Soviet Union: Today and A Look Back

Stalin died on March 3, 1953. While Stalinism as a system underlying the Soviet party and state machinery has survived his death, Soviet life in the following 20 years has acquired some important new social features and, to a certain degree, even a new direction. The ideology and the Leninist heritage, as understood by its present exponents and interpreters, continued to play an important role in determining the policies of the regime; but the Communist party has been forced also to give consideration to the day-to-day needs of the technologically changing society, and especially to the new mood and unorthodox ways of the younger people, who did not know Lenin and for whom even Stalin was a figure out of the historic past.

Growth of Dissidence

The most important development in the post-Stalin era was the growth, mostly among the new intelligentsia, of dissident movements whose ideologies oddly enough corresponded in many ways to the spectrum of prerevolutionary Russian thinking, ranging from the legal reformers steeped in constitutionality to the believers in a special Russian destiny, to dissidents among labor groups representing the old Russian social democracy. The opposition also included groups among the national minorities: Ukrainians, Tatars, Jews, and some nationals from Caucasus.

The most conspicuous dissident group, the Committee for Human Rights, headed by the noted scientist Andrei Sakharov, while remaining within the legal framework, expressed unorthodox views on matters ranging from illegal deportations to the right of free emigration, and did not hesitate to address its communications directly to the United Nations. In March 1972 Sakharov suggested that the committee discuss measures resolving problems connected with the "forced resettlement of the Volga Germans, Kalmuks... Crimean Tatars..." and undertake a study of the "causes of the crimes of genocide committed by Stalin's administration."

An important statement circulating in Moscow announced the formation of Seyatel (The Planter), a group working toward the establishment of a
social-democratic party in Russia. The statement, prefaced by a scholarly discussion, outlined a comprehensive program in the tradition of Russian Menshevism. As recently as July 1972, an underground appeal in Moscow called for improved living conditions. It held up as example the Polish workers who rioted in Gdansk in 1970, forcing the resignation of Polish Communist party leader Wladislaw Gomulka. The authors of this unusual appeal were not known, but they probably were technicians and workers, who were interested mainly in wages, pensions, and the living conditions of the masses. They went so far as to call for an immediate strike to achieve both their direct aim, and the larger goal of political freedom for all.

Samizdat, the underground illegal publications, spread throughout the Soviet Union and became an effective channel for presenting the views of the various ideological groups. One of its better known products was Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytiy (“Chronicle of Current Events”), a general democratic publication which first appeared in 1968 and, according to a high-level decision in February 1972, was to be immediately suppressed. Other publications were Veche (old Russian Common Council), which focused on national Russia, and Ukrainsky Visnik (“Messenger of the Ukraine”). At times Samizdat published articles and even books by authors who otherwise would not have been published, including Aleksandr Solzhenytsin, the Russian Nobel-Prize winner, and short-story writer Lidya Chukovskaya. Some three years ago Valery Chalidze, a physicist, founded Obschestvenye Problemy (“Social Problems”), a mimeographed periodical which was issued openly without being submitted to censorship, and gave the address of the publication and the names of contributors. Some of these publications were short-lived, some were still being published. All expressed unorthodox political, religious, social, and literary views, a phenomenon that would have been unthinkable in the days of Stalin.

Dissidents were subjected to police harassment, detention in mental institutions, and internment in labor camps. Pressure was intensified as the Soviet Union moved toward a rapprochement with the West. The crackdown led to the arrest of dozens of dissidents in the Ukraine, Crimea, Russia proper, and elsewhere, among them the well-known historian Pyotr Yakir, son of the Jewish General Yona Yakir who had been executed during the Stalin era; Yuri Shikhanovich, a mathematician, and Ivan Svitlichny, a Ukrainian writer. The writer Vladimir Bukovsky was sentenced to seven years in prison and labor camp. Special instructions were issued by the Central Committee of the Party noting that improved relations with the West should not deter Soviet writers from adherence to Marxist philosophy and from the struggle against “subjectivism” and “revisionist” art conceptions.

Recently, Moscow took steps to rid itself of the more vocal dissidents by permitting them to go abroad; some were granted exit visas to go to Israel. There was little hope that any of them would be permitted to return to the
Soviet Union. In this group were Aleksandr Yesenin-Volpin and Roman Rutman, mathematicians; Valery Chalidze, a physicist; Yuri Glazov, an orientalist; and Yuri Titov, an artist. Permission to go abroad was also given to biologist Zhores Medvedev, who had been active in the civil-rights movement and had been committed to a mental hospital in 1970 (AJYB 1972 [Vol. 73], p. 533). Iosif Brodsky, a Russian poet, who in 1964 had been sentenced to a term in labor camp as a "parasite," left Russia for the United States (AJYB, 1968 [Vol. 69], p. 501).

The departure of Yesenin-Volpin and Chalidze, the resignation of Andrei Tverdokhlebov (AJYB, 1972 [Vol.73], p. 533), and the arrest of other active leaders of the Committee for Human Rights, may create a serious problem for this center of intellectual dissidents. Sakharov, who had always been treated with special deference because of his great achievements in developing the Soviet hydrogen bomb, did not hesitate to plead for the dissidents and to continue to express his unorthodox views. However, there were reports that his position had become less secure and that the secret police was prepared to deal with him. Two of his stepchildren have been ousted from their school, and there was talk of his going abroad on a lecture tour. There were also reports that Andrei Sinyavsky, who had been sentenced to forced labor in 1966 for publishing anti-Soviet works abroad, was released and planned to go abroad (AJYB, 1970 [Vol.71], p.460), and that Yuri Galanskov, a dissident poet, died in a labor camp in Mordovia (AJYB, 1970 [Vol.71], p.461).

Yekaterina A. Furtseva, the Soviet minister of culture, renewed her attack on Solzhenytsin, who, she stated, was not only opposed to the Soviet society, but offended the very dignity of the Soviet people.

