

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1916—End Of An Era

The Czarist regime had lost its last shred of moral authority and prestige; its terrorizing no longer intimidated. Restrained by its own reactionary elements, the Imperial Duma (Parliament) was unable to act. Civil bodies, the rural societies (*zemstvos*) and urban associations, endeavored to fill the political void, taking over the care of the war refugees and the provisioning of the army. Reactionary and radical forces skirmished for position in the inevitable showdown.

Czarist Russia's 6,000,000 Jews were caught in the maelstrom and bitter strife of social dissolution. About 700,000 of them were in the military service and at the front; over half a million of the civilian Jewish population in the border provinces in the west had been deported into the interior as security risks. This dislocation added to the prevailing economic misery of the Jews and made them, to a greater extent than ever, a pawn in the struggle between reaction and liberalism. Anti-Semitic attacks in parts of the press charged Jews with ritual murder and incited the populace to pogroms; physical assaults by the Black Hundred thugs became frequent. Liberal elements came forth to defend the Jews and called for an end to all discrimination. A speech calling for equal rights for Jews set the Duma in uproar.

1917 (March 14—November 17)—Bourgeois Revolution

Czarist regime collapsed. Many local uprisings, but no unified revolutionary force prepared to take over. Czar Nicholas II abdicated in favor of his brother, who declined the throne. The conservative Duma, with only two Socialist members, set up the Provisional Government from among its members. Conservative Prince Lvov, Premier; Liberal Paul Milyukov, Foreign Minister; Socialist Alexander Kerensky, Minister of Justice. The first decree issued by the new government on its first day in power proclaimed eight basic reforms, the third of which abolished all social, religious, and national distinctions.

Two weeks later, the Ministry of Defense removed all discrimination against Jews in the army (where they had been permitted to serve only as soldiers) and in the navy (where they had not been accepted at all).

April 5: The Provisional Government issued decrees eradicat-

ing restriction of the rights of citizens on grounds of race and creed, enumerating the specific areas where these had existed: choice of place of residence and of movement; private ownership of real as well as personal property; engaging in industry and commerce; employing all sorts of hired labor; partaking in corporations and stock companies; employment as administrators and guardians and serving on juries; admission to all schools, public and private; use of non-Russian languages in education, enterprise, and in keeping accounts.

Russian Jews responded to the March Revolution with patriotic fervor. Campaigns for the purchase of the new government bonds were conducted in all Jewish communities, the Odessa Jews alone purchasing in the amount of 30,000,000 rubles. No sooner were the military colleges opened to Jews than 250 Jewish youths applied for admission. A new spirit pervaded communal life. New democratic elections in the communities expanded local leadership. Newspapers in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian mushroomed all over the country. Jewish schools with instruction in Hebrew and Yiddish sprang up everywhere. Jewish political parties emerged into the open; out of eight, five were Zionist. Moscow Jews protested ill treatment of Jews in Romania. Petrograd Jews organized a society to aid in the rehabilitation of Palestine. Responding to a call by the first large open Zionist meeting in Russia for the restoration of Palestine to the Jews, the Provisional Government promised to exert the influence of the Russian government at the future peace conference for the establishment of Palestine as a national Jewish home—six months before the Balfour Declaration.

Too hesitant and harassed to introduce the urgent agrarian reforms the peasantry expected, and determined to carry on the unpopular war even in the face of crushing defeats and the disintegration of the front, the Provisional Government was menaced from the Left and Right.

Arriving from abroad, Lenin called for the conversion of the bourgeois March Revolution into a social revolution. At the first Bolshevik Congress on Russian soil (May 7) he carried his resolution for an immediate Socialist revolution, over strong opposition, with the promise to end the war and to distribute the land at once and to transfer "all power to the soviets," meaning that the soviets, the councils of workers (at their place of work), would become the government body rather than a national assembly. The Bolshevik revolt aborted on July 16, and was quickly suppressed by the Provisional Government. Lenin fled to Finland.

Prince Lvov resigned. Alexander Kerensky took over the

premiership and the ministry of war. On September '10 came the revolt from the Right under the Czarist General Kornilov, which Kerensky likewise quickly suppressed. Municipal election on October 18 returned a majority of moderate Socialists. Kerensky dissolved the Duma, ordered a general election for a Constituent Assembly on November 25. Russia, now formally a republic, was temporarily ruled by a directorate of five, of which Kerensky was the leader.

