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INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY JEWRY
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY
OF JERUSALEM

STUDIES IN
CONTEMPORARY
JEWRY

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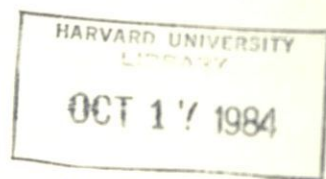
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Editorial Note

The last two decades have witnessed the rapid growth of modern Jewish studies in Israel, the United States, and, to a lesser but not insignificant extent, elsewhere. Various factors have been at work here. The expansion of higher education generally as well as the very high percentage of Jewish youth at universities in the West have been of key importance. In Israel, for example, there are now five universities, and a number of colleges, where in 1960 there was only the Hebrew University. And this transformation was part of the general trend characteristic of higher education in the United States, Great Britain, France, and other Western countries during the 1960's.

Such objective developments would, nonetheless, hardly have been sufficient in themselves to produce the mushrooming of modern Jewish studies at the universities. If one is looking for a single factor which was of decisive importance it is surely to be found at the more subjective level of historical awareness. The impact exerted on the public consciousness by the Holocaust, on the one hand, and by the establishment of the Jewish state, on the other, has only increased with the passage of time. These two phenomena are so totally out of the ordinary run of things even when set against the unusual history of the Jewish people that they naturally tend to produce in the beholder a sense of bewilderment, of wonder, of mystery. And these sentiments, in turn, lead many to seek further understanding through knowledge and analysis.

However, the scholarly infrastructure called upon to sustain and give direction to this demand has not built itself up at a rate to match that of the institutional expansion. The signs of this uneven development are to be seen at every turn. Hundreds of books a year are published in this field but relatively few are adequately reviewed. Doctoral dissertations appear in large numbers but are nowhere listed together. There are many monographs but few first class textbooks to synthesize their findings for the student. And most of the books which are published confine themselves within the boundaries of the single sovereign state even though modern Jewish history has been marked above all, perhaps—in contradiction to the expectations of the Enlightenment—by its international or transnational character.

convert. It must be noted, though, that in the same academic year, 1942-43, two years preceding the Holocaust in Hungary, twenty-four Jewish pupils still attended the Calvinist *Gymnasium* and sixty-five the Lutheran *Gymnasium* (9% of all pupils) in Budapest. (Data gathered from individual published school reports.)

38. Jewish community *Gymnasias* educated 12.6% of all Jewish secondary pupils in 1925-26, 16.9% in 1930-31, 15.6% in 1934-35 and only 14.6% in 1937-38, the academic year immediately preceding the enactment of the first anti-Jewish law. These community schools attracted the offspring of a distinctively non-educated and non-professional social bracket with, for example, almost half of them (48.8%) belonging to the families of traders, shopkeepers and shop assistants (as against 22% of pupils in state *Gymnasias* and 21% in Lutheran *Gymnasias*) while the proportion of children of the educated middle classes, teachers, professionals, civil servants, was among the lowest: 14% (as against 29% in state and Lutheran *Gymnasias*). (Data for 1934-35 computed from *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv* [Hungarian statistical yearbook], 1935, p. 312.)

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR in Light of New Documentation

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The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR has been assigned a prominent place in memoirs published in the West during the 1960's and 1970's.¹ Many articles and books on Soviet Jewish history have been devoted, in whole or in part, to the study of this organization.² An important monograph was recently published on the subject.³ All historical analysis has been based on Soviet publications, memoirs and fragmentary information culled from correspondence between members of the Committee and its supporters and friends abroad.

The Committee was disbanded in 1948 and the majority of its members were executed in 1952. Over thirty years have passed since these events, and in most countries such a time span would have been sufficient to warrant the opening of archives. In the USSR, however, all documentation on this subject, as on so many others, remains sealed, so that the appearance in the West of fresh scraps of primary data on the Committee can contribute significantly to our knowledge of Soviet Jewry during the war and in the immediate post-war years.

Through unconventional channels, the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (in Jerusalem) has recently acquired a number of documents (in copy form) which apparently belong to the archive of Solomon Mikhoels.⁴ Shortly after Mikhoels was murdered (14 January 1948), his daughter Natalia was appointed director of the Solomon Mikhoels Museum, located in his study and in the office of the GOSET (the Moscow State Yiddish Theater). Mikhoels' papers (including theater reviews, stenographic copies of his speeches and other material related to his activities) had been transferred some time in 1948 to the Bakhrushin Museum, according to the testimony of his daughter, where most of it was destroyed in a subsequent fire. Accord-

ing to the same witness, any remaining material of an archival nature that was left in Mikhoels' apartment was confiscated during a search that took place in early 1953.⁵ But a certain amount of archival material concerning Mikhoels' activities as an actor, director and as head of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, was preserved in a collection at the Central State Archive for Art and Literature in Moscow (TsGALI).

The collection is divided into two sections. The first (no. 2308) consists of 209 items containing material on the Moscow Jewish School of Theater. This includes instructions and directives received by the School from 1933 to 1939, as well as annual reports on its activities between 1936 and 1938. There are, in addition, notes for Mikhoels' lectures (1936-37) and material related to personal matters for the years 1933-1948.⁶ The other section (no. 2307) consists of 108 items of papers from the Moscow State Yiddish Theater (GOSET). Among them were directives received by the theater from 1938-1949; work schedules and reports from 1940-49; agreements with writers, composers and directors; lists of theater employees; and minutes of the "liquidation committee" that oversaw the dismantling of the theater. (This constitutes the only direct evidence, to the best of our knowledge, for the existence of a special "liquidation committee" for the GOSET).⁷

The documents acquired in Jerusalem most probably come from this material, and include personal papers and letters, as well as material relating to Mikhoels' work as director, teacher and manager at the State Yiddish Theater. Mikhoels' role as a public figure, identified with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, also finds reflection in a number of the letters in the collection. Some of the latter appear below, in translation from the Russian original.

The late 1930's saw the restriction and decline of legitimate Jewish activity in the Soviet Union. In mid-1938, the OZET (Society for the Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Workers) was forced to disband as was the KOMZET (State Committee for Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Workers).⁸ Thus, the Soviet Jews were left without any public or state body to deal with their specific problems on a nationwide level.

In January 1938, the Russian-language organ of the OZET, *Tribuna*, which had disseminated a certain amount of information about Jewish life in the Soviet Union, was closed down.⁹ On 14 September of that year, publication of the main Communist Yiddish newspaper, *Der emes*, ceased.¹⁰ There was a steep decline in Yiddish publishing in general, both from a qualitative and quantitative point of view. While 437 pamphlets and books in Yiddish were published in 1935, the number in 1938 was down to 348.¹¹

Soviet Jewish research institutions ceased activity almost completely, though they continued to exist officially on a reduced scale.¹²

The number of Yiddish schools dwindled considerably,¹³ and in those few that remained, Russian became the language of instruction, while Yiddish was taught only as one of the subjects in the curriculum—a reversal of the situation in the 1920's.

A considerable number of those involved in communist Yiddish culture were arrested and exiled or executed in the great purges of 1936-37. Among them were several Jewish writers¹⁴ but in the main, Jewish writers continued to publish in whatever literary forums remained, and Jewish dramatists continued to stage plays at the four professional Jewish theaters (in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk and Birobidzhan). Willingly or not, literary and theatrical figures became the only visible representatives of the Soviet Jewish community, and the regime used them in this capacity whenever it was considered expedient. Thus, people whose main activity had previously been in artistic fields now found themselves becoming public figures. Of these, one of the most prominent was director of the GOSET, Mikhoels.¹⁵ When the Soviet authorities organized a series of rallies (in November 1938) to protest against the Nazi attacks on German Jews on "Kristallnacht," among the participants were the Yiddish author, Itzik Feffer, and Mikhoels.¹⁶ The authorities decided once again to use Jewish literary and theater figures as propagandists when the Soviet annexation of parts of eastern Poland (following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty and the subsequent invasions of September 1939) brought with it the resident Jewish population of 1.3 million—ten percent of the total in the area. In addition, the new regions contained some three hundred thousand refugees fleeing, or expelled, from the German-occupied areas. Delegations of writers and artists were sent to the annexed territories and appeared at meetings and rallies, where they sang the praises of Jewish life in the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Thus, for example, in February 1940, a delegation of Soviet Yiddish writers arrived in the newly annexed western part of the Belorussian SSR, on the eve of the elections to the Supreme Soviet. The delegation included Yiddish novelists and poets Peretz Markish, Leyb Kvitko, Shmuel Halkin, Aron Kushnirov, Shmuel Godiner, Shmuel Rosin, Ber Orshansky, Buzi Olievsky and Elye Gordon. Among its members were also the literary and stage critics, Yehezkel Dobrushin and Yitskhok Nusinov; the director of the Moscow Yiddish publishing house, Leyb Strongin; and the secretary of the Jewish section of the Writers' Union in Belorussia, Hirsh Kamenetsky. This, like the other such delegations, met with employees in factories where a high proportion of the work-force was Jewish, appeared at literary evenings in public halls, and spoke about the achievements of Soviet Yiddish literature.¹⁸ While they thus fulfilled their assigned task, they were able to get an in-depth

view of the difficult economic situation and low morale of the Jews in the area—especially among the refugees. Upon their return, members of the delegation felt obliged to approach the highest government echelons with suggestions of ways to ease this situation. They drew up memoranda to this effect, and drafted a letter to Stalin.¹⁹ In their letter, they noted, *inter alia*, that

Jewish workers and the entire unfortunate mass of the Jewish poor, and the Jewish intelligentsia, are animated by the thirst to build life on new Soviet principles. This requires the implementation of systematic and organized economic and cultural-educational measures; at the present time it is not being carried out or is done poorly.