Steps have been taken to reinforce the apparatus of political supervision in the Red Army, where some dissidents have apparently succeeded in attracting lower officer cadres (Krasnaya Zvezda, Moscow, March 25, 1972).

Old Russian Tradition Glorified

Recently there have been indications of a new and growing interest, even glorification, of old Russian traditions and of the role of the Russians in the multinational Soviet Union. In a way, Stalin, himself, initiated this trend when, at the end of World War II, he toasted “the Russian people” as the most outstanding of the peoples who made up the Soviet Union, “endowed with a clear brain, stable character, and endurance.” Soviet magazines published poetry extolling Russia, and Soviet society showed an ever-increasing interest in the Russian past, its churches, icons, and folklore. In an album of works by a Soviet painter, Ilya Glazunov, issued in Moscow in 1972, the first reproduction was Russian Earth, and the last, Rus (Russia), both executed in a traditional Russian national art form—an old Russian citadel around a monastery. Other Glazunov works included Russian North, Russian
Song and Kitezh (an old legendary city). Many depicted an old Russian church and emphasized the continuity between the old and new Russia. The nationalistic mood spreading throughout Russia was intensified by the increasing fear of the neighbor to the east, the Chinese, whose continuing growth most Russians considered "an immediate danger."

This new emphasis on old Russia was obviously acknowledged by the Kremlin ideologists as an important, if not always Marxist, element in official Soviet literature. The periodicals Molodaya Gvardia and Nash Sovremennik reflected the new trend that clearly had its roots in the slavophilism of Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891), who rejected Europe and the West and advocated unlimited autocracy and militancy for Greek Orthodoxy. Molodaya Gvardia, with its russkost (profoundly Russian thinking), and its editor Victor Chalmaev were also fostering Russian chauvinism, which probably was offensive to many of its readers. As early as 1969, the liberal Novy Mir openly protested against this trend. While this upsurge of emotional attachment to historic roots was generally a natural reaction to the events of World War II and its aftermath, it served to point up the difference in the treatment of the various nationalities in the USSR.

Nationalities

After many years of proclaiming the "complete solution" of the nationality question on the basis of respect for the national integrity of the various peoples of the Soviet Union, Kremlin leaders came out with a proposal to revise the boundaries of some of the ethnic republics for the more efficient coordination of the country's complex economic system. Communist party leader Leonid I. Brezhnev had hinted at such changes during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Soviet Union. And Voprosy Ekonomiki ("Problems of Economics"), in its December 1972 issue, quoted Lenin as having said that the ethnic composition of the population was not the only, or most important, factor in establishing the boundary lines of the ethnic republics. The Soviet official line was that in the course of 50 years various nationalities had been successfully welded together and were more interested in socialist construction than in their national past. To offset the new approach, Soviet authorities celebrated the autonomy of the Caucasian groups, the Chechen and the Ingush, who had been expelled by Stalin and later rehabilitated and returned to their native land by Khrushchev.

Some nationally developed republics like Georgia maintained their own way of life in a climate of nonconformity. There were reports of riots in Kaunas (Lithuania) and arrests in the Ukraine. Some 20,000 Crimean Tatars petitioned the Politburo to put an end to "terror . . . and discrimination," and to permit them to return to their native Crimea from where they had been deported by Stalin and which now was officially a part of the Ukraine.
demanded redress in public demonstrations. Some even went in groups to the Crimea, but the authorities refused to give them the necessary registration permits.

**Economic Life**

There were reports of a decision by the Soviet authorities to consolidate the approximately 50,000 industrial plants of the country into a system of large government corporations, each managing a group of related factories. The plan, to be implemented over a number of years, was to place operational responsibilities somewhere between the Moscow center and the local plants. The old ills of inefficient management continued to plague the economy, and it was reported the planned increases of consumer-goods production would have to be cut. Soviet planners complained that local enterprises were investing too much money in low-priority projects and in unnecessary construction. Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin stated that economic growth in 1972 was the lowest in a decade. At the same time, and in a move to bolster the morale of the workers, it was reported that personal income taxes in the lowest income brackets were being gradually reduced and the minimum base income revised upward, thus raising the real income of the lowest-paid workers.

The poor harvest brought more problems, forcing Moscow to arrange for heavy purchases of grain from Western countries. Notwithstanding rigid supervision, there still existed in the USSR illegal underground "private" enterprises, with large numbers of persons operating as producers, suppliers, or workers, and many customers obviously ready to buy at high prices products not available in the official market. In Georgia, many local officials and black-marketeers were discovered to be involved in such an enterprise; all were brought to trial. As far as could be learned from the press, Soviet authorities were handling these malfeasances without too much publicity; certainly without the severity and publicity used in conducting the so-called economic trials of 1961-1966, in which many defendants were Jews and their names were singled out for special mention. (AJYB, 1963 [Vol.64], pp. 352-53).

**Foreign Relations**

Soviet leaders have long viewed Western capitalism, and particularly the United States system, as being in a state of stagnation that would inevitably lead to collapse. Since Stalin's death, the more pragmatic Kremlin leaders, after a thorough exploration of conditions in Western countries, gradually came to realize that the "moribund" capitalist system had adjusted itself to the postwar situation. Consequently, Moscow looked for a detente in
Soviet-American relations and some sort of rapprochement, or at least a breathing spell in its relations with the rest of the Western world. As time went on, the USSR emphasized reconciliation and extension of economic and cultural exchange, despite some internal opposition. It would appear that the Brezhnev line focused on strategic equality with the United States and recognition by West Germany of postwar frontiers in Eastern Europe.

President Nixon's visit to Moscow in May 1972 was in many ways an acknowledgment of, and consent to, the new Moscow line of reconciliation. The profound changes in the Kremlin's outlook were emphasized by the fact that the Nixon visit was not postponed after the American mining of North Vietnamese harbors. For the first time in many years Soviet-American relations were sufficiently improved to create conditions favorable to increased trade.

