

JEWS IN THE SOVIET UNION

FACTS versus FICTION

In recent weeks a number of attacks have been made on the Soviet Union by organisations claiming to be defending the interests of Jews in that country, and speaking on behalf of the cause of Zionism and even of Israel.

The British Soviet Friendship Society would be exceeding its functions if it were to take a stand for or against Zionism or the State of Israel. But it categorically repudiates the falsehoods about the position of Jews in the U.S.S.R. which have been freely circulated by Zionists.

It has been said that 'there is discrimination against Jews in the U.S.S.R.' *This is not so.* There are hundreds of thousands of Jews in industry, in agriculture and in the professions. All jobs are open to them and they can be found in large numbers among factory and shop managers, scientists and architects, lawyers, writers and artists, etc. A number of Jews are members of the Government; 8,000 are members of the Soviet Parliament, the Parliaments of the 15 Federal Republics and the local authorities. Many Jews hold high rank in the Soviet armed forces. Tens of thousands of Jews hold high civil and military decorations. Discrimination against Jews, or any other Soviet nationality, is a criminal offence under Soviet law.

It has been said that 'there is a percentage limitation of Jews in schools and universities'. *This is untrue.* As a matter of fact, whereas the 3 million Jews in the U.S.S.R. represent about 1.2% of the population, in the universities Jewish students—110,000 last year—represented 2.4% of the total. It stands to reason, moreover, that they could not have got to the universities without a secondary education. Among the 64,000 scientific research workers, they had over 7% of the total posts, and came third in the country.

It has been said that 'Jews are obliged to label themselves by giving "Jew" as their nationality in their identity cards'. *This is untrue.* There are over 100 nationalities in the U.S.S.R., which is a federal state in which all nationalities are equal in status. All Soviet citizens at 16 get an identity certificate in which their nationality is indicated, according to that of their parents. But if on reaching adult age they regard themselves as members of another nationality, they are free to record this. In fact, 75 % of those who have registered themselves as Jews gave their native tongue in the 1969 census as Russian, Ukrainian, etc.,—*not* Yiddish.

It has been said that 'Jews are not allowed to have their own (religious) schools in the U.S.S.R.'. *This does not represent the facts.* In the U.S.S.R. religion has been separated from the State, and only state schools exist. There is no religious instruction allowed in *any* school. The U.S.S.R. is not alone in this: the same law exists in some West European countries with state education. Soviet Jews are in the same position as other nationalities in this respect. But there is no bar on Jewish parents teaching their own children religious beliefs.

It has been said that 'Jews cannot practise their religion in the Soviet Union'. *This is quite false.* Jews, like all other religious communities, can and do maintain their synagogues and hold prayer meetings. They have their Kosher meat shops, and bake unleavened bread freely before Passover. Moscow Central Synagogue publishes an annual calendar, and in 1968 issued a new prayer book in 10,000 copies: it has a theological school. But Jews, like other Soviet citizens, are of course, free to be non-religious as well.

It has been said that 'Jewish children cannot be taught Yiddish in the U.S.S.R.'. *This again is not a fact.* The fact is—as the data about the use of Yiddish show—most Jewish families use the major languages of the U.S.S.R. in their everyday speech. They naturally prefer their children to study in school in a language which will not create linguistic obstacles when they go on to higher studies, technically advanced jobs or other careers. But it is equally a fact that there is a considerable amount of literature—books and magazines—published in Yiddish. Who could read it, if the 25 % of Jews who regard Yiddish as their language were unable to teach it to their children? Many drama companies perform in Yiddish.

It has been said that 'when Jews are charged with offences, the courts and the press underline that they are Jews'. *This is a lie.*

No one has ever been able to quote a single instance. It is the foreign press which sometimes underlines the names of those charged and makes this discriminatory suggestion!

It has been said that 'denunciations of the policy of Israel, or of Zionism, are so worded as to turn people against Soviet Jews'. *This is not true.* No example has ever been produced of this malicious assertion. What is true is that one author of an anti-Zionist book some years ago was severely punished for illustrations which might have had an anti-Jewish effect.

It has been said that 'Jews are the only Soviet nationality without a homeland'—alternatively, that 'the homeland of Soviet Jews is Israel'. *Both these assertions are untrue.* For those Jews who wanted to have a territory of their own, the Jewish Autonomous Region, Birobidjan, was established in 1934. It is larger than Belgium and has flourishing industries, agriculture, educational and cultural establishments, etc. But the vast majority of Soviet Jews preferred to stay where they were—like the vast majority of British, American, French and other Jews (it is somewhat ludicrous when the Jewish minister in a London suburb says: 'All we ask is to be allowed to live in Israel'—to which, like thousands of similar citizens, he has not the slightest intention of emigrating). The vast majority of Soviet Jews regard the Soviet Union, in which their grandparents fought for socialism, their parents built socialism, and they themselves are helping to build a communist society, as their homeland.

It has been said that 'tens of thousands of Jews would emigrate to Israel if they were allowed'. The few hundred families who may want to emigrate, and tell the foreign correspondents in Moscow about it, are no more typical of the 2,000,000 Jews who don't, than the occasional Russian writer, artist, etc., who thinks he can do better for himself in Britain or the U.S.A. is typical of the scores of millions of other Russians. But no country allows unrestricted emigration of its population to a country involved in a war.

It has been said that 'Soviet writers tried for various offences were charged because they were Jews'. *That is not true.* Such writers were not all Jews. It has also been said that 'Russian Jews and their families have been put in prison without committing any crime'. *That is one of the most despicable lies of all.* Only a few weeks before the trial of the Leningrad hijackers—not all of whom were Jews—

the world was raging with indignation about the peril of hijacking planes, the world's pilots were threatening an international strike, and the United Nations Assembly called on all states to take steps to prevent such crimes and to severely punish the guilty. The defendants in the Leningrad trial—who had first-class counsel—admitted that they had planned to hijack the 'plane, and the weapons they had got ready, wherewith to attack the pilots, were produced in court. The question of their being Jews never came up—except in the foreign Press. They were sentenced *not for hijacking*, but for *conspiracy to hijack*. Every lawyer knows that *conspiracy* is under British and American law no less than under Soviet law one of the gravest crimes, especially when it involves a threat to human life.

Do not allow the general public to be misled by this latest variety of anti-Soviet campaign. Get these facts as widely known as possible.

Published by

*The British Soviet Friendship Society, 36 St. John's Square, London ECIV 4JH.
April 1971*

(50p per 100, post free)

Farleigh Press Ltd. (T.U.), Watford, Herts