Along with criticism of the lack of practical action appropriate to the specific needs of the Jews in the annexed territories, the letter noted that

Young patriots of our homeland [the reference is to Jews of the annexed territories] are experiencing a tragedy whose equal has not been seen in the history of the Jewish people. Jews of the liberated areas and even more so the hundreds of thousands of refugees are the blood relatives of the three million Jews who remain in the zone of German interests. This by itself suggests the need for a series of immediate measures.

In drafting this appeal, to say nothing of sending it (if indeed it was sent), these literary personalities deviated from the role to which they had been assigned. Such behavior might well have aroused the suspicion in government circles that those involved were trying to assume leadership of the Jewish population. Indeed, Mikhoels' wife testified that in the late 1930's he claimed that "Sometimes it seems to me that I alone am responsible for my whole people."²⁰

Jewish literary and stage figures thus found themselves in an extremely difficult position at this time. Part of the Jewish community considered them a sort of unofficial leadership, turning to them with complaints about the decline of officially-sanctioned Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, and in fact demanding that they take appropriate action to change the situation (Doc. 1). The writers knew very well, however, that not only in the large urban centers but even in the Jewish Autonomous Region (upon which some of them had placed so much hope), Jewish cultural life had been all but destroyed in the purges of the late 1930's (Doc. 2).²¹ The authorities had clearly indicated that there would not only be no expansion of Jewish cultural activity, but that it intended to cancel the publication of Yiddish literary works in the original, and publish Russian translations instead.²²

Furthermore, the writers and others active in the cultural sphere sensed that a growing segment of the Jewish population was losing interest in Soviet Yiddish culture—whether as a consequence of government pressure or of assimilatory processes. All this promoted among them a sense of helplessness, isolation and even depression, feelings expressed by Mikhoels in a letter (a copy of which is now in Jerusalem) to his wife.

In May 1941, the Moscow State Yiddish Theater staged a series of performances in Leningrad—the second-largest Jewish population center in the Soviet Union, with an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 Jews. After a number of these performances, Mikhoels wrote to his wife:²³

I do not know what is the matter with me. I have the feeling that something has burst inside: apparently, an unprecedented tiredness [. . .] I think that it is not simply tiredness, but a special tiredness from everything that accompanied my latest work; both the difficulty of the work and the resistance of the ever slower and slower older actors led me to the end of my tether.

In addition to the difficulties that the authorities placed in the path of any new production, to which Mikhoels alludes in his letter, the theater, he implies, also encountered indifference among the Jewish public:

Here in the meantime things are joyless. At "Tevye"²⁴ on the opening day of the tour the hall was only fifty percent filled. At "Maimon,"²⁵ "Ispantsii [The Spaniards]"²⁶ and "Kunelelel"²⁷ there were even fewer. It was performed heavily and unwillingly. Tomorrow is a premiere. [. . .] Solitude here is just as thick as the noisy surroundings of businesslike Moscow [. . .]

The sense of loneliness and the nagging question, "For whom do I toil?" was almost certainly uppermost in the minds of many Soviet Jewish artists in the Soviet Union on the eve of the German invasion.

The sudden German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 once again encouraged the Soviet regime to use the Jewish intelligentsia in a propagandist role—this time with the Jews of the free world, particularly of the USA, in mind. Assigned a positive function, many Jewish artists found their spirits revived. On 24 August 1941 a gathering of "representatives of the Jewish people" was called in Moscow. Mikhoels spoke at the assembly, as did the Yiddish writers, Peretz Markish and Dovid Bergelson; the Russian authors of Jewish origin, Samuil Marshak and Ilya Ehrenberg; the journalist, Shakhna Epstein; and others. Addressing the Jews of the world, they emphasized that

"we are one people," and that "the ocean between us has not divided us, even for a moment."²⁹ The speakers stressed that "the very existence of the Jewish people is now at stake, more than ever before in the history of this tormented people,"³⁰ and called upon "the members of this ancient people [. . .] this people which has been persecuted for generations,"³¹ "Jews throughout the world, wherever they may live, regardless of differences in ideology and world view, to join without delay in the sacred battle against Fascism."³² This appeal greatly impressed many Soviet Jews, soldiers at the front as well as civilians, who were now more confident about addressing various requests to Jewish literary figures (Doc. 3).

Now, in contrast to the late 1930's, these intellectuals appeared publicly as representatives of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union, which seemed to legitimize their leadership position. This situation was institutionalized with the establishment of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the first quarter of 1942. The regime created the Committee for the specific purpose of collecting material and disseminating it, primarily abroad, among the Jewish communities in the West. The work of the Committee was conducted, at least in the first stage, according to specific instructions from Kuibyshev, where the government offices were located after their evacuation from Moscow. The Secretary of the Committee, Shakhna Epstein, lived in Kuibyshev at the time, while Mikhoels, the Chairman, was in Tashkent, to which the GOSET had been evacuated from Moscow in October 1941. The operating procedure of the Committee can be inferred from the following telegram, which Epstein sent, apparently in May 1942, to Mikhoels:

They proposed [emphasis added] convoking a meeting of the Jewish intelligentsia in Moscow. At the same time, of the plenum of the committee, also a continuation of the collections for the tank column.³³

At the gathering that took place in response to this telegram, the speeches were similar in tone to those of August 1941, but at the first plenary meeting of the Committee the question of its role inside of the Soviet Union was brought up. Several of the participants stressed the view that the Committee should not limit itself to propaganda activity aimed at those outside the Soviet Union, but should also deal with the problems of Soviet Jews. Proposals for expanding its sphere of activity came clearly to the fore in its second plenary meeting, which took place 18-20 February 1943, following the Soviet victory at Stalingrad.

A number of the participants urged the Committee to take upon itself the task of resettling the hundreds of thousands of refugees, and not to remain merely an office for the transmission of propaganda

abroad. They proposed that the Committee establish branches wherever there was a concentration of Jews.³⁴ In this way, many of the participants sought to break out of the existing framework and expand the scope of the tasks originally assigned to the Committee. Such demands most probably were not to the liking of those in authority, but given the policy of relative tolerance toward "nationalist deviations" during the war, and the Committee's utility as a propaganda tool, the authorities permitted the discussion of these ideas to continue.

Following this meeting of the Committee, Mikhoels and Itzik Feffer were summoned to Kuibyshev and asked to undertake a mission to the United States. Mikhoels thought the idea through very carefully, and was ambivalent about it up to the moment of departure, as he revealed in a letter to his wife of 15 March 1943:

I have thought over an awful lot during these days. Apparently, it has to be this way. You prepare for something your whole life and when finally the need arises to accomplish this thing, you turn out to be unprepared, everything seems unexpected and even unnecessary [. . .] The prospect of that situation in which, factually, I would find myself alone, appears to be awfully difficult and complicated. For my second colleague who is travelling with me can hardly offer me any support. And the complications then will increase with every passing day. I will just have to plunge right in. But in truth this is not like playing a role. A flop here is unthinkable—that means to ruin oneself, to behead oneself.

In these obscure lines, Mikhoels hinted at his awareness that the mission could prove fateful and that any slip could cost him his life, and made a point of stressing that Itzik Feffer might not be the best possible companion for such a difficult task. This may explain the cautious manner with which Mikhoels responded in the United States to those Jews who tried to raise the problems of Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

Preparations for the departure of the delegation took longer than initially expected. Feffer and Mikhoels had been scheduled to leave during the last part of March and to return to the Soviet Union at the end of June,³⁶ but they left the Soviet Union only at the beginning of May 1943 and arrived in the United States in mid-June. The delegation was received with great enthusiasm in the United States, Canada, Mexico and England and its mission was carried out to great advantage. In meetings which the delegation held with representatives of the Joint Distribution Committee and the World Jewish Congress, the American hosts expressed their willingness to help in resettling the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union, and even to renew the discussion of possible support for Jewish resettlement in the Crimean Peninsula.