In May 1972 a treaty was signed by the United States and the Soviet Union limiting defensive strategic weapons of each of the contracting parties to 200 anti-missile missiles. Negotiations were continuing for the limitation of other arms, including offensive weapons.

The era of Sino-Soviet amity had long passed. Moscow intensified its propaganda war against China and, as though to underline the seriousness with which Soviet leaders viewed their conflict with Mao and the situation in the Far East, the number of Soviet troops along the Soviet-Chinese border was brought up to 49 mechanized divisions, a very substantial part of the total Soviet forces. Moscow also reinforced the already close links with Mongolia, where apparently substantial Soviet army personnel was stationed. While both Mongolia and China looked for improvement in their relations with one another, Ulan Bator's dependence on Moscow and other East European countries imposed limits on Chinese initiatives.

Concurrent with the Soviet Union's quest for reconciliation with the United States, it reiterated that its warm relations with, and support of, the Arab states fighting the "Israeli imperialist aggressors" would continue. In pursuing its pro-Arab line, the Kremlin leaders continued to ignore the reactionary regimes in some of the Arab countries, as well as the virulently anti-Communist appeals voiced by openly hostile Libya and Egypt. Soviet military "observers" and army personnel were removed from Egypt in July 1972, but Moscow gave assurances to President Anwar al-Sadat that Egypt would continue to be supplied with spare parts and replacements for Soviet arms.

Satellite Countries

Moscow maintained close relations with the satellite countries in Eastern Europe. While the degree of closeness differed somewhat, depending on geographic factors, national tradition, and military considerations, all these countries remembered the Dubček experiment in Czechoslovakia (1968) and
were behaving accordingly. The order of the satellite countries’ dependency on, and closeness to, the Soviet Union was as follows: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary. Rumania under Nicolae Ceausescu proclaimed that it was a loyal member of the Soviet bloc but in fact continued its policy of friendship with countries outside COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and insisted on its own program of economic integration. Communist Albania continued to assert its total independence of the USSR, feeling closer to Mao’s China. Tito’s Yugoslavia had its own brand of Communism and pursued its own “road to socialism,” and maintained relations with both East and West. The Soviet Union exercised de facto control over its East European allies through the COMECON system which, unlike arrangements in Western Europe, was based on strict loyalty to Leninist doctrine and meant Soviet domination. The so-called Brezhnev doctrine, enunciated by Moscow in 1968, limited even further the freedom of “socialist” countries, since Moscow arrogated to itself the right to intervene in areas where “socialism is imperiled” and to be the sole judge of what constituted such “peril” and when it was imminent (AJYB, 1969 [Vol. 70], p. 385-86).

Except for Rumania, and perhaps to a certain extent also Hungary, the members of COMECON accepted the Brezhnev doctrine. There was nothing that the post-Dubček government of Gustave Hušak could do to assert its independence, even if it had such intentions. Bulgaria and Poland were economically dependent on the Soviet Union and had to agree. Hungary, under Janos Kádár, adapted itself to the situation, but maintained its pragmatism in dealing with economic problems. It introduced substantial reforms without, however, provoking the wrath of the Soviet Union by touching the fundamental social structure.

It is difficult to establish any direct relationship between a satellite state’s closeness to the Soviet Union and its treatment of its Jewish community. Some such relationship undoubtedly existed, but the situation of the Jews was also related to the size of their community, local Jewish traditions, and degree of assimilation. Thus, the Jewish community of Rumania, numbering some 90,000, maintained an extensive program of religious and cultural activities, including maintenance of kosher establishments, a newspaper, and a Yiddish theater. Hungary’s 80,000 Jews had a functioning religious community, a rabbinical seminary unique in Eastern Europe, a Jewish gymnasium (high school) and a substantial publishing program (the 15th volume of the Monumenta Hungariae Judaica was in production).

While some 8,000 Jews remained in Poland and the secular Social and Cultural Union of Polish Jews continued to exist, there was very little Jewish life. Folks-shtimme was still being published, but its readership was small. The Yiddish State Theater was functioning, but its audiences were mainly non-Jews who followed the plays in translation. Jewish life in Poland, after
the antisemitic outbreak under Gomulka and the forced departure of large numbers of Jewish activists and intellectuals, continued to disintegrate.

In Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, with some 7,000 and 14,000 Jews, respectively, the Jewish communities were restricted in the type of activities they could undertake. In Czechoslovakia, where Soviet influence on the treatment of the Jewish community was gradually making itself felt, the situation has recently deteriorated. In Yugoslavia, with its unique geopolitical situation, the 7,000-member Jewish community and its secular communal structure continued to develop without hindrance. It maintained relations with Jewish congregations abroad and with Israel, and carried on a wide variety of secular cultural activities.

Party Apparatus

There were no changes in the collective leadership of the Soviet party and state machinery. Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksei Kosygin, and Nikolai Podgorny retained their posts as secretary general of the Communist party, chairman of the Council of Ministers and chairman of the Supreme Soviet, respectively. There were no Jews among the ruling 15-member Politburo.

In the wake of the internal debate on relations with the United States, Pyotr Shelest was removed from his post as secretary general of the Ukrainian Communist party. He was replaced by Vladimir Shcherbitsky, but retained membership in the Politburo. A reputed conservative, Shelest was reported to be strongly opposed to Brezhnev's "conciliation-with-the-West" policy, endorsed by the leadership of the party. It was significant that no "strong measures" were taken with the dissident Shelest. Some balance appeared to have been achieved between contending groups in the top echelons of the Soviet government, which for the time being assured the stability of the leadership.1

A dissident source noted that there were three essential trends within the Party and its top leadership; neo-Stalinist, moderate-conservative, and democratic. Some dissidents, including Roy Medvedev, author of *When History Changes*, counted themselves as belonging to the third group.

The long-delayed history of the Communist party, published in Moscow, barely mentions the role of Stalin and makes no references to the purges of 1936-37 in an apparent effort to avoid controversial subjects.