November, 1917—Bolshevik Revolution

Exploiting the deterioration of the general situation and the popular disaffection agitated by the moderate Socialists, the Bolsheviks seized power on November 7. They had timed their revolt with the meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, from whom they presumed to have received the authority. They disavowed bourgeois terminology—ministers of state became People's Commissars: Lenin, President of the Council (Soviet) of People's Commissars; Leon Trotsky, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs; Joseph Stalin, People's Commissar for Nationalities. After a week's futile effort to rally the army against the Bolsheviks, Kerensky fled Russia.

On November 8, Lenin announced the adoption of peace without annexation or indemnities, thus ending the fighting without waiting for German agreement on this point, and abolished private ownership of land. On November 15, the Council of People's Commissars issued a declaration, signed by Lenin as President and Stalin as Commissar for Nationalities, "abolishing all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions," and guaranteeing "the free development of the national minorities and ethnic groups inhabiting Russia."

On November 25, the first and only free popular elections set by Kerensky and conducted under the new regime gave the following returns: total representatives, 707; of these, 426 were Socialists (370 of them Right Social Revolutionists), 175 Bolsheviks, 17 Liberals (Cadets), and the rest were from various national groups, like the Cossacks, the Mohammedans, and the Jews. The first meeting of the newly elected Constituent Assembly was delayed till January 8, and the assembly was forcibly disbanded two days later.

1918-21—Intervention, Civil War, War Communism

A period of confusion, bloody strife, extreme social change, and economic collapse. By the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 3, 1919, Russia lost 1,267,000 square miles of territory, 62,000,000 population, one third of her best crop area, half of her indus-

tries, three-quarters of her coal and iron; in short, was "reduced to practically the size of the medieval Grand Duchy of Moscow." The surrender dismayed many Russians, including some of Lenin's fellow commissars, and infuriated Russia's erstwhile allies. It also aggravated the forces of disintegration already in progress: local would-be chieftains setting up so-called independent governments in various localities, large and small, the larger ones aided by foreign powers.

The peace treaty also provided an excuse for Allied intervention—officially to prevent the large Allied stores of war supplies in Russia from falling into the hands of the Germans and possibly to restore the Eastern front with or without the Russians. Actually, the Allied intervention had begun on December 30, 1917, with Japanese warships entering Vladivostok, and Allied troops engaged the Red army long after the Allied armistice with Germany. More basic reasons for intervention were the Bolshevik publication of the secret war documents on November 24, 1917, the nationalization of property on December 14, 1917, and the repudiation of the national debts on February 8, 1918.

Throughout these three years, armies fought armies, capturing, evacuating, and recapturing cities and towns, pillaging and killing the civilian population as they entered and left. Old grudges were paid off: the Turks slaughtered 30,000 Armenians, and the Ukrainians tortured and murdered Jews in even larger numbers. The scarcity of goods was appalling; the services broke down; money lost its value. There were 11.7 billions of paper rubles in circulation in March, 1917; by 1921, there were 1,168.0 billions of them. Rather than proceed slowly toward Socialism, as he apparently had intended, Lenin now made one clear hop into Communism. All banks were nationalized, merged into one, and the one turned into a department of the National Budget Accounting Office. All plants employing more than five workers using mechanical power were nationalized; so also was every enterprise employing ten persons without mechanical power. Distribution was likewise taken over practically entirely by the State. Peasants were to give up to the State all their produce above their own absolute needs, for a set price. Workers received their pay in ration cards for food and goods—as these were available. Literally, he who did not work did not eat, but the first jobs, like civil rights, went to the new elite, the proletariat.

All through this period the instrument of coercion was the dreaded Cheka, the Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counter-Revolution, created in December, 1917. Basing

itself on Lenin's dictum: "No dictatorship of the proletariat is to be thought of without terror or violence," and insisting, "We are not waging war against separate individuals; we are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class," the Cheka did exterminate individuals, summarily, without pretense of the due process of law or a basis of objective evidence, but generally on hearsay or suspicion. And it exterminated as many members of the proletariat, workers and peasants, indeed even Socialists, as members of the bourgeoisie, and even absolutely innocent people such as involuntary hostages. In brutality, the notorious "wall" of the Cheka surpassed the guillotine of the Place de la Révolution 130 years before.

During the first part of this period Jewish life continued at the same energetic pace. Bolshevik theory and practice confirmed the equality of rights of the Jews both as individuals and as a national entity. In 1918, there were 171 Jewish publications in the country: 81 Yiddish, 10 Hebrew, and 80 Russian. The Hebrew school system, *Tarbut*, managed to organize within one year 25,000 kindergartens and elementary schools, and a large number of classes for adult education. The Yiddish school system and the religious schools likewise showed remarkable progress. But the exigencies of the situation called for specific action by the Bolshevik government in respect to the Jews.