In November 1943, the delegation returned to the Soviet Union, filled with impressions from their trip. During the spring of 1944, the Crimean Peninsula was liberated from Nazi occupation. Most of the local Tatar population was exiled for alleged collaboration with the enemy. The ethnic Germans from the Volga region had suffered a similar fate. These two areas seemed most suitable for a concentrated settlement of the Jewish population. Accordingly, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee requested that the Soviet authorities allot one of these areas for such settlement, and for the establishment of a Jewish republic (Doc. 4). The fact that this request was apparently rejected by Stalin personally did not have an immediate impact on the status of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. It was only in the late 1940's and early 1950's that the idea was denounced as a Jewish-Zionist plot to detach the Crimea from the USSR and hand it over to American imperialism.

Once most of the Nazi-occupied territory had been liberated, the Committee received an increasing number of appeals from the Jews who were encountering official difficulties in their attempts to return to their old homes (Doc. 5). There was also an increasing number of complaints against the lenience of the authorities towards those who had collaborated with the Nazis and had taken part in the murder of Jews (Doc. 6). After the final victory over Nazi Germany, the number of appeals to the Committee connected with manifestations of blatant anti-Semitism likewise increased (Docs. 7 and 10). For their part, Jews who had been exiled to the interior at the beginning of the war similarly appealed to the Committee to help them reunite with their families (Doc. 9). When the survivors returned to their former homes—in the Soviet Union as elsewhere—they devoted an intense effort to memorializing those who died at Nazi hands. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and particularly its head, Solomon Mikhoels, became the main source of aid and counsel in this sphere, too (Doc. 11). The Committee also received complaints concerning discrimination against Jews in acceptance and promotion at Soviet academic and research institutions. The first signs of such discrimination were already becoming apparent by 1947 (Doc. 13).

It was to the Anti-Fascist Committee, then, that Soviet Jews directed most of their complaints. Some even considered it the proper address for venting their criticism of Soviet policy toward the Yishuv (Doc. 12). However, in reality the Committee had its hands tied. It was never recognized by the Soviet authorities as the representative of Soviet Jews, with the official right to speak in their name and voice their demands and requests. Those actively involved in its work, beginning with Mikhoels himself (who had excellent connections) made concerted efforts to deal as best they could with the matters brought before

them, and took advantage of personal contacts in government and among the intelligentsia. One of the former actors of the GOSET has given the following description of Mikhoels' activities at the end of 1947:

In the corridor next to the entrance [. . .] sat a number of aging women, a young man, an actor in the Russian theater and a soldier. They, as many others, had come to Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels to ask for advice and help [. . .] When my friend and I entered his room, Mikhoels was busy talking on the phone. "His name is Alexander Davidovich Milner . . . That's how it's listed on the passport . . . Does that affect his acceptance into the university?" Mikhoels said in an excited tone. "You understand" [he said, turning to the writer of this account, and to his friend] "this is not an isolated case, but is becoming part of a pattern. They don't allow an old woman to enter her own apartment because she comes from Tashkent, where she had been 'hiding' from the war. 'Your people stayed in Tashkent while we fought,' they claim, 'so why don't you stay there?' . . . Another man is rejected wherever he seeks employment, without any explanations. A third man has been rejected from every university. Where are we heading?"³⁷

This question indeed seemed to preoccupy Mikhoels during his last trip to Minsk, where he was cruelly murdered on 14 January 1948.

It is fair to assume that one of the several factors that led to the murder of Solomon Mikhoels and to the arrest and execution of many Committee activists was the fact that so many Soviet Jews saw them as leaders.

Notes

1. The following memoirs devote some attention to the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and to the fate of its members: Yosef Kerler, *12 Oygust 1952* (Jerusalem, 1978); Israel Emiot, *Der birobidzhaner inien* (New York, 1960); Hersh Smoliar, *Vu bistu, haver Sidorov?* (Tel Aviv, 1975); Yitzhak Yanasovitch, *Mit yidishe shrayber in rusland* (Buenos Aires, 1959); Esther Markish, *Lahzor miderekh arukah* (Tel Aviv, 1977); Hersh Smoliar, *Oyf der letster pozitsie, mit der letster hofenung* (Tel Aviv, 1982).
2. S. M. Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1951) pp. 202–05; S. W. Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets* (New York, 1976) pp. 261–64; Benjamin West (ed.), *Behevlei klayah* (Tel Aviv, 1963) pp. 225–53; L. Schapiro, "The Jewish Antifascist Committee and Phases of Soviet Anti-Semitic Policy During and After World War II," in Vago and Mosse (eds.), *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe, 1918–1945* (New York, 1974) pp. 283–300; Yehoshua Gilboa, *Hashanim hash'horot—yahadut brit hamo'a'ot, 1939–1953* (Tel Aviv, 1972) pp. 37–59.

3. Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia; the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (New York, 1982).
4. The collection in the Mikhoels archive at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People is numbered P166.
5. Natalia Vofsi-Mikhoels, *Avi Shlomo Mikhoels* (1982) pp. 38-40.
6. *Tsentrāl'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva SSSR, putevoditel'—iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1959) p. 300.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
8. See Yaakov Levavi (Babitzky), "OZET-GEZERD (Hevrah lesidur hak-lai shel yehudim amelim bivrit hamo'azot)," *He'avar XVI* (1969) 118-30.
9. See Yehuda Slutsky, "Tribuna—ktav-et yehudi-rusi-sovieti (1927-1937)," *Behinot VIII-IX* (1977-78) 68-88.
10. *Gazety SSSR, 1917-1960; bibliograficheskii spravochnik* (Moscow, 1970) p. 48.
11. Khone Shmeruk, "Hapirsumim be-yidish bivrit hamo'azot bashanim 1917-1960," in Kh. Shmeruk (ed.), *Pirsumim yehudiim bivrit hamo'azot, 1917-1960* (Jerusalem, 1961) p. lxvi.
12. Alfred A. Greenbaum, *Jewish Scholarship and Scholarly Institutions in the Soviet Union, 1918-1953* (Jerusalem, 1978) pp. 72-76.
13. The Polish Jewish writer Melekh Tshemny was told the following about the closing of Yiddish schools, by a librarian in the Jewish library of the small town of New Zlatopol, in March-April 1941: "The Jewish school is closed. [The authorities] in Kremenchug wanted to find out how many Jews were interested in the Yiddish school . . . They took a vote and afterwards turned the school into a Ukrainian school. It has been several years since we had a Jewish school." (Interview by Dov Ben-Yaakov, 15 May 1971, p. 19 of transcript).
14. Among the prominent writers liquidated during this time were Izzy Kharik and Moshe Kulbak, as well as literary critics Yoisef Liberberg and Max Erik.
15. Mikhoels' role as a public figure, other than in the theatrical realm, became evident at a conference of Yiddish writers held in Moscow in April 1941. For reports of this conference, see *Ufboy* 1941, no. 9, pp. 12-13.
16. For a report on these gatherings see: *Der shtern* (28-29 November 1938); *Pravda* (28 November 1938).
17. For an account of the impact of the annexations on the expansion of Yiddish publishing, see Shmeruk, "Hapirsumim be-yidish bivrit hamo'azot (misof shnot hashloshim ad 1948)," in *Sifrut yehudei brit hamo'azot biyemot hashoah veaharehah*, Yad Vashem special publication.
18. On this visit, see the letter of Y. Dobrushin in *Yidishe kultur* (1940) no. 4, p. 54; Hersch Smoliar, "Hahayim ha-yehudiim bema'arav byelorussia hasovietit 1939-1941: prihah ushki'ah," *Shvut IV* (1976) 133-34.
19. Among the items from Mikhoels' archive which have reached Jerusalem is the first page only of the letter to Stalin, which mentions the memorandum. The memorandum itself is not in our hands. Citations are from the text of the letter.
20. A. Pototskaya-Mikhoels, "O Mikhoelse bogatom i starshem," in *Mikhoels* (Moscow, 1965) p. 508.
21. On the purges in the Jewish Autonomous Region, see: Yaakov Levavi (Babitzky), *Hahityashvut hayehudit bebirobidzhan* (Jerusalem, 1965) pp. 64-66, 362-70.
22. Such views were expressed to Itzik Feffer by a prominent cultural figure in the Ukraine in the summer of 1939, according to Soviet writer

H. Bloshtein: "This figure was of the opinion that it would be more practical to translate works by Jewish writers into Russian and Ukrainian, directly from the manuscript. He justified this by saying that the rising generation of Jews is not being educated in Jewish schools and no longer speaks Yiddish, while at the same time the older generation understands either Russian or Ukrainian fairly well. This approach would also permit the non-Jewish reader to become better acquainted with Yiddish literature." (H. Bloshtein, "Er volt itster alt gevorn 75 yor (a bintl zikhroynes vegn Dem Nister)," *Yiddishe kultur* (1959) no. 8, p. 22.

23. The letter, in Mikhoels' handwriting, is not dated, but from the context it is clear that he refers to the tour made by GOSET in Leningrad just prior to the outbreak of the Soviet-German war.