Brezhnev has recently assumed a special position of *primus inter pares*. Despite the fact that he had no official government function, he was

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1Shelest was removed from the Politburo in 1973. This development, which will be dealt with in the *American Jewish Year Book* for 1974, confirmed the general line followed by Brezhnev.
conducting foreign policy and, on recent trips abroad, was received as the de facto head of state.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

*Demography*

No new information was available on the Jewish population of the Soviet Union (AJYB, 1972 [Vol. 73], pp. 535-37). While some recent emigrants from the Soviet Union have suggested that it was between 3,000,000 and 3,500,000, it would appear that these figures should be rejected as lacking sound basis. It would be more realistic to continue calculating the Soviet Jewish population on the basis of the 1959 Soviet census. Allowing for differences in natural increase between the urban and peasant populations and the structure of the Jewish family, and taking into account the very difficult question of who is a Jew, it was estimated that the Jewish population of the Soviet Union has increased by about 9 per 1,000: from 2,640,000 in 1970 to some 2,692,000 in 1972. About 44,000 persons left the USSR in 1971 and 1972. Thus, the present Jewish population was put at some 2,648,000. This is a provisional figure which will have to be revised if and when it becomes possible to arrive at a more precise one.²

The incidence of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews decreased considerably. Soviet statisticians published no data on mixed marriages; but to the extent that one can rely on reports of local observers, the decrease was quite marked in the last two to three years. According to a reliable source, intermarriages involving Jews in Moscow and in Leningrad had reached about 50 per cent in the early 1960s. The same source indicated that in the new cities of Siberia—many with a young academic population—the rate remained extremely high.

Data on the occupational distribution of the Jews in the Soviet Union were not available. Although Soviet enterprises had precise records indicating the nationality of each employee, this type of statistic was quite difficult to obtain. Most of the gainfully employed Jews were working for state enterprises usually located in the great urban centers. There still was substantial concentration of Jews in the so-called Jewish professions—accounting, planning, some lower supervisory posts in state stores, etc. Jews were also well represented in medicine, dentistry, and engineering. Significantly, and this was the result of industrialization, there were many Jews also in factories, working as technicians, welders, fitters, and others. According to reports, the

²It is significant that *Sovetish Heymland* (#4, 1973, p. 179) quoted, without comment, the figure of 2,644,000 given in the 1971 *American Jewish Year Book*. 
Jewish employment picture, apart from sensitive jobs or those considered important for the state, was now much better than under Khrushchev. However, this was not true of promotions.

Communal and Religious Life

The Jewish communal structure, which in many ways had survived the formal abolition of the Jewish community in 1919, was liquidated in the late 1930s. After the war, the thaw and liberalization initiated by Khrushchev had little impact on the situation of the Jews. If anything, it continued to deteriorate. While Stalin had tried to promote the forced assimilation of the Jews by all "methods" at his disposal, including the execution of Jewish intellectuals, Khrushchev used different "methods" to attain the identical goal. The fact was that both Stalin and Khrushchev distrusted the Jews and considered them a foreign element having strong international ties and group loyalty based on attachment to a "foreign land"—Palestine, later Israel. Soviet authorities continuously denied the existence of a "Jewish question" in the Soviet Union. However, the Jews as individuals and as a community remained in an inferior position.

One has to remember the economic trials conducted under Khrushchev (1961-1966), which singled out the Jews and meted out to them the most drastic punishments. Also under Khrushchev, synagogues were closed, Jewish cultural needs were ignored, and Yiddish writers and poets were refused facilities for their creative work. Jewish national rights ignored by both Stalin and Khrushchev continued to be denied to the Jews by the present Soviet rulers. The development of anti-Jewish policy can be traced directly from Stalin to Khrushchev, and from Khrushchev to his successors, Brezhnev and Kosygin, and from all of them back to Czarist days. As in days of old, the Jews in the Soviet Union were in a "special situation."

While the status of other religions and their institutions in the Soviet Union improved, Jewish religious life continued to deteriorate. There were no Jewish schools; no formal preparation for bar-mitzvot, and very few mohelim who could perform circumcisions. Since authorities looked upon religious ceremonies as a reactionary survival of old customs, young Jews avoided religious marriages because they might become obstacles to their careers. In Lithuania, there had been only one shochet, Reb Yaakov, and he died in 1972, just before the High Holy Days.

While officially there was a yeshivah at the Moscow Synagogue on Arkhipov Street, with Leib Gurvich as rosh-yeshivah, it was not functioning beyond giving some religious instruction to persons who were past the age of preparing for the rabbinate. There were reports, similar to reports in former years, that some 19 new students were expected to come to the yeshivah, but
nothing further was heard. Soviet Jews suffered from a crucial lack of qualified rabbis and all other religious functionaries.

Since the Soviet authorities did not arrange for the production of prayer shawls, phylacteries, and mazuzot, and private manufacture of such commodities was impossible under prevailing conditions, these religious articles, as well as sidorim and mahzorim, were practically unobtainable. After long negotiations, a number of chumoshim and sidorim were printed in Canada for use in Moscow. The chumash was a copy of the one originally issued in Vilna in 1914, and the sidor was a photocopy of the prayerbook originally published by the late Rabbi Yehuda Leib Levin.

The precise number of synagogues in the Soviet Union cannot be established. Official sources indicated some years ago that there were 97 synagogues and hasidic shtiblakh\(^3\), but this number no doubt was reduced after the emigration of a sizeable number of religious Jews to Israel in 1971 and 1972. In the absence of a central organization, each dvadtsatka (20 members registered as a religious congregation) had to deal with its own problems. Efraim Kaplun was head of the Moscow synagogue’s 22-member board. Moysei Litunsky was chairman of the Leningrad synagogue. Under pressure from abroad and perhaps also because of changed circumstances in Moscow, closer contacts have been established between some rabbinical groups in the West and the Jewish religious community in Moscow, headed by Rabbi Yaakov Fishman. Many rabbis from the West had occasion to visit Moscow and even to participate in services at synagogue.