The first step was *pro forma*. As Stalin organized his Commissariat for Nationalities he set up subdivisions, sub-commissariats, for the various major nationalities in the country. Accordingly, he also established a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, and placed at its head a Jewish Bolshevik, S. Dimanstein. While it lasted, Dimanstein was, in effect, the Jewish secretary of state in the Bolshevik regime. He organized local branches of his commissariat in all the major Jewish communities. These worked co-operatively with the Jewish sections of the Bolshevik Party, their major objective being to guide the proletarian revolution in the "Jewish street," to Bolshevize the Jews economically, socially, and ideologically.

The first Jewish problem to be faced by the Bolshevik regime was anti-Semitism. Anti-Jewish outbreaks had passed human bounds in the territories occupied by the counter-revolutionists, and threatened to pour over into the land under Bolshevik rule. For the new masters of Russia this was both a moral issue and a tactical problem. The toll of Jewish victims in the Ukraine and other areas was horrifying. Several years later, S. Dimanstein was to report that during the civil war "the White generals, various atamans and *batkas*, like Petlura, Bulak-Balakhovich and the others, organized 1,520 pogroms in 911 cities and towns;

in many places the pogroms were repeated several times. About 200,000 killed and 700,000 other victims—this was the result of the pogroms in the Ukraine and Byelorussia; moreover, 300,000 children lost their parents." At the same time the Bolshevik leaders realized that the murderous orgy against the Jews was meant also against their own regime, for the counter-revolutionists identified Jews with Bolsheviks, and the hatred and wrath generated against the one was to pass on to the other.

The Bolshevik leaders met the issue head-on with a decree issued on July 27, 1918, published in *Izvestia*, entitled: "Decree by the Council of the People's Commissars for the Radical Suppression of the Anti-Semitic Movement." It was signed by Lenin, as President of the Council of People's Commissars, and the appropriate officers of the Council, Director of Affairs of the Council Bunch-Bruevich and Secretary of the Council Gorbunov. A lengthy and forthright statement, it ran as follows:

According to reports reaching the Council of People's Commissars, the counter-revolutionists are conducting a pogrom agitation in many cities, especially at the front border, with the result that excesses have been perpetrated in many places against the toiling Jewish masses.

The bourgeois counter-revolution is taking over into its hands the weapon which fell out of the Czar's hand. Whenever the autocratic government found it necessary to divert the wrath of the people away from itself, it directed this against the Jews. The Jewish rich always managed to find protection for themselves; the victims slain in the incitement and violence were the Jewish poor.

Now, the counter-revolutionists are beginning again to inflame the masses against the Jews, exploiting the starvation and weariness and also the unenlightenment of the most backward masses, and the residue of hostility to Jews implanted into the people by the autocracy.

In the Russian Soviet Federated Republic, where the principle of the self-determination of the toiling masses of all peoples has been proclaimed, there can be no place for national suppression. The Jewish bourgeois is our enemy not as a Jew but as a bourgeois; the Jewish toiler is our brother. Any incitement against any nation is intolerable, criminal, and contemptible.

The Council of People's Commissars declares that the anti-Semitic movement and the pogroms on Jews are destructive to the cause of the workers' and peasants' revolution, and calls upon the toiling people of Socialist Russia to fight with all means against this evil.

National hatred weakens our revolutionary ranks, the unity without distinction of nationality of the toilers' front, and is only a support for our enemies.

The Council of People's Commissars orders all Soviet departments to take decisive means to destroy at the root the anti-Semitic movement. The pogromists and pogrom agitators must be placed outside the law.

The second all-important Jewish problem of this period was the economic situation. The absolute nationalization of all the enterprise of War Communism, coming after the dislocation of the war and the ravages of the civil war, left large numbers of Jews stranded on a barren island of the Socialist economy. The October Revolution found the large masses of Russian Jewry economically dislocated and pauperized. Although some individual Jews had become very rich during the war, the Jewish middle class had been greatly reduced and the lower middle class had joined the poor. Every major city had a considerable number of Jewish refugees—deportees from the front in the Czarist days, escapees from pogroms in the small towns during the upheaval of the Revolution—unable to support themselves without some social assistance. Now, a major part of the self-supporting element of the Jewish population everywhere, the traders, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, managers, employees of various private services, had lost their means of livelihood, and there were no state enterprises that needed them or could absorb them. Thus, a majority of the Jewish population consisted of the category *lishentsi*, deprived—deprived of the opportunity of earning a living, deprived of their civic rights (because of their former bourgeois status), deprived of the very sustenance of life, for he who did not work did not eat.