24. "Tevye der milkhiker," adapted for the stage by Y. Dobrushin and N. Oyslender, based on the story by Sholem Aleichem. Solomon Mikhoels staged the play and played the role of Tevye. Music was written by L. Pulver, and the set was designed by Y. Rabinowitz. The premiere performance was held at the Moscow State Yiddish Theater on 27 November 1938. Writing about the play after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Peretz Markish alluded to its contemporary resonance. In describing the scene in which Tevye and his daughters are expelled from the village, he emphasized:

This is how Jewish and non-Jewish anti-fascists are being persecuted in Germany, Austria and Fascist Italy. In this one little scene, presented in all its simplicity, we can feel history—the tragic history of a people that has not been broken by tragedy; of a people standing against the worst possible conditions and resisting them . . .

(Peretz Markish, *Mikhoels* [Moscow, 1939] pp. 48-49. The book was approved by the censor for publication on 3 October 1939.)

25. The play "Solomon Maimon" was written by the Soviet Yiddish writer M. Daniel, and the music was by L. Pulver. The set was designed by R. Falk; Solomon Mikhoels directed. The premiere performance took place on 22 October 1940 in Moscow and in 1941 the play was performed for the first time in Leningrad.

26. Lermontov's play "The Spaniards" was first staged at the GOSET in 1940 or 1941. Referring to this play in 1941, Mikhoels wrote:

Though there were many differences between Fernando and Emilia, there was one further factor that divided him from Naomi. It was not just the gap of social inequality, as the one which stood between Fernando and Emilia, but the difference in nationality as well. And these days, when ideas about biological distinctions among peoples are rampant in the capitalist countries—distinctions that can be made to separate lovers—we can appreciate the tragedy of "The Spaniards" as a truly contemporary one

(Mikhoels, "Ispantsii," in *Mikhoels* [Moscow, 1965] p. 235).

27. A comedy by Avrohom Goldfadn, the father of the Yiddish theater (1840-1908).

28. During a visit to Leningrad, the theater staged "Wandering Stars" for the first time. The play was written by Y. Dobrushin, adapted from the work by Sholem Aleichem. The musical score was arranged by L. Pulver and the set was designed by A. Tishler. Solomon Mikhoels directed.

29. The words of Peretz Markish in *Briders yidn fun der gantser velt!* (Moscow, 1941) p. 14.

30. David Bergelson, *ibid.*, p. 18.
31. Solomon Mikhoels, *ibid.*, p. 8.
32. David Bergelson, *ibid.*, p. 20.
33. Cited from the documents in the Mikhoels archive, now at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem.
34. "Tsveyter plenum fun yidishn antifashistishn komitet fun FSSR," *Einikayt* (15 March 1943).
35. Cited from a letter written by Mikhoels, undated, which dealt mainly with final arrangements prior to his departure. The letter mentions the date 16 March as "tomorrow" and further on stated that "The trip will take from a week to ten days . . . and I will be there by the end of March." From this one can infer that the letter was written on 15 March 1943.
36. In the letter cited in note 35, Mikhoels wrote: "'How long will I be away? I have tried to clarify this matter here. Lozovsky told me that it would not be more than two months, apart from travel time . . . He said that had been the decision.'"
37. Yosef Sheyn, *Arum moskver yidishn teater*. (Paris, 1964) pp. 192-94.

DOCUMENTS¹

1.

Leningrad, 25.4.39

To the People's Artist of the USSR
Comrade Mikhoels

We greatly regret that Leningrad has no Jewish theater, no Jewish club, no society and no one with whom to talk.

Sholem Aleichem's jubilee is passing here almost unnoticed.²

The public library has an exhibition, but the Jewish population is completely unaware of it; the newspapers don't mention it and there are no posters. At the entrance to the library hangs a poster—"Sholem Aleichem Exhibit." Whoever notices the sign will drop in to have a look.

A concert was held in the Academic Capella [hall] in connection with the jubilee, but this concert was most unsuitable for the jubilee.³ The little theater was full, there were no tickets, a large crowd stood by the doors and on the street, asking for tickets, and the public went away embittered, because they couldn't go to the concert.

In the exhibition hall of the public library a meeting was scheduled for 5:00 PM (as if on purpose so that the public wouldn't be there). About two dozen people attended, no more. No one knew about this meeting. Someone from the group who arranged the jubilee spoke and

someone from the public. And that was all. When many Jews learned about this, they were indignant and offended by such inattention, such lack of activity and organization and inability to conduct a jubilee.

It is very annoying and very sad that Jews pay so little attention to their outstanding writers, poets, etc. They discredit themselves, place themselves beneath all others. This jubilee should be respected according to its worth, as an event of worldwide magnitude, which should be the pride of the people.

They comforted us that the artist Mikhoels will come to Leningrad which would enhance the jubilee.

We should be most happy and grateful.

(Signed for all) Soloveichik
[signature]

2.

Birobidzhan, 15.6.39

Asyonok,⁴ my dear, you see how I remember you and write frequently. The day before yesterday the theater received a telegram from Solomon Mikhailovich [Mikhoels] from which I understood that he is in Dnepropetrovsk. How is the People's [Artist]⁵ there and how are you in Moscow? Write to me, please; at the address which I already indicated in the previous letter (Khabarovsk. Regional Board for the Arts. Comrade Smolianov. For I.A. Belikov).

I have begun to feel a little more cheerful since the theater began to perform, had the premiere of "Wandering Stars"⁶ (not a bad show). Today is a jubilee evening and on the 20th I shall travel to Khabarovsk. In addition, the weather has become pleasant and sunny. And although clouds of dust are drifting about Birobidzhan, this is better than impassable mud and autumn rains. To top it all, Zhemchuzhina⁷ spent a day here on her way from Vladivostok to Moscow and I was with her for several hours. She asked about the health of the People's [Artist] and of Zuskin⁸ who, it turns out, visited her two days before her departure to the Far East, complained of insomnia, etc. I assured her that the insomnia had ended. (I don't know whether V. L. [Veniamin L'vovich Zuskin] will thank me for that.) Polina Semenova [Zhemchuzhina] watched two acts of the dress rehearsal of "Wandering Stars," was very pleased and found that the female troupe here is stronger than in Moscow GOSET. ("They act well, but in Moscow the women don't know even what to do with their hands. I pointed that out to Mikhoels when I watched 'Teveye.'")⁹

I tried, of course, to uphold Moscow's honor, but except for

Romm,¹⁰ she doesn't like any of the women in "Tevye." Particularly Rotbaum¹¹ and Karchmer. Here there is a truly capable gang (not only the women) and one can only be amazed how in these unbelievable conditions in which they live and work the performances turn out quite well. (I mean specifically "Wandering Stars" since I have not yet seen their other standard works. Despite a few deficiencies, this is a performance of good theater). They relate to Mikhoels with some kind of reverence, incessantly emphasizing that he is their teacher (this does not hinder them, it is true, from admiring Goldblatt).¹² And truly, People's [Artist], you can be proud of many of them, your students. Despite everything, they have some kind of creative daring, they set important tasks for themselves and accomplish them simply, with self-sacrifice.

Keep in mind that to work in their circumstances is quite a feat. They have disgusting facilities, no leadership and no audience. The living conditions are very bad. And it is no wonder that their enthusiasm flags somewhat, their creative flame begins to dim.

There is no nourishment for the fire, the flame cannot blaze up. And I am very sorry for this capable, young, self-sacrificing group, who in the name of hollow fireworks (the creation of a Jewish republic) are to a certain degree sacrificing themselves. For a Jewish Autonomous Region (as specifically Jewish)—this is a bluff.

Factually, everything comes down to signs in Yiddish, two or three Jewish villages and several kolkhozes. Altogether in the region, the Jewish population numbers about twenty thousand people (the others are much more numerous) and resettlement in the past two years has almost ceased (somewhere around 150 families). In addition, assimilation is occurring. The circulation of the two regional newspapers is characteristic. Twelve thousand copies of the *Birobidzhanskaia zvezda* [Birobidzhan Star] (in Russian) are distributed, but the *Birobidzhaner shtern* [Birobidzhan Star] (in Yiddish) barely reaches 1,500, although by the order of the regional Party committee the press run of both newspapers was set at 5,000 each. The literary Jewish journal printed here appears in a few hundred copies altogether.¹³ Its quality is not worth talking about. From conversations with the regional committee secretary¹⁴ and the editor of *Birobidzhanskaia zvezda*, I have the impression that not only will the creation of a Jewish republic not succeed (there can be no talk of that, I think), but that even the region is unlikely to be maintained as Jewish. For what, then, the sacrifices; for what all the enthusiasm? And it is no wonder that people fade; they have drunk all the eau de cologne, shampoo, even valerian drops (this is serious!), they rot while still on the stalk.

Well, today my letter did not come out very cheerful; for that

reason it's better to end quickly! Again I ask you to write me about everything. When you meet him, kiss the People's [Artist] for me (please send him the letter. How good it would be if he would scribble even a little something to me). With greetings to all. With a hug and kiss,

Osia¹⁵

3.

[1941]

Dear Comrade Professor!