The Russian Orthodox Church, and even religious bodies of the Moslems, enjoyed better status, since the authorities considered them as possible political instrumentalities. In a 1972 “Lenten Letter” circulated in Moscow, Solzhenytsin accused the Church of forsaking the people and of being “a tool of the atheistic state.” He deplored the persecution of dissident priests and pleaded for the independence of the Church. At any rate, the Russian Orthodox Church enjoyed many advantages in terms of internal organization and education for the priesthood that the Jewish religious community did not have.

Despite hardships, strong Jewish feelings existed among Jews. A new religious awareness began to emerge, particularly among the youth, despite the fact that their knowledge of Jewish religious tradition and practice was meager. It involved both a feeling of national identification and a not-too-well-defined yearning to continue the great religious structure that had defined Jewishness over the centuries. For some years this Jewish identification has been expressed in joyous dances by thousands of Jews, mostly young men, around the synagogues in Moscow and other cities on

Simhat Torah. In earlier years there had been little interference by the authorities; but in 1972 dozens of policemen forced the dancing Moscow Jews to leave the synagogue area. The authorities could not, however, prevent private celebrations of the holiday.

Immediately after the High Holy Days, a group of 94 Jews protested to the Moscow City Soviet against the restrictions on access to the synagogue during the Rosh Ha-shanah services. Many Jews, often without knowledge of ritual but seeking to identify with their fellow worshipers, went to the synagogue, also for the Sabbath services. Reliable sources have reported that a number of young Jews have returned to a rudimentary practice of Judaism, avoiding nonkosher food and in other ways following Jewish religious tradition.

Besides the Jewish activists who were trying to leave Russia, there were in the Soviet Union substantial numbers of Jews, not always openly identified, who considered themselves part of Jewish religious life and felt they should be helped to conserve their Jewishness. One factor in this situation was the split developing between younger Jewish activists and the older group, who found it psychologically difficult to embrace the more dynamic ways of their sons and daughters.

The authorities have recently not interfered with the preparation of matzot, and in Moscow alone 30,000 Jewish families were able to purchase adequate supplies for Passover. In distant areas, where technical problems of preparation of Passover foods could not always be overcome and where local administrations were less than helpful, the situation was more difficult.

**Antisemitism and Discrimination**

Antisemitism continued to be part and parcel of life in the Soviet Union. Despite official denials, Soviet Jews were again experiencing the treatment Jews had known in Russia for centuries, except perhaps during a short period beginning with the March 1917 revolution. A recent historical novel, *The Promised Land*, by the Soviet writer Yuri Kolesnikov, indicates that after 55 years of Soviet power certain elements in the country were still thinking in terms of the “Black Hundreds” and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* of czarist times. The book depicts Adolf Eichmann as a Zionist agent who supplied arms to the Zionist underground in Palestine at the same time that he sent thousand of Jews to the gas chambers. Against a completely falsified picture of Jewish life, Kolesnikov described the Zionists as almost natural allies of the Nazis. There were, he said, thousands of Jews like the Rothschilds and the Morgenthau, who owned “a large share of the gold reserves” and of the world’s principal banks, factories, and trading firms. The author put into the mouth of a Zionist official the often-used canard that “if Adolf Hitler did not exist today, we Zionist Betarists would have to invent him.” Soviet reviewers praised the book.
Some anti-Jewish writings were disguised as anti-Zionist material, but reference to the Protocols would reveal their true source. Fascism Under the Blue Star, by Yevgeny Yevseyev, charged the Zionist movement with conducting a conscious policy of genocide; dominating, through secret channels, practically all the governments of the West, and controlling radio and television networks, and hundreds of opinion-forming newspapers. According to Yevseyev, Zionists not only dominate the world, but also spread hatred and subversion even to the point of having participated in the killings at Babi Yar. The root of Zionist atrocities, he said, were to be found in the Jewish religion. Yevseyev's crude, overt antisemitism was protested by Jewish intellectuals, who requested the Central Committee of the Party to prohibit the publication of his writings on the ground that they incite to pogrom. Yevseyev's work, was published in 1971 by Komsomol, through Molodaya Gvardia, in an issue of 75,000 copies.

Soviet antisemitic and anti-Zionist propaganda also found its way abroad. The Italian Communist paper l'Unità (November 26, 1972) editorially criticized a piece by Nikolai Rebrov circulated in Italy by the Soviet press agency Novosti (p. 439). The author used the Talmud and other sacred writings to demonstrate the amorality of the religious foundations of Zionism.

The degree of fanaticism of Soviet antisemitism may be gauged from the following dispatch sent by the Rome correspondent of Izvestia (September 26, 1972). Referring to a discussion of the massacre of 11 Israeli athletes by Arab terrorists at the Olympic Games in Munich, V. Kolosov wrote: “It is not without reason that many representatives of the world press were asking the very sensible question: Were not the bloody events [of Munich] one of the elements of the widespread Zionist conspiracy against peace?”

The propaganda, some of it issued as written by Jews, was reminiscent of the Stalinist campaign against “cosmopolitans,” which in the postwar years culminated in the infamous doctors’ trial. There would appear to be a direct relationship between Stalinist persecution, Khrushchev's anti-Jewish attitudes, and the present Brezhnev-Kosygin anti-Jewish repression. Apparently with the blessing of the Party, anti-Jewish propaganda has been fed to a whole generation of the Soviet people in a pattern resembling the antisemitic “black” press of czarist days. Unless strong measures to curb this overt antisemitism are taken at the top, it could become more virulent; for it is natural for the present Soviet officials and the new intelligentsia rooted in the peasantry to mistrust the urban Jew.

In May 1972 in Dniepropetrovsk, a quarrel between neighbors, a Ukrainian and a Jew, resulted in three days of anti-Jewish riots. The authorities had to intervene, and special meetings were called to explain that the Jew was innocent, but that the fight had been instigated by “Zionist agents” (Chronicle of Current Events, Moscow, 1972).