It was this catastrophic condition that the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs endeavored to ameliorate. At the time there were two ways out of the situation: to organize the artisans or would-be artisans into artels or co-operative enterprises, or to settle the needy on farmland. Both had been undertaken on a modest scale as early as 1918. But inasmuch as raw material for the artels was scarce, and the necessary tools—until American Jewish relief organizations entered the picture—wanting, the major effort was in agricultural settlement. Land being available, and the agricultural machinery then in use still being of the simplest, a farm seemed the shortest cut to a full stomach. This set the pattern for the reconstruction of the Jewish economy for nearly two decades. Dimanstein claimed that Lenin was much interested in the agricultural projects, and regarded agriculture as a quick and radical way out of the difficult economic situation of the Jewish masses. On his recommendation, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party requested all the government departments concerned to facilitate the settlement of Jews on

farmland. A decree by the Commissariat for Agriculture in July, 1919, called for the allotment of land to Jews wherever land was being subdivided or was available.

As in the economic field, the events in the Jewish cultural sphere at that time also set the pattern for years to come. The directors and personnel of the Bolshevik Jewish agencies, such as the commissariats for Jewish affairs and the Jewish sections of the Party, mostly were Jewish Communists with a past to live down. They came from the Zionist Socialist parties or the Bund, both branded long ago by Lenin himself as incompatible with Bolshevism. As neophyte Bolsheviks, they were ever on guard against being suspected of their former heresies, and thus they went beyond the intent and scope in applying their Party's orders or in attempting to anticipate the possible turns of the Party line.

It was in June, 1919, at the Eighth Party Congress, that Nikolai Bukharin reinterpreted the Bolshevik principle of national self-determination for the peoples of Russia to mean self-determination not by the entire nation but by the workers of the nation. Otherwise, he claimed, you recognized the bourgeois entity of "nation." This involved high policy, for accordingly not the Ukrainian people but the Ukrainian workers, who might be Bolsheviks or led by Bolsheviks, were to determine whether their country was to stay in or secede from the Soviet Union. But the Jewish commissariats and Jewish sections avowed this principle, and went to a length never gone to by Communists of other nations, as early as October, 1918. At their first conference on that date the leaders of the commissariats and sections declared that the "various institutions . . . in the Jewish street and the Jewish communities elected on the basis of the famous 'four tail' ballot [universal, equal, direct suffrage and secret ballot] injure the interest of the broad Jewish working classes" and necessitate "proclaiming the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Jewish street and calling upon all Jewish workers to rally round the Jewish commissariat to safeguard this dictatorship."

The dictatorship of the Jewish proletariat waited a year until the Party line hardened, then proceeded on three fronts. First, to dissolve the Jewish communities. On June 19, 1919, *Izvestia* carried a resolution of the Second All-Russian Conference of Jewish Commissariats and Jewish Sections of the Party, which found the Jewish communities and their central board serving as "a rallying point for undisguised enemies of the interests of the working class and the achievements of the October Revolution . . . dimming the class-consciousness of the Jewish working

masses . . . educating the growing Jewish generation in an anti-proletarian spirit," and demanded that all these communities "be dissolved forever" and that "such funds and property as exist . . . be transferred to the local Jewish Commissariats." On August 5, 1919, the Bolshevik government issued a decree to this effect, thus spelling the end of the Jewish community life that had existed in Russia for centuries and had experienced such a promising renaissance in March, 1917.

The second front to receive the attention of the Jewish proletarian dictatorship was the field of education. The Jewish commissariat declared that the national tongue of the Jewish workers was Yiddish, and with the help of the local authorities, began closing the Tarbut Hebrew schools. Here they encountered considerable resistance. Representatives of Tarbut complained to the Commissar for Education, Anatoli Lunacharsky, who told them frankly that he had not ordered the closing of the Hebrew schools, and that he differed with the Jewish commissariat on this issue. The Jewish commissariat then appealed to higher authority, and a month later the final decision came. It ran as follows: Since Hebrew was not the spoken language of the Jewish masses, it could not be regarded as a minority tongue, and should be considered as a foreign language. In the first grade Yiddish was therefore compulsory; in the other grades, parents might choose any tongue from the recognized foreign languages. Those children who had begun their schooling in Hebrew might continue. The closing of the Hebrew schools was to be repealed.