I am now in the field with the army. I read the report on the Jewish meeting in Moscow with bated breath, with great joy. I am particularly pleased with the appeal to stop the tears, sobbing, sitting *shive* over the dead and mourning *golus*. Now is the time to act. It's so right—"Now or never!"

In the name of my Jewish comrades, I assure you that each of us, at his post, will kill the enemy and destroy him no worse than our Slavic brothers in the struggle. The enemy will be beaten!

In addition, dear professor, I have a request. At the meeting of 24. VII.41.,¹⁶ a journalist, a correspondent of the Jewish press in the USA—Shakhna Epstein—spoke. From the photograph I recognized him as a Jewish activist in the leftist organizations in Paris. (I myself am from Riga, but in 1938–39 I lived in Paris in order to improve my skills—I am a pianist). If Shakhna Epstein is only his pseudonym and I am not mistaken that he is *Leo Glezer*¹⁷ (at whose place I lived in Paris), then I ask you to help me make contact with him. If I am mistaken, please let me know. Excuse me for the trouble to which I am putting you.

We waited and waited for your visit to Riga as a guest of our Jewish theater,¹⁸ but unfortunately, it didn't come about. But I am sure that in the new Soviet Riga we shall have the honor to greet you as our dear guest.

My address: Field post station No. 557
Post station No. 4, Orchestra
G. I. Braun

I await your reply and remain yours,

G Braun [signature]

4. [Memorandum on Jewish Resettlement]¹⁹

[1944]

[. . .] In the course of the Patriotic War [Soviet-German War 1941-1945] there arose again a series of urgent questions connected with the life and organization of the Jewish masses of the Soviet Union.

According to approximate data, before the war there were about five million Jews in the USSR. Of them more than a million were killed by the Fascists in the Soviet areas which were temporarily conquered.²⁰

Among the Jews living in the USSR, a significant portion reside in the western regions of the Ukraine and Belorussia, former eastern Poland, the Baltic republics, Bessarabia and Bukovina. With the exception of those capable of bearing arms who are in the ranks of the Red Army, the entire Jewish population is scattered in groups throughout the Central Asian republics, Siberia, the banks of the Volga and in certain central regions of Soviet Russia.

The question of returning a significant part of the Jewish population to their native locations loses its real meaning in that some—for example, the Polish Jews—having become Soviet citizens, cannot return to Poland. And a part of the indigenous Jewish population of the USSR again faces the question of shelter, for the areas which they had inhabited for so long have been thoroughly destroyed and none of their relatives remain alive. On the other hand, those hurriedly evacuated to new places cannot regard their situation as stable and in good order.

As for political and cultural educational work in their native language, in that respect the matter is even worse since the overwhelming majority know no language other than Yiddish sufficiently well, and almost no work is done in Yiddish. This fact makes it easier for harmful elements to increase their influence in this milieu. Further economic recovery and the building up of Soviet Jewish culture, which has attained important achievements, is made extraordinarily complicated by the above-mentioned circumstances.

At the same time, whether under the influence of Fascist propaganda or as a consequence—during the war—of the intensification of certain capitalist vestiges in the psyche of certain strata of the population, including part of the intelligentsia, new outbursts of anti-Semitism have become noticeable. These unhealthy phenomena are extremely painful to literally all strata of the Soviet Jewish population, which is natural, given the fact that the entire Jewish people is experiencing the greatest tragedy in its history, having lost about four million of its number at the hands of the Fascist barbarians, i.e., more than a quarter

of its total population. This development evokes on the other hand the growth of nationalistic and chauvinistic feelings [among the Jews].

In its time the Jewish Autonomous Region was created in Birobidzhan, with the prospect of transforming it into a Jewish Soviet Republic, thus [resolving the anomaly of a non-territorial nationality group by] granting the Jewish people normative state and legal status. Such a development would have equalized its position in the family of fraternal peoples of the Soviet Union in this respect also. It must be acknowledged that the Birobidzhan experiment, for a variety of reasons, including its extreme distance from the primary locations of the Jewish working masses, did not produce the desired effect. The national Jewish districts in the Crimea and in the Kherson area were reputedly more successful in this sense, both economically and culturally.

In view of the above, we consider it timely and expedient to place for discussion on the agenda of post-war problems the question of creating a Jewish Soviet Republic in one of the regions where, subject to political considerations, this is possible. We would consider that such a region could be either the territory of the former republic of Volga Germans or in the Crimea.

The creation of such a republic would solve once and for all the problem of the Jewish people, its life and development in a Bolshevik manner. Such a solution, which was impossible for so many centuries, is still impossible in all states other than our Great Socialist Motherland.

In the construction of such a republic the Jewish masses of all countries, in particular of the USA, would offer us essential help.

Among the Jewish working masses of the USSR—who were not behind hand among those fighting against the German invaders, both at the front and in the rear during the Great Patriotic War—such an idea enjoys unusual popularity [. . .]

5.

20.8.44

Anti-Fascist Committee
To Comrade Mikhoels

From a captain's wife, L. V. Berdakina, temporarily living in Simferopol, Lenin 19, Apt. 18

Petition

I am appealing for your intercession in obtaining permission for me and my family, consisting of two children: a son Veniamin Yakovlevich Berdakin, b. 1927, a student of automechanics; and a daughter, Sofia Yakovlevna, b. 1940; and myself, Liubov Veniaminova Berdakina, b. 1900 to return home to Kalinindorf,²¹ Kherson Region. I was evacuated from there and was located for the duration in Siberia, in the Altai Region. A month ago I succeeded in traveling to Simferopol, but I want to go home. But it is impossible to get there without an official permit; I have received no answer to my repeated requests. I wrote to friends and they advised me to turn to you. My husband, a military doctor with the rank of captain, was conscripted and has been at the front the whole time, and he also received no answer to his requests, that we be permitted to return home. In addition, we are in difficult material circumstances, and it is very difficult for us to live in a strange city. In Kalinindorf I worked in the hospital. Now I would perform any kind of work, I am ready to work in a kolkhoz, if only I can live at home.

I ask for your intercession in obtaining authorization to go to Kalinindorf. My husband is a member of the Kalinindorf district Soviet and RIK [district executive committee], a deputy of the village Soviet, and chief doctor of the district hospital.

L. V. Berdakina

6.

26.8.44

Dear Comrade Chairman of the Anti-Fascist Committee!

Recently I succeeded in visiting the motherland, and shtetl of Minkovtsy,²² Kamenets-Podolsk Region of the USSR, where I learned of the tragic death, at the hands of the German Fascist invaders of my family—my wife and my son as well as my wife's parents and all her relatives among the 2000 Jews of the shtetl who were murdered.

The slaughter was carried out on 31.8.41, i.e., at the beginning of the war; it was the first such action in all the regions of the Kamenets-Podolsk Region and almost the entire Ukraine. According to the testimony of the few surviving inhabitants of the shtetl, I was convinced that it was the action of a particular band of local inhabitants from the surrounding villages (Antonovka, Kuzhelovka etc.), who conducted

secret meetings and submitted their decisions about the annihilation of all Jews and Communists of the entire region to the Gestapo, which quickly—31.8.41 dispatched a detachment there and with the help of local police [*politsai*] drove all the Jews and Communists to a hill beyond the shtetl, shot them all and threw them into three ditches.

At present these police go about freely and work in the region. An especially savage member of the police now works as a cinema technician, and the local organs of authority tolerate this.

It is difficult to describe everything that I experienced and heard from the remaining inhabitants. For a more vivid familiarity with the situation which occurred in Minkovtsy during the occupation by the German bandits, if you find it necessary, you can summon an inhabitant of this shtetl, Haim Ikhilevich Ingberman, who lived underground the whole time and knows more than a little about those evil deeds which were committed there.

With a greeting from the front
Captain [signature]

7.

12 July 194[5]

Anti-Fascist Jewish Committee—Moscow

To Comrade Mikhoels

An incredible moral depression, oppressing us to the utmost, forces us to turn to you with a request to dispel our doubts, calm us all, and to undertake appropriate measures.

Recently, cases of anti-Semitic attacks have become more frequent: Jews have been beaten and insulted at the market, in stores, schools and even in institutions and enterprises; simply on the street; some of the public witnessing such incidents join in the hooting and egg on the hooligans.

Here are some concrete facts from reality in Rubtsovsk:²³

1. In the middle of May at the market one woman, with the clear connivance and even participation of the market supervisor, took away a chicken—purportedly stolen—which had been bought by the mother of Comrade Belehov, director of the tool shop of the factory; meanwhile all this was accompanied by insults in an anti-Semitic spirit!

2. Gazizov, a worker of the TsES [central electric station] of the factory committed a series of hooligan attacks, accompanying his excesses with anti-Semitic declarations. On 3 July of this year in the

bread store of the factory Gazizov insulted in word and deed the factory worker I. G. Lvovskaya, wife of a front officer of the Red Army several times decorated; he hit one old lady who was felled by the blow, but upon discovering that she was Russian, he helped her get up and apologized, adding, "but I thought you were a Jewess," after which he beat the OTK [technical control division] worker, Patukhova, wife of a senior worker with more than thirty years experience at this factory; and finally he beat until he bled a Polish Jew, D. Lazarovsky, who interceded on behalf of Patukhova.