According to recent emigrants, anti-Jewish attitudes in the Soviet Union
were a fact of everyday life, surfacing in relations with non-Jewish neighbors, as well as in the offices of government officials. Jews were beaten up by hoodlums who uttered the familiar insult: "Yids, Hitler didn't kill enough of you."

Under these conditions it could be expected that Jews were experiencing discrimination where they worked. Some Jews remained in responsible positions, but they were gradually being excluded, particularly from "sensitive" areas. The exception was Deputy Premier Benjamin Dimshitz, a member of the Central Committee. There were no Jews in top army posts, and none in the Foreign Office. Not one Jew was among the younger generals, including military men with advanced technological background, who recently replaced the old command. Recently published figures on Jewish participation in the founding Conference of the Soviet Union 50 years ago throws some light on the present condition of Soviet Jewry. According to the research of A. Pribulda of Moscow, Jews had been the second-largest group of participants, with 238 delegates (10 per cent). The Russians had 1,393 delegates (62.5 per cent); the Ukrainians had 176 (8 per cent).

Mistrust of Jews was discernible also in the universities, and it was difficult for Jewish students to be admitted to the top schools and to receive normal academic advancement. Anti-Jewish attitudes existed even in Soviet prisons. Eduard Kuznetsov, one of the convicted defendants in the Leningrad trial (AJYB, 1971 [Vol. 72], p. 407), reported that the KGB objected to Jewish prisoners wearing skull caps since it did not believe that there were any really religious Jews.

Jewish Resistance

Despite the continuous repression, dissident movements in the Soviet Union have been growing in numbers and boldness. The Soviet authorities apparently hesitated to apply Stalinist methods and physically to liquidate the opposition, with or without trial. The same was true with regard to Jewish dissidents. Soviet Jews continued their fight to lead a Jewish life in Russia or to emigrate abroad. Many took part in the democratic resistance, but most remained within the strictly Jewish efforts.

Soviet Jews were never "Jews of silence." In the worst days of Stalinist terror underground Jewish groups, particularly Zionist cells, existed until about 1937. And throughout this period there were Jews who lived according to Jewish tradition, observed the Sabbath, and tried to give their children a Jewish education, all of which called for great courage. Today, because of the growth of Russian dissidence and the rebellious mood of the other nationalities, Jewish activism expressed itself in bolder and more open ways. No assessment was possible of the scope of Jewish dissidence; of the precise number, however substantial, of those seeking to emigrate to Israel because
they saw no future for themselves in the USSR, or even of the exact number of Jews in Soviet prisons, labor camps, or “mental clinics.” (It was estimated that some 40 were imprisoned in 1972.) Imprisoned Jewish activists maintained their courage. Jewish inmates of camps in Mordovia (Potma) and Perm (Urals) sent to the State of Israel Hannukah greetings expressing the hope that they would soon be able to go there. Similar greeting were sent to Israeli President Zalman Shazar by groups of Jews in Kishinev (Bessarabia) and Minsk (White Russia), expressing oneness with the Jewish people.

Soviet Jews have now adopted more direct methods of demanding amnesty for the arrested and the right of all Jews to emigrate. In December 1972 in Moscow, 60 Jews were taken into custody after they tried to deliver a message to the Supreme Soviet requesting a reply to an earlier petition demanding freedom for the Jews convicted in the Leningrad, Riga, and Kishinev trials (AJYB, 1972 [Vol.73], pp. 541-42).

In an attempt to calm public opinion in the West, Moscow arranged for some demonstrations of “loyalty.” Early in 1972 a group of Soviet Jews, among them Y. Braginski, a well-known editor and writer; L. Arnstam, a motion-picture director, and V. Kemenov of the USSR Academy of Arts, protested against “Zionist insinuations” of discrimination against Soviet Jews and declared everything was well with them.

The Soviet police had the means to control internal developments and hold Jewish activities to a minimum. Still the Kremlin bosses found it necessary to adopt a measure intended to put an end to the clamor for Jewish emigration to Israel. A “diploma tax,” decreed on August 3, 1972 and announced in the Bulletin of the Supreme Soviet on December 27, was levied on persons requesting exit permits, on the theory that the government should be reimbursed for money invested in their education. The rates varied according to academic degrees and length of service; from about 5,400 rubles for the equivalent of a BA degree to 12,600 rubles for a candidate degree (the equivalent of a European doctorate), to as high as 19,000 rubles for a full professor. (Different figures have been quoted by different sources.)

The education tax, as well as refusal to grant visas to many applicants, created a stir in the West where Jewish organizations, Jewish and non-Jewish clergymen, academicians, and intellectuals in various fields organized strong protests against this modern form of slavery (p. 210). Twenty-one Nobel-Prize winners issued a special statement urging repeal of the tax. Soviet-Jewish scientists protested and requested exit visas as a “basic human right.”

Soviet authorities responded by cutting off the employment of all persons who had applied for exit visas, putting them into the category of “parasites,” persons without gainful occupation. Under Soviet law such persons could be prosecuted. It was clear that the Kremlin leaders were attempting to create fear among Jews, eliminate their resistance, and destroy their will to live a Jewish life. Besides the many academicians who found themselves without
work were such people as the noted Jewish dancer Valery Panov of the Leningrad Kirov Ballet Company. When President Nixon was in Moscow, he reportedly touched on the Jewish situation and obtained promises that a solution would be sought. Many United States senators and congressmen joined the protest movement and vigorously demanded abolition of the tax.

Harassment of Jews in the Soviet Union has not ceased. At a secret press conference in Moscow in December, seven Jewish activists reported that anti-Jewish repression was being stepped up and the situation was worsening. Jewish dissidents were arrested in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, Novosibirsk and Riga. Jews were prevented from coming to Moscow during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet Union; some were physically removed from trains. The Soviet postal authorities were reported to have intercepted letters from Israel to Jews in Dagestan inviting them to come to Israel. (No exit visas were issued without such invitations.) Rigid control of telephone calls was a serious obstacle for persons abroad wishing to discuss the matter of exit permits with relatives in Soviet Russia.