This was, however, only a reprieve. What the Jewish commissariat could not achieve by appeal to the highest authority they well managed with the authorities lower down. The Hebrew schools continued to be suppressed or taken over by local officials. On January 23, 1920, the Habimah Theatre, which played in Hebrew, was closed because "Hebrew was a reactionary language." The Habimah was subsequently reopened and functioned for nearly four more years. Lunacharsky insisted that the persecution of Hebrew and of the Jewish religion came from "Bolsheviks of Jewish extraction." Jewish parents soon realized that it was not "practical" to send their children to Hebrew schools, even where they could do so.

The third front for action was Zionism, and strange as it may seem, here was where the Jewish commissariats met with the greatest resistance. On this issue the Russian Jews fought back, and when they lost the frontal attack they persisted for years underground. In the summer of 1919, the Jewish commissariats and Jewish sections called for the dissolution of all bourgeois

Jewish organizations, and singled out the Zionist groups as a counter-revolutionary force, preventing the communization of the Jewish masses, strengthening clericalism and nationalistic trends among the Jewish workers, and serving as a weapon in the hands of the Entente imperialism in its conflict with the proletarian revolution. Such a charge by an official body was enough for local officials; they closed Zionist clubs and dissolved local Zionist organizations. In some places the leading members were called upon by the local authorities to make public disavowal of their membership. The Zionist leaders appealed to the highest authority in the land, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (*V'Tzik*), with a memorandum giving the history and the ideology and range of activities of the Zionists in Russia. On October 19, 1919, Zionist leaders in Petrograd were arrested. On October 31, 1919, they were released. On April 23, 1920, all the delegates and alternates to an all-Russian Zionist convention in Moscow were also arrested, but not for Zionism—for the alleged possession of bombs and for contacts with countries of the Entente and with Zionists abroad, who had assisted Admiral Kolchak's war on the Soviet and mustered armies to aid the Entente in its intervention in Russia.

On July 21, 1921, three days after the Kiev authorities had closed all Zionist institutions, came the decision of the Soviet government, which stated that inasmuch as the party of the Zionists had not been declared a counter-revolutionary party in any of the previous decrees, and since the cultural-educational activities of the Zionists did not go contrary to the decisions of the Soviet government, no Soviet organizations were to place obstacles in the way of that party in the aforesaid activities.

As in the case of the decision on the Hebrew language, the victory was of small significance in actuality. Administrative persecution of Zionists continued, but the Zionist movement carried on its uncertain, harassed existence for a few more years.

1921-28—New Economic Policy, Famine, Recovery

After three terrible years, the Bolsheviks won the battle against the foreign foe and their internal opponents, but lost the war for the system they had imposed upon their country. When the State requisitioned all the peasant produced above his absolute needs, the peasant responded by producing no more than he needed. One-third of the area cultivated in 1916 lay fallow in 1919, and the total agricultural output for the same area was cut to one-half. Production of grain was down to 30,000,000 tons from 76,000,000 in 1916. When the drought of 1921-22 arrived, the famine was calamitous. Bread rations in

Moscow and Leningrad were one-eighth of a pound every other day. Five million people died of starvation, and many millions more would have died if the American Relief Administration and its associates had not been feeding 10,000,000 people daily. Despite the system of compulsory labor, industrial production in 1920 was a mere 15 per cent of its level in 1914, and the figure for steel and iron was only 7 per cent.

The people could not take it any longer. There were peasant uprisings in several parts of the country; there was a strike of government workers; there was a revolt of Red sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt, the pride of the October Revolution. Lenin saw the handwriting on the wall. "We are in a condition of such poverty, ruin, and exhaustion," he said in March, 1921, "that everything must be set aside to increase production." Everything was War Communism. A money economy, with a free market, was restored. The peasant was to pay a specified amount in kind—later it was to be in money—as a tax; the rest of his produce was his to dispose of as he pleased. The city worker was paid in newly issued rubles, on the basis of piece work, with extra pay for overtime and with fringe benefits. Rugged individualists were encouraged to engage in free enterprise, production, or distribution, and to rent nationalized factories and operate them for profit. The state re-established a banking system, and quickly learned to tax, levying not only on such items as tea and sugar but also on manufactures and rents, and on property as well as income.

