish parents are automatically considered Jews and their "national identity as such is stamped on the "internal passport" that they as Soviet citizens must carry. In addition, the Jews are also formally recognized by the Soviet "Council of Affairs of Religious Cults" as a religious group.

Benefits however, do not accrue from this

unique status as religion and nationality. Other religions are not linked to a nationality, but because Judaism is, attacks upon it are necessarily understood as general attacks on the entire Jewish nationality.

Finally, this understanding of Jews as a nationality plus the ties of peoplehood that associate Soviet Jews with a world Jewish concentrated in the West, also make Soviet Jews vulnerable to accusations of spying and disloyalty.

During the Stalin "Black Years" of 1948-1953, hundreds of specifically Jewish leaders were imprisoned and executed for their "cosmopolitanism." The despair was so great among Jews that many had their belongings packed in expectation of Siberian exile. The climax came in January 1953 when Pravda announced the existence of an American-Zionist-inspired plot under the auspices of "Jewish murder-physicians" who planned to assassinate Soviet leaders.

The whole campaign only ended after Stalin's death when the plot was exposed as a hoax, but until this day inuendos of the same libelous accusations are to be found in the Soviet press.

As the 11th largest "nationality" in the S.U., the Jews should be entitled to free development of their cultural identity which is a right stated in the Soviet Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 22), and the 1962 UNESCO convention against discrimination in education. They do not receive this right, while other minority groups do.

In the 1959 census, 400,000 Jews gave Yiddish as their native language, yet there is not a single Yiddish school or class today in the S.U. This situation exists despite the fact that the occasional Yiddish or Hebrew concerts given by foreign artists are invariably sold-out, thereby indicating Jewish interest in Jewish culture.

There are no Jewish educational facilities because they are banned. In a country which into the 1940's had the world's largest Yiddish school system, the only university in Yiddish in the world, 14 permanent theatrical companies, three daily papers and five literary journals in Yiddish, there is now only one monthly Yiddish magazine, Sovietish Heimland, with a circulation of 16,000. However the articles used for even

The unending plight of Soviet Jewry

Prepared by

The Action Committee for Soviet Jewry