On the other hand, 1,200 ethnic Germans were permitted to leave the Soviet Union in 1971. Many were Volga Germans, who had been exiled by Stalin to Asia during World War II and later rehabilitated. Another group from the Volga area was scheduled to leave soon. Some 40,000 had relatives in Germany.

Culture

The negative attitude of the authorities toward Jewish cultural activities continued. No Yiddish schools could be conducted, and the use of Hebrew was forbidden. Aleksandr Chakovsky, editor of Literaturnaya Gazeta, stated at a press conference on May 25, 1972, that enough information in Yiddish was available in the Birobidzhaner Shtern, issued five times a week in the so-called Jewish Autonomous Region, and in the monthly Sovetish Heymland. According to official sources, there were in the Soviet Union some 400,000 Jews who spoke Yiddish, in addition to many others coming from Yiddish-speaking homes. Obviously, a small Yiddish paper published in the Far East could not satisfy the needs of the highly sophisticated Jewish population in Russia, the Ukraine, and Byelorussia.

It would seem that the Soviet Union was continuing the old czarist policy of forced assimilation of Jews, and was enforcing it rigidly. Some Jewish intellectuals, who have been connected with secular Jewishness all their lives and were well aware of the situation, left the country. Among recent arrivals in Israel were Motl Saktsier, Eli Shekhtman, Yankel Yakir, Meshulem Surkis, Meir Baratz, Efroim Roitman, Hirsh Osherovich, all Yiddish writers and poets. Nina and Natalia Mikhoels, daughters of the noted actor Shlomo
Mikhoels who had been murdered in 1948, also came to Israel. Despite difficulties and obstacles, there were many interested local groups which continued to promote Jewish activities in areas tolerated by the authorities. However, the continued emigration of Jewish intellectuals was expected to create a serious problem, since many of those who asked for exit permits were creative in areas of Jewish culture.

Rumors of the impending opening of a Yiddish legitimate theater proved false, though there were in the Soviet Union more than 500 other national theaters. However semi-professional drama groups and individual actors continued to perform. Thirty former members of the Kovno Yiddish Drama Ensemble left for Israel; the remaining 80 young artists continued their work under the direction of Jacob Belzer, who recently celebrated 55 years on the Yiddish stage. The Moscow Yiddish Drama Ensemble, under the direction of Benjamin Schwartser, began its Moscow season with *Drei pintelekh, Tevye der milkhiker*, and *Dos groise gevins*, starring Sonia Binik, Leib Traktovenko, and others. The ensemble toured Siberia and the Far East.

The Yiddish Art Ensemble, with Anna Guzik and a small group including M. Yakubovich, S. Amurova, and others, performed throughout Russia. The Vilna Yiddish Folk Theater celebrated its 15th anniversary with the presentation of *Der fidler oifn dakh*, a Yiddish version of *Fiddler on the Roof*. The Birobidjan Theater Group continued its work. The well-known artist Ilya Kharif gave reading of Sholem Aleichem in many cities of the Ukraine and Moldavia. Sidi Tal and her Chernovitz Art Ensemble gave many performances in cities where Jews lived. Anna Sheveleva, a soloist with the Tula philharmonic orchestra, gave concerts in Asiatic parts of the USSR.

A scholarly work, *Jewish Inscriptions of the 18th and 19th Centuries in Georgia*, by Nisn Babalikashvili appeared early in 1972. Two new Yiddish books also became available: *Der beker fun Kolomeye* ("The Baker from Kolomeye"), by Hershl Polianker, and *Der mames nign* ("Mother's Song"), by Shloime Roitman. Reports of the publication of other titles could not be verified. Thus, between 1959 and 1972 only 37 Yiddish books appeared: three in 1959, one in 1960, two in 1961, one in 1962, two in 1964, five in 1965, two in 1966, four in 1967, two in 1968, five in 1969, five in 1970, three in 1971, and two in 1972. None were published between 1948 and 1959. By contrast, more than 1,000 books were published annually in Estonia (population about 1,650,000).

*Sovetish Heymland* broadened its content by giving much more information on Jewish life abroad. Its editor, Aaron Vergelis, was the official Soviet spokesman on Jewish life. The publication's tenth anniversary in 1971 passed almost unnoticed in the general press. The Paris Yiddish Communist paper, *Naye Prese*, mentioned the anniversary, and expressed regret that the Kremlin ideologists had not used the occasion to declare their readiness to satisfy the national needs of the Jewish population. *Sovetish Heymland* organized in its
offices exhibits of paintings with Jewish themes by 24 Jewish artists: Aleksandr Gluskin, Victor Midler, Leib Zevin, Felix Lembergski, Robert Falk, Mendl Gorshman, Meir Axelrod, Mordke Dzhanashvili, Yaakov Averbukh, Shymon Gruzberg, Nohem Alpert, Shymon Germiz, Feitl Mulier, Berta Tarnopolskaya, Tankhum Kaplan, Shmuel Rozin, Mark Klionski, Gershon Kravtzov, Shaya Bronstein, Boris Valit, Max Gelman, Yosef Chaikov, Peisakh Krivorutski, and Shloime Verkhovski. There was also an exhibition in Vilna that included 50 works by Alpert, most of them depicting life in what once had been the great Vilna Jewish community.

Of the 185 recipients of the 1972 State Prize, 21 (11 per cent) were Jews: 5 of 42 winners in science, 12 of 117 in technology, and four of 26 winners in the humanities. The percentages of Jewish winners in previous years were: 11 in 1971; 15 in 1968, and 14 in 1967. Bearing in mind that the Jewish population was about 1 per cent of the total Soviet population, there seemed to be a great reservoir of Jewish talent, particularly in technology and science.