The economy began to perk up at once. Shortly before his death on January 21, 1922, Lenin expressed satisfaction with the results of his New Economic Policy. He wanted his lieutenants to keep it up until Communists learned to be businessmen. Whether they learned or not, by 1928 the Soviet economy was on its feet and had climbed back up to where it had been under the Czar in 1913. It was on this base that Stalin began to build his Five-Year Plan. Retaining in its hands the natural resources, heavy industry, transport, banking and foreign trade, the Soviet government realized it still must have foreign aid. To obtain this, the worldly Leonid Krassin told his fellow Soviet leaders, "It is necessary to assume a more peaceful attitude and to lower the banner of World Revolution." The banner was lowered only a little, but the peaceful pose was assumed. During the NEP the Soviets signed peace and trade treaties with all their neighbors and the principal countries of Europe. They even came to terms with the Pope in a Concordat at the Vatican.

For Soviet Jewry the NEP was a godsend, affording them the

breathing spell they desperately needed to find their way into the new society. Some took the easiest turn, reverting to their former occupations, the industrialist renting back his factory, the ex-shopkeeper reopening a store. By 1924 one-third of the private stores in Moscow were held by Jews, in spite of the fact that they thereby added the social odium of being a Nepman to their already undesirable status of ex-bourgeois. Many more who were too poor to take advantage of the NEP, or who looked farther ahead, made use of the new liberal atmosphere to make their transition to a Socialist living—and to full rights and opportunity for themselves and their children. It was easier to organize an artel when both raw material and finished product had a free market, and farm toil was not so arduous when the fruit of your labor was your own. The new spirit in the land made it possible for American and other foreign Jewish social agencies to enter the scene and assist these Jews in making their adjustment. The Agro-Joint helped many tens of thousands of Jews to settle on farmland, to undertake co-operative industrial projects, to learn farming and mechanical trades. The All-Soviet Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow in 1923 had a special Jewish pavilion marking the progress of the Jews in this field. With the expanding State apparatus and the growing Socialist sector of the economy, new vistas opened for the Jewish proletarians and more especially the intelligentsia. There was a crying need for foremen, directors, managers, specialists of all sorts, teachers, and other professionals.

The Jewish commissariats were dissolved in 1924. The Jewish sections, emaciated and inert, expired some years later. Most Jews must have said good riddance to both. But their damage was done. They had wrecked the entire structure of traditional Jewish life. The community organization was a thing of the past. The remaining few struggling Hebrew schools breathed their last with the final ban on what was left of the Zionist movement. All that remained was a mass of people engrossed in the struggle for daily bread, with the only spiritual expression the faith of the fathers, now declassed like themselves, and the use of their mother tongue, plus what their own Communist sons and daughters chose to distill into it. Their new spokesmen were self-appointed "culture workers," Yiddish teachers and writers and Yiddish-speaking Party hacks, who presumed, backed by the force of the local authorities, to recast Soviet Jewry in their own image.

Characteristic of this period were developing trends in three areas: In Yiddish, there was a marked increase in schools, from 128 in 1923 to 475 in 1927 in the Ukraine, and from 98 to 184

in Byelorussia; there also was a beginning of local autonomy, a court with the proceedings in Yiddish in Berdichev, and of scholarly institutions, like the Mendeli Museum in Odessa. In religion, there was a growing constriction of legal rights, presaged in 1922 by a campaign for Jewish Communists to work on the Sabbath. In 1926, a government decree permitted anybody who paid the tax and observed sanitary conditions to set himself up as a kosher slaughterer; an all-Soviet conference of rabbis was limited to the rabbis of the three immediate towns of the place of conference. This was the last rabbinical conference to be held. In economy, the government appointed a Commission for the Rural Placement of Jewish Toilers (KOMZET), attached to the Soviet of Nationalities of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union, and a corresponding civilian body, OZET, to aid in Jewish colonization. President Mikhail I. Kalinin, who sponsored KOMZET, declared in 1926: "The great mission of the Jewish people is to maintain their nationality; hence a considerable number of them must root themselves in the soil, at least some hundreds of thousands." In 1927, KOMZET was assigned the additional function of assisting in the industrialization of the Jews.