3. On the night of 4 July in the same store a band of five people, under the leadership of Nikolai Podprugin, a worker in shop No. 2, and of Bondarenko, a worker in shop No. 1, beat the Polish Jew Zilbershtein, and rained insults and threats upon I. N. Tkachenko, a senior worker of factory shop No. 1 because he interceded.

4. The daughter of senior factory worker Lerner, Comrade Rusobrova, ORS [workers' supplies section] worker, turned to the *Gorzdravotdel* [municipal division of public health] for a certificate in connection with the notice she had received via the *Raivoenkomat* [regional military commissariat] about her husband's death on one of the war fronts; instead of help, she was asked the question—"what nation are you from?" Astonished at this question, she asked, "What does nation have to do with anything here," and not attaining anything other than poisoned grins, Rusobrova left the *Gorzdravotdel* with nothing.

5. On 8 July the hooligans completely lost all control of themselves and caused something like a pogrom at the stadium during a football match. The director of subsidiary agriculture at the *Gorpishchepromkombinat* [city food processing combine], a certain Markov, with a chest decorated with medals (since the organizers of these excesses generally do not appear themselves, but put up invalids or decorated participants of the patriotic war) beat the factory engineer Eistrakh, decorated with a medal for the defense of Odessa; tried to beat another engineer and defender of Odessa, also decorated with a medal, Comrade Gimpelman; but was hindered in this by engineer Mirsky. Then Mirsky was approached by a citizen who called himself an NKVD worker; he led Mirsky to a room where Mirsky was beaten by this same Markov and others. When engineer Eistrakh, pale, with a torn shirt, burst away from the crowd surrounding him and hooting at him, it seemed to us like we were witnessing a scene from the movie *Professor Mamlok*.²⁴

The anti-Semitic excesses, which also occurred earlier, but have intensified recently and acquired terrible dimensions, undoubtedly are the result of the actions of a special group of ill-meaning people who

conduct secret anti-Semitic propaganda and sow national enmity because here in Rubtsovsk both in 1941 and early 1942 there was no notion of anti-Semitism.

We are disturbed by the fact that the local prosecutor's office, the militia and party organizations often play down the political side of these excesses, considering them simple hooliganism and rather frequently leaving these crimes completely unpunished.

Among us are direct participants and family members of participants in three wars: World War I, the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War. In these wars many of our dear ones gave their life for the Soviet Motherland and many were decorated. After this should we hear threats—"Wait until our own people return from the front, we'll slaughter all the Jews"? And this is taking place in a country which was the first in the world and in history to give the much suffering Jewish people the opportunity to live freely and develop after two thousand years of persecution. And this is the country which has crushed and annihilated the most savage enemy of the Jewish people—Fascism.

We can not be silent any longer!

The atmosphere now is inflamed: the excesses increase with every day, we are demoralized and in no condition to work.

We beg you to send a commission as soon as possible to investigate the facts presented here, to check the reaction of the local Party and Soviet organization to our complaints.

A group of workers of the
"Altaiselmash" [Altai agricultural
machinery] factory in Rubtsovsk,
Altai region:

[original signatures]: Shop director Sigal, OKS [capital construction division] [two signatures blurred], foreman Goldin, construction engineer Medvedovsky, engineer Bogudnov, foreman Shnaider, shop director [signature smudged], director of the financial dept. Korotin, dept. directors of the OTZ [labor and wages division] Boim, Kaufman, Shraiman, foreman Grinberg, Vainer, [signature blurred], foreman Pesmel, technical director of the shop Shnaider, director of the ODK [quality control section] M. Bernshtein, engineer Limeniuk, accountant Grinshtein, deputy chief accountant Talmapolsky, deputy director Geibtman, sr. designer Khmelnitsky, sr. designer Levit, dispatcher-engineer Komriz, director of the OTZ [labour and wages division] Lifshits, shop director Fridman, assistant shop director Krushan, director of the kindergarten [signature illegible], store director [signature illegible], electrician Lepkin [not very legible], director Yablonsky,

electrical engineer Maze, deputy director [signature blurred], shop mechanic Mirsky, [two signatures blurred].

8.

[1945]

Dear Solomon Mikhailovich!

Today is the premiere of *Freylechs* [cheerful tune].²⁵ Unfortunately I am unable to attend the theater as a spectator.

And so: *Freylechs*. One only has to think briefly about this one word.

After the greatest tragedy in the history of the existence of the Jewish people, their theater in the USSR is sold out for every performance with the slogan *Freylechs*.

You know, my friend, this is very significant and promising. This means that our people is alive, we are living and we shall live—we, its sons and daughters.

Sholom Aleichem said: "*Gute fraynd veln zikh freyen—shlekhte veln tsepuket vern kukndik*." [Good friends will rejoice—and ill-wishers will bust watching.] Retribution awaits the latter (*shlekhte*) sooner or later—they will be no more.

The Jewish people has occupied a worthy place in the general concord of all our peoples. It—our people—will work and rejoice.

And so, the application of the post-war five year plan in the field of art, the Jewish State Theater opens with the premiere *Freylechs*.

Good luck, dear one!

I am confident of the success of the premiere, with which I and Khena Naumovna congratulate you!

Greetings, congratulations and best wishes to the entire theater collective.

Boris Shimelovich²⁶

9.

30.11.45

Moscow Jewish Theater

To the Honored People's Artist of the USSR
Comrade Mikhoels

Our very dear friend!

We are sending to you our collective petition to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, M. I. Kalinin on the issues:

1. About removing from us and the members of our family the appellation "*spetspereselentsy*."²⁷

2. On the granting of permits to the members of our families to go from Tomsk Oblast to the city of Prokopyevsk, Kemerov Region—to our place of work—the construction of the third level of the Stalin coal mine since August 1943.

The same declaration, along with our individual petitions was sent directly to M. I. Kalinin.

Why did we decide to turn to you. We know about your interesting and important social activity. As a deputy of the Supreme Soviet,²⁸ as a great, widely recognized talent, you are ready and willing to offer various kinds of help to individuals and groups from our much suffering Jewish people. With your sensitivity you will know what forms of help you can give to expedite the approval of our petition.

We are confident that your expeditious, authoritative, active participation in this matter will help in a positive and more speedy outcome.

Be assured of our deep respect for you. The success of this matter will earn you our collective gratitude. From our hearts we wish you health and success in all your undertakings.

[Signatures]: 1. Smolian, I. M.; 2. Levin; 3. Ess, B.; 4. Sadovnik; 5. Khanzhi; 6. Rubinshtein; 7. Rotshtein; 8. Feldman; 9. Kolitsman; 10. Fenster; 11. Nussenbaum, S. I.; 12. Steikovsky; 13. Shlafer; 14. Shvartsman; 15. Yagolnitser; 16. Traiber; 17. Goldman; 18. Kupershtein, Sh.; 19. Dorfman; 20. Vishmit.

To the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Workers' Deputies of the USSR, Kalinin, Mikhail Ivanovich

Moscow

Declaration

We, the following signatories, turn to you, our deeply respected president of the USSR, Mikhail Ivanovich, with a petition to issue governmental instructions:

1. To remove from us and the members of our families the appellation *spetspereselentsy*.

2. To have the Tomsk Oblast NKVD permit the departure of mem-

bers of our families from Tomsk Region to the city of Prokopevsk, Kemerovsk Region.

Our petition is dictated by our difficult situation which would be significantly eased if you could solve this problem.

The circumstances are as follows: From various places in Lithuania, Northern Bukovina, Moldavia and Bessarabia we were resettled in June 1941 together with our families in the Tomsk Region.²⁹ We are deeply convinced that such a massive resettlement of Jewish families from these localities was not intended as a class repression.

Yes, many of us—under the capitalist order (before the advent of Soviet power) were forced to live specifically in these localities (the zone of the Jewish ghetto and eternal border wars) and to engage in commerce. It is not difficult to become convinced that this was not our fault but our great misfortune. In these localities there was no developed manufacturing, industry, many were unable to obtain office positions. Unemployment and competition thrived among the congested population. Dry goods, hardware and grocery shops saved the situation and afforded a middling existence. We are convinced that in this case the repressions imposed upon us were not because our parents belonged in the past to the petty-trade stratum under capitalist conditions.