The status of Jewish culture in the USSR must be seen in light of the peculiar situation that had resulted partly from the natural development of Soviet society, partly from the government’s policy of forced assimilation. Once general schools were opened to Jewish youth, they sought in ever increasing numbers the opportunities offered by state education. In the 1930s most teenagers attended these schools to take courses which would qualify them for their chosen professions and which Jewish schools did not offer.

At the same time, all Jewish social and cultural institutions and activities were liquidated under Stalin. Consequently, whole generations of Jews grew up with very few or no ties with their Jewish past. There was, of course, the older generation of Jewish writers, artists, and journalists who continued to use Yiddish as the medium of expression. However, they worked within the Communist or, at any rate, the accepted framework, and their writings and art, though mainly Jewish (Yiddish) in form, were Communist in content.

Post-war Jewish youth did not know Yiddish and therefore had no empathy with these cultural endeavors. Quite apart from the fact that even the “accepted” Yiddish activities decreased as the years went by, the young Jew in the Soviet Union could not, and did not wish to, identify himself with whatever “official” Jewishness the authorities tolerated. Under the impact of an intensification of the national spirit among the Russians, Ukrainians, and other groups, and under the influence of the State of Israel, the younger Jewish activists looked for a more positive Jewish religious or national outlook which quite obviously did not exist. Significantly, many Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel had only scant knowledge of current Yiddish activities in the USSR and almost no knowledge of the Yiddish language.

Quite obviously, the spiritual climate of Jewish life in the USSR was changing. Simultaneously with Jewish resistance directed mostly toward emigration to Israel, new active Jewish forces were surfacing in Soviet Jewry,
tending toward the reassertion of Jewish values and a Jewish way of life. Some recent Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union saw no hope for Jews in the present Soviet state. Without denying the great dangers inherent in the Soviet regime, one must bear in mind the slow process of adaptation to new technological conditions by the Soviet Union which was causing substantial changes in Soviet attitudes. And given the fact that Russian Jews, unlike their brethren in the West, had responded in their own national, positive way to the dangers of assimilation and disintegration resulting from the Haskalah movement, could it not be possible that Soviet Jewry now, too, was groping for a way to conserve, even to develop further, its distinctive and separate Jewish identity?

**Soviet-Israeli Relations**

Soviet-Israeli relations went through many stages, from the happy recognition of the State of Israel in 1948 to deterioration in the last years of the Stalin era. Broken early in 1953, Soviet-Israeli ties were resumed after Stalin’s death, but they lacked the earlier friendship and solicitude. Before and after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Moscow was squarely in the pro-Arab camp. And since the Israelis were not willing to serve Soviet interests in the Middle East, it was doubtful that the attitude of the Kremlin would change substantially.

Moscow has continued its strongly pro-Arab policy. According to Western estimates, some $1.1 billion in Soviet military assistance went to underdeveloped countries, the bulk of it to the Middle East and India. The Soviet policy-makers maintained their rigidly negative attitude toward Israel, demanding that the Israeli “aggressors” leave the occupied Arab territories before any settlement was reached in the Middle East. The Soviet press and radio continued their anti-Israeli propaganda, which was geared not only to the Arabs, but also to internal consumption. As stated before, the Kremlin distrusted the Jews and was suspicious of their feelings for Israel. Thus Jews seeking to emigrate to Israel were a particular propaganda target.

Despite the new emigration tax and other obstacles, departures of Soviet Jews for Israel continued unabated. According to reports, the number exceeded 31,000 in 1972. It was also reported that Soviet authorities would issue exit visas to Jews seeking reunion with their families in the United States, Canada, and other countries. At the invitation of the Soviet Council of Friendship with Foreign Countries, a delegation of the Israeli-Soviet Friendship Society visited Moscow. The delegation, which included Hadj Malamad, A. Berliand, Shalfik Tubi, David Ehrenfeld, and Avrom Melamed, received a friendly welcome and participated in many meetings with Soviet officials. Sporadic reports indicated that a rapprochement between the USSR and Israel was imminent, but this had not been confirmed at year’s end.
Birobidjan

There were some 15,000 Jews in Birobidjan, in a total population of over 160,000. The so-called Jewish Autonomous Region has lately been much in the Soviet news. Its geographic location made it a strategic area, and it was important for the Soviet Union to develop the area's industries and communications. Jewish life, on the other hand, was very meager. There were no synagogues, no rabbis, no Jewish schools, and the younger people were barely aware of their Jewishness.

The Birobidjaner Shtern, founded in 1930, was but a pale reflection of a Russian newspaper by the same name. There was also a Jewish library and Yiddish-language radio transmission, but the question was how long either would continue, since the youth did not know Yiddish. The Birobidjan Yiddish theater group continued to perform, and there were a few Yiddish writers. Some street names and other public signs appeared in both Russian and Yiddish. But while Birobidjan was being developed and might some day be a well-organized area, it cannot be considered a Jewish region: it had all but lost its original character and was rapidly becoming a Russian area no different from others in the Far East.

Commemoration of the Catastrophe

As far as the unsympathetic attitude of the authorities permitted, Soviet Jews continued to hold memorial meetings for the victims of Nazism. In November 1,500 Riga Jews took part in commemorative services at the mass graves in Rumbuli Forest where in 1941 tens of thousands of Jews had been murdered. Similar events took place in Kovno, Vilna, Kiev, and elsewhere, with the police on the alert to keep activity at a minimum. In Kiev a group of Jews who had come to place flowers at the foot of the Babi Yar monument were forcibly prevented from doing so; 27 were arrested and several sentenced to 15 days in prison.

Personalia

A number of prominent Jews died in 1972: Joseph Kolin, a noted actor, at the age of 58; Motl Grubian, a Yiddish writer and poet, at the age of 62; Mendl Gorshman, an artist, at the age of 70; Hirsh Plaskov, a lieutenant-general in the Soviet Army during World War II, at the age of 73; Shlome Rabinovitch, a journalist connected with the Novosti, state press agency, an official spokesman on the Jewish situation in the Soviet Union, and author of Yidn in Soviet Farband and other writings, at the age of 68.

Leon Shapiro