1928-41—Collectivization, Industrialization, Purge, Progress

The Second World War came to the Soviet Union when it was halfway through its third Five-Year Plan. The preceding thirteen years had made such changes in the Soviet Union that the launching of the first Five-Year Plan on October 1, 1928, could well have been called the Second October Revolution. Lenin said that five social systems were operating during the NEP: Socialist, State Capitalist, co-operative, private enterprise, and subsistence farming. At the moment of the supreme test, a single simple system prevailed, a socialized industry interconnected with a co-operative agriculture, managed authoritatively by an oligarchy directed and controlled by a supreme dictator. From the time of Lenin's death, industrial production had increased twenty-four times, the national income ten times, and the cultivated area had increased by 74 per cent. Investment in the economy for the period amounted to 357 billion rubles; the number of factory and office workers grew from a little above 7,000,000 to well above 30,000,000, and the school and college population from just under 8,000,000 to close to 37,000,000. The Soviet Union was able to stand up to Hitler's industrial and military might.

Back of this great achievement lay thirteen years of bloody purge, drive and terror, incessant drudgery and deprivation. At

every critical step, slip, or failure, there was struggle against opposition, sabotage and betrayal, trial and confession—human scapegoats in the Cult of Personality. The collectivization of agriculture was accomplished at the cost of the lives of millions of peasants, who opposed and sabotaged the change and then succumbed in the famine they had created. The most gigantic undertakings in the farthest corners of the land were executed by prison labor that had been trapped by a secret police whose business was both terror and construction. The individual had neither rights nor consideration, and was forever under the cloud of fear. Even a man so high in the hierarchy as Ilya Ehrenburg, who had been in the most perilous places and the gravest danger in the Spanish Civil War and in the Second World War, said that the only time he had been conscious of fear was in his own apartment in Moscow—fearing the ominous knock on the door in the dark of night. But unemployment had been eliminated after the first Five-Year Plan, and life became considerably easier after the second one. The year 1941 remains in the memories of that generation as a "good year"; that is, there was almost enough food to go around, at least for those who earned good money, and articles of clothing were not beyond reach for most people.

Despite the over-all improvement during the NEP, there was much employment among Soviet Jews at the start of the first Five-Year Plan—twice as much as among non-Jews, it is generally conceded. In 1929, *Emes*, the chief Communist Yiddish daily, reported that two-thirds of the Jews in the Russian republic were to some degree dependent on Jewish aid from abroad; the percentage was slightly larger in Byelorussia and a little lower in the Ukraine; about 50 per cent of the Jews in Moscow and Leningrad needed aid. In consequence, KOMZET and the Jewish agencies from abroad were most active during the first half of this period. At one time the Agro-Joint, ICA, and ORT operated forty-two trade and farm schools, financed 300 loan societies, and provided tools for artels and various means for agricultural settlements—in addition to the free land, reduced transportation, and credits supplied by the Soviet government—for close to a quarter of a million Jews on about a million acres. The industrial enterprises included such variety as sugar mills, shoe factories, and iron foundries. The agricultural settlements were to specialize in a variety of products from vegetables to tobacco and coffee. The location of the settlements also varied; some were close to towns having a large Jewish population, and many were in the South Ukraine, where Jewish colonies had been in existence for a considerable time before, and

larger tracts had been assigned for Jewish colonization on the Crimean peninsula.

It was at the beginning of this period that the territory of Birobidjan came into consideration as a triple-purposed project: (1) concentration of colonizing and industrializing efforts in behalf of the Jews; (2) a correction of the national status of the Jews, normalizing them in respect to territorial concentration and national cultural development like the other nationalities in the Soviet Union; and (3) a solid contribution to the development of the strategic Far Eastern area, which was proceeding at the time. In 1928, the territory of Birobidjan was reserved for Jewish colonization. After some initial efforts at Jewish colonization there, on May 7, 1934, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union proclaimed Birobidjan as a Jewish Autonomous Region within the framework of the Far Eastern territory of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. (The development of this project has been recounted in a special chapter.)

As the second Five-Year Plan came to an end, the acuteness of the Jewish economic problem had passed. Most of the adjustment had been made. There was room in the rapidly expanding economy for all sorts of talents and skills, and the new generation of Jews had no difficulty in qualifying. A process of geographic and occupational reshifting was then in progress. Jews followed the general trend to the more developed or developing parts of the country and greater opportunity, and from country to town. Some who had, with great pain, tried to become farmers were now back in the city. The unadjusted, maladjusted, and unemployable were still there, but they were not as many as they had been, nor were they unique. The Jewish relief organizations from abroad wound up their affairs and left (1938).