The repressive measures with regard to our parents, and all the more so to the majority of our younger generation were entirely uncalled for according to all considerations:

a. We ourselves all willingly transferred under Soviet power to employment in administration or labor since it is these positions which now and in the future promise a better existence, stable qualifications, a more favorable moral and material way of life.

b. We always felt, and the four years of war showed ever more graphically, that the Soviet Union alone is the sole true defender of national minorities. The nationality policy of the Soviet state seeks the revival and development of the physical and cultural strength of all the formerly oppressed nations and of the Jewish people, in particular.

c. As against this healthy Soviet nationality policy, the German Fascists during the entire period of Hitler's rule, especially during the war years, gave a lesson in multi-millions annihilation of all Jews without exception, not distinguishing between poor and rich, young and old. These victims cry out for vengeance.

d. This means that the Jewish people naturally seeks to live and work in any corner of the Soviet Union sincerely and loyally, for only the Soviet state offers the right to life, labor, rest, and cultural development.

e. A rational use of our labor was achieved in the construction of the third level of the Stalin coal mine.

Many of us also participate actively in social activity, improve our qualifications. We have all begun to live an active life. In comparison with the past, this new life is more interesting and full. We consider that our resettlement was dictated only by military circumstances, for we have been living in a zone where the battle front was drawing near. Now, thanks to the great victories of the Heroic RKKA [Workers and Peasants Red Army] and of the entire Soviet people, naturally the time has come to consider easing, abolishing the consequences of resettlement.

The July decision of the GKO [State Defence Committee] recommended the unification of the coal miners' families in order to offer us the conditions and opportunities for still better work. The Construction Board of the third level of the Stalin coal mine (city of Prokopevsk) and the National Coal Commissariat have also lent their support to this request.

Aside from family ties, the question of uniting the coal miners' families is also of material and practical importance. Under the existing conditions in the Tomsk Region and in the Bogcharsk District, the family members left there cannot apply their knowledge, strength, and labor. Bringing them from Tomsk Oblast to the city of Prokopevsk, Kemerov Region, where entry is permitted, will end the dependent condition of family members, attract new young forces to the work of construction, and increase the workers' energy.

Along with a positive solution to the question of resettling our families and uniting them with us, we also sincerely hope, dear Mikhail Ivanovich, our father and teacher, that you will also justly solve the basic issue of eliminating our appellation—accidentally and temporarily ascribed to us—of *spetspereselentsy*.

In doing so you will give us the opportunity to live better, to work and study better, and to devote all our strength, energy and knowledge more calmly and fully to the aid of socialist construction.

One can write with regard to all the attached declarations to one address:

Kemerov Oblast, City of Prokopevsk, Construction Board of the third level of the Stalin coal mine—Nussenbaum, S.I.

[All the signatures are as given in the former document]

10.

Kuibyshev, 4.1.46

Dear Comrades Mikhoels and Zaslavsky³⁰

I decided to inform you of my thoughts, which have long been upsetting me and, as far as I know, have been upsetting many citizens of our city and of other cities in the Soviet Union.

Perhaps it is no secret to you that the anti-Semites are trying to raise their heads and are becoming more and more brazen. At least in the city of Kuibyshev this is very noticeable. In street-cars, on queues, in railroad cars and in other places one can hear all sorts of attacks against Jews, along with attacks and ironic comments against other national minorities.

People frequently slander and inform on the Jews to various organs completely without any serious basis (by the way, such incidents occurred even before the war). There have been cases where Jews have been rejected for work. There have also been instances where various organs such as social welfare have adopted a bureaucratic attitude toward members of Jewish families—even toward old people whose children were killed and toward women left alone with their children when their husbands were killed.

In Kuibyshev during 1945 there were several instances of the murder of Jewish families. After these murders generally rumors are spread that they were committed with the intent to rob. No one knows the results of the investigations. Some time ago, the family of a Jewish dentist was murdered. The murderer was arrested. The results of the investigation and trial remain unknown.

In addition to such deplorable instances, it should be noted that the Jews' internal social life is more and more going to ruin. Ever more frequently one can encounter Jews who live alone, far from other Jews and consequently deprived of the opportunity to socialize with people of their own nationality. People forget their own native language and culture. Many of them change their first names and family names for various reasons and often because of the unfavorable circumstances in which they find themselves.

Jewish girls often become the wives of men of another nationality who afterwards reveal their anti-Semitism. I'm not even mentioning that we know very little about the international situation of the Jews, and little about how the Jews live in other cities in the Soviet Union. The circumstances [in which we live] demand that Jews have the opportunity to socialize with each other, to turn to a leading comrade for advice, help or support. Although Jewish societies exist here and

there, they are usually religious in spirit. The Soviets and trade unions are often insufficiently sensitive when it comes to inquiries from Jews, to settling their complaints, appeals, etc.

Furthermore, the Jewish people is now experiencing (as a result of the war) various kinds of difficulties more than any other people. Difficulties connected with the fact that many Jews lack living quarters. Material difficulties. Many Jews, men and women (particularly old people and widows deprived of their breadwinners) live half-starving, don't have enough to eat. The mortality rate among them is very high. No one organizes a collection for them.

Presumably, many Jews abroad (especially in the USA) would respond and offer material support to Jews who have suffered from German and other Fascism. Indeed, there are philanthropists in that same USA who concern themselves with raising the material standard of living of the Germans, scrupulously calculating how many calories each one of them gets.

We don't know whether the Jews who are still in German concentration camps receive material support from their brethren in the USA. Many Jews are becoming ill as a result of the insults and the humiliations which they suffer at the hands of the anti-Semites.

In the initial years of the Soviet regime, Jewish sections of the party organs were in existence.³¹ Then they justified themselves since Jews had barely arisen from former oppression and humiliation. Now, clearly, there is an urgent need to create such organs at least in the trade unions or at the very least in those unions where there is a significant number of Jews.

In some of the trade union regional committees there should be workers specially designated to work among the Jews and the other national minorities. These organs must be established, even if it means having to reduce the staff in other areas of work (physical culture, chess etc.). It is also necessary to establish All-Union and republic aid funds for Jewish families who have suffered loss at the hands of German Fascism (aged parents who have lost their children, widows, orphans). This fund should be created from payments made by Jews, both those living in the USSR and those abroad. Each Jew can make a contribution, without an upper limit to this fund. Any monetary sum or property could be willed to it.

In general, an insufficient amount of anti-racist agitation and propaganda is conducted among the urban and rural populations. No anti-racist journals or newspapers are published. No anti-racist films, explaining the question scientifically are produced. Up until now no anti-racist socio-scientific society has been organized, although this question could interest many in the most diverse circles and is in itself

a very interesting problem. The international unification of peoples of different nations and races, after all, serves the growth and progress of mankind in all respects, including anthropologically.

What I have presented is a statement, on the one hand of several facts of life and, on the other, proposals derived from the need to eradicate anti-Semitism and racism, which have revived and increased as the result of:

1. The Hitlerite agitation and propaganda, which put down roots among the vacillating and insufficiently conscious elements.
2. The amnesty of many imprisoned criminals.
3. The return from Germany of many war prisoners and other prisoners (who were captured by the Germans even before the war)—many of them were undoubtedly subjected to a Gestapo work-over.
4. The contamination of many Soviet institutions and trade unions (and frequently party bodies, it must be confessed) with blatantly anti-Semitic elements, who are also disposed against other national minorities, who camouflage themselves and do their dark, dirty work secretly, "on the sly," by conversations amongst "their own," by intrigues, slander, etc.
5. The weak agitation and propaganda activity directed against anti-Semitism, racism and various types and forms of chauvinism.
6. The lack of any kind of organizational socio-political activity among the Jews.

I beg you, comrades Mikhoels and Zaslavsky, to examine my letter and to send me an answer. I thank you in advance for your answer.

Engineer G. Sher [signature]

To the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee

Please send this letter (copy) to Comrade Zaslavsky, D. of the editorial board of the newspaper *Pravda*.

G. Sher [signature]

11.

14.9.46

Dear Solomon Mikhailovich!

I am sending you a photo of the first slab to be placed on the grave of the victims of Fascism in the city of Chervin,³² Minsk Region. Altogether forty slabs will be cast.

I am asking you to solicit the Soviet of Ministers of the Belorussian SSR to authorize 30,000 rubles for the establishment of a memorial at the grave of the victims of Fascism in Chervin as an addition to the 15,000 r. which we have collected to manufacture the above mentioned slabs in Moscow. Some have suggested that we assemble the slabs in the side wall of one of the stone houses in the city of Chervin itself, and place a single slab with a common inscription on the grave of the victims of Fascism.

Please give us your opinion.

Greetings, Vi . . .

12. On the Struggle to Eradicate Fascism and on the Fate of the Jewish People

[1946]³³

The ashes of the crematoria of Auschwitz, Treblinka and other German death factories have not yet cooled. The specter of the gas ovens where the Germans suffocated millions of people has barely vanished, the massive annihilation of millions of Jews by German and other Fascists has barely ended. Over Kiev's Babi Yar there still hovers, clearly, distinctly, the vision of the horrible shooting of 114,000 Jews. Tens of thousands of homes in numerous shtetls in the Ukraine, Belorussia and Poland stand empty for their age-old inhabitants—Jews—were murdered by the Fascists. In the fertile villages of the Jewish areas of the Ukraine and Crimea one can no longer hear the talk of industrious Jewish farmers, who lived there for centuries.