In the Jewish cultural field, the zenith of ambition and activity and, more importantly, of favorable attitude on the part of the authorities had come and gone. The high-water mark was reached in the middle 1930's. Although only 22 per cent of the children from Yiddish-speaking homes had attended Yiddish schools in 1922, the percentage was 64 in 1932. Much of the increase may have been at the expense of the Hebrew schools, but still the development was impressive. In 1934 there were 467 Yiddish schools with 85,489 pupils in the Ukraine; five normal schools with 865 students and two Yiddish departments at the Pedagogical Institute with 561 students were preparing teachers for the growing Yiddish schools. In Byelorussia, the increase in the decade was from 12,241 to 36,501. More telling, perhaps, was the comparative number of Jewish students in the

factory training schools, technical schools, and advanced schools or institutes where the language of instruction was Yiddish—55,312 in 1928 and 143,815 in 1933. At Kharkov, in 1934, I visited a Jewish machine tool plant that stamped its products in Yiddish. In the second half of the 1930's, statistics for the attendance at Yiddish schools, or indeed for any Jewish social phenomena, even for the Jewish population in Birobidjan, became scarce. A tendency seemed to have set in to merge the Jews with the local population, numerically at least. The frequent complaints in the Yiddish press, however, are an indication that there must have been propaganda, obvious neglect, sabotage, and occasional direct official pressure against educational and cultural activity in the Yiddish language. By the time the Second World War reached the Soviet Union, little remained of the Yiddish school system.

The approaching change in the cultural climate was sensed early by the Yiddish writers. Halfway in the decade, some writers complained in the literary journals about losing contact with the readers and about official neglect of Jewish culture. They expressed poetic presentiments of being the last generation. On the other side, voices anticipated the turn of the line and called for denationalization of Yiddish literature, as though its being too Jewish, rather than the contrary, was its bane. They also expressed aversion for the status of permanent minority. The campaign against the Jewish religion became increasingly acrimonious, more so than that against other religions.

1941-61—War, Ruin, World Power

This decade has been fully covered in the book; all that need be done here is underline the general pattern of the developments in the Jewish situation.

1. The Jews stood by Russia in her dark hour. Soviet Jews fought valiantly, self-sacrificingly, for their fatherland. Although sixth in population, Soviet Jewry was third in the number of its nationals receiving honors and distinctions at the front. Jews in other parts of the world, in spite of their attitude toward Communism, were active workers, often the initiators and leaders, in the movements for Russian war relief.

2. The Soviet Union was instrumental in saving the lives of many Jews, perhaps hundreds of thousands, who had fled from Nazi-occupied territory or had been especially evacuated from the path of the Nazi invaders. Although some Red Partisan groups treated Jews no better than did the Nazis, most of these groups saved escaping Jews and welcomed them as fellow fighters against the common enemy.

3. Even though it permitted the upsurge of Jewish nationalist feeling during the war years, and encouraged contacts between Soviet Jewry and the Jews of the world, the Soviet government did very little, if anything, to combat the rising hostility toward Jews among the general populace. After the war, anti-Semitic manifestations were generally suppressed, but the hopes for a regeneration of Jewish national life were soon dissipated.

4. For five years, 1948-53, Stalin followed a policy designed to destroy any expression of Jewish national culture and to liquidate physically the Jewish leaders and intellectuals active in or associated with Jewish life. As to his ultimate intent for the Jewish people, this seems to have wavered between forcible assimilation in the general population and the opposite, extirpation from the general population and consigning the Jews to the farthest ends of the land.

5. Post-Stalin Jewish policy seems to consist of the following components: rehabilitation of the Jewish writers and other intellectuals who survived Stalin's purge, and provision for them according to the individual circumstances; determination not to revive Yiddish cultural institutions or secular Jewish culture in Russian, only minor tactical departures that do not affect the basic policy being countenanced; reducing the social and economic status of Jews to their proportion in the general population—in effect, a *numerus clausus* on all top positions, Jews being permitted to rise to preferred positions not on their personal merit alone but within the percentile of their nationality.

This policy is contradictory in theory and practice. On the one hand, it seeks forcibly to assimilate Soviet Jews into the general population, going to the extent of tolerating a discriminatory campaign against the Jewish religion, which is regarded as the last escape for the Jewish nationalist sentiment. On the other hand, it differentiates between the Jews and the general population in a matter so vital to both as preferment, and here too tolerates little-disguised outpourings in the press holding the Jews up to scorn or subjecting them to vicious attack, perhaps as a means of browbeating them into stepping down the social ladder or refraining from aiming too high. The policy seems to say in the same breath that the Jew is no longer a Jew but just one of the rest; and that the Jew, being a Jew, must know his place according to his number among the rest.