There is no measuring rod which can measure the magnitude of suffering and loss borne by the Jewish people from bloody, misanthropic Fascism; from its protectors; from the "diplomatic" attempts to strengthen Fascism under various masks—attempts which were conducted openly during the Fascists' brief time in power. There is no measuring rod which can measure the baseness and loathsomeness of the friends (both open and secret) of Fascism, of the enemies (both open and secret) of the ancient but young, powerful but weak Jewish people, which has brought much benefit to mankind, but remains so defenseless!

The very history of the people was defamed, the foundations of human knowledge were falsified, and the genius of the Jewish people was held down—all in preparation for the annihilation of the Jews by the Fascists.

It was the cursed, infinitely despised German Fascist killers and

their various henchmen who did the actual murdering, but it was their hidden associates and friends who were chuckling and rubbing their hands with pleasure. Now, cowed by the magnificent struggle of all freedom-loving mankind against Fascism, these people have crept into every loophole in literature, art, science (it was the most difficult to creep into the latter field since science itself is completely incompatible with unnatural Fascist obscurantism). They crept in here by stealth and there under the heaviest disguise tried to incite hatred against Jews, to defame the people as a whole, particularly certain of its most outstanding sons, who consistently fought for the fate of their people.

But Fascism, as a state organization, has been destroyed in all the countries where it temporarily was in power and where it raged most savagely. The peoples of the world turn away with contempt from Francoist Spain in which a blatant Fascist dictatorship has so far been preserved and they demand the destruction of this stronghold of Fascism and the liquidation of Fascist elements everywhere once and for all.

It is against this background that various pseudo-scientific, *ex cathedra* pronouncements have been appearing in the press, supposedly in defence of a national liberation movement but in essence almost openly fomenting anti-Semitism. They appeal in reality for the further annihilation and suppression, both spiritual and physical, of the Jewish people in Palestine. These articles, lectures and all kinds of pan-Arab appeals constitute a particularly brazen juggling of Fascist anti-Jewish propaganda. This entire screech, all these "howls" have as their cause the decision to allow one hundred thousand Jews into Palestine. The whole world knows the terrible deprivation of rights under which the Jews have to live in Greece, where monarchical-Fascist terror is in full swing and is forcing the Jews to emigrate. It is well known that there are tens of thousands of Jews who have been made homeless by Fascism—they cannot return to Germany where Fascist elements are still far from eradicated, or to other places destroyed by Fascism. They cannot continue to live in the refugee camps; they cannot immigrate to America. Why is it impossible for these people, saved by a miracle from death, to immigrate to Palestine, where there is a compact group of Jews who wish to help them? What danger can these hundred thousand unfortunate Jews, saved from death in the death camps, constitute for the development of the sixty million Arabs?

Clearly, they do not present any danger to the Arab national liberation movement. It is obvious that the fierce hue and cry which this issue has unleashed is a patently Fascist anti-Jewish campaign. Clearly, this campaign is part of the struggle for the revival of Fascism;

clearly, it is inspired by certain pro-Fascist elements who wish to disrupt the peaceful postwar development, who desire war with the Soviet Union. In their subversive work they are willing to use any provocations and in their activity in the Middle East they resort to the tried method of inciting hatred between peoples and, before all else, hatred toward the Jewish people. But if the anti-Semites, the cannibals calling for the destruction of Jewry, the various Purishkeviches,³⁴ Petliuras,³⁵ Makhnos,³⁶ Hitlers, did achieve temporary successes in the anti-Jewish activity, their end was all the more ignominious and terrible for that. This time, these anti-Semitic gentlemen, enemies of the Jewish people—even if they have the impudence to array themselves in the guise of would-be Marxists heralding a "national liberation" (read a pan-Arab) movement—will not attain even a transient success.

Irrevocably gone are the times when the interests of the Jewish people were grist for the mill of political scoundrels. The times will never return when for every plausible and implausible reason it was permissible to destroy what had been built up by the Jewish people and to agitate for their destruction.

Indeed, one need only approach the question impartially to become convinced that the Jews have justice on their side. A people oppressed for millenia, annihilated, has found for a million of its sons and daughters some semblance of autonomy in their historical homeland—in Palestine. The Arabs are a people who share the same origin as the Jews, and moreover, of course, they are not going to lose the right to any of their numerous states. The only ones who lose rights in Palestine are the pro-Fascist political foxes. The presence of the Jews there makes it more difficult for them to rush about from Hitler to Churchill, from the League of Arab Nations to those "decent" forces who lend their protection to all kinds of anti-Jewish outbursts. No matter how strange it might seem, such elements have found a place for themselves even on the platform of Soviet lecture halls (the lectures of Milogradov, Lutsky³⁷ and others).

From 1936 to 1939 anti-Jewish pogroms occurred in Palestine—this is presented as the Arab liberation movement. During the war, many Arab figures migrated to Hitler in Berlin (the Mufti of Jerusalem and others). These Arab politicians did not take any active part in the war against the Fascist Axis of Germany, Italy and their allies, the true enemies of the Arabs and of all mankind. On the contrary, some came out in support of Fascist Germany. Consequently, they—these figures of pan-Arabism, this league of united nations—do not deserve any credit from the United Nations.

These political foxes and scoundrels are trying to wipe the Jewish

people from the face of the earth even though this people, which had to endure the savage hatred of Fascism against freedom-loving mankind, fought consistently and actively against German and other Fascism. They are trying to crown the physical annihilation of the Jews with the spiritual destruction of those left alive. Their plot to deny the right of the Jewish people to a governmental system is utterly repulsive and disgusting. This denial is patently unscientific, anti-Marxist. It is a patent pro-Fascist affirmation. Luxemburg, with a population of 300,000 has the right to be, and should be, an independent state! Various small nations have the right to preserve their governmental system! This is completely true as long as class society exists.

But why must a great nation, the Jews, with many millenia of history, with a powerful culture, which has given so much to mankind, be deprived of this right?

Clearly, depriving the Jews of the right to settle in a compact mass is a manifestly pro-Fascist action, an attempt to revive the times when the Jews were being annihilated. But this attempt must be and will be brought to nought. Progressive humanity will put an end to the incitement of hatred against the Jews and against their achievements in Palestine and in other countries. All the Fascist ravings, all the Fascist pogroms and actions have cost all the peoples too much blood, sufferings and horror!

It is time to end this! It is time to understand that this is inadmissible!

The Jewish people has lived, lives, and shall live!

It will disappear only when classes, states and nations disappear, only when communism triumphs *throughout the world*! The path toward this aspiration of all mankind is long. On the road toward it, the existence of the Jewish people—like that of other peoples—is a natural law of social development.

Roizen, M. A. [signature]

13.

[1947]³⁸

For Reference

The Commission of the Presidium of the AN SSSR [Academy of Sciences, USSR] has rejected the confirmation of all the Jews (eleven people) [who had applied]. Five of them did not have a low grade ("satisfactory") on any of their exams.

Gurevich

The only one of all the candidates who passed *all* the exams with a "five,"³⁹—a member of VKP(b) [All-union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)]. The reason for the rejection—he is an orientalist, and since the country needs orientalists, it is inexpedient to accept him for another speciality. The Institute of Philosophy is interested in Comrade Gurevich since he knows oriental languages and can work in the field of Eastern philosophy. Comrade Gurevich presented a certificate obtained from the Oriental Institute, that the Institute does not need him and permits him to use his own discretion and recommends him for graduate studies at the Institute of Philosophy.

Vorsovskaia

A member of the VKP(b); she has sixteen years of pedagogical experience in propaganda work, and her speciality is suitable—she graduated from the Faculty of Russian Language. The reason for the rejection is not indicated since there aren't any reasons. Korotaev refers to the Institute; the Institute had accepted her and refers to Korotaev.

Kantorovich

A partisan; a candidate for membership of the VKP (b); decorated; her speciality is suitable (she graduated from the Faculty of Russian Language and Literature). As there is no reason for rejection the case has been put off and drawn out for the second month already, they refer to technical reasons, do not confirm and reject.

Zibel-Vaisman

Decorated; a front-line soldier; a candidate for the VKP (b). Third year working in school. His speciality is suitable—a historian who has gone into the area of historical materialism. The reason for rejection—he finished the Institute this year and has not yet shown his capability for scholarly work (although his academic supervisor, Prof. Konstantinov, in evaluating his research paper, noted his aptitude for scholarly work).

Pritsker

Decorated; a front-line soldier; a member of the VKP(b). The reason—he studied in graduate school before he joined the army and did not distinguish himself.

The remaining candidates (Levit, Finkelshtein, Rukhovich, Nemirovskaya, Shafran, Kabalnitskaya) do have one poor (“satisfactory”) grade either in language or in one question in philosophy. But among the Russians who have been confirmed, there are only five or six who do not have a “satisfactory” mark. The Presidium did not reject one of the Russians who passed before the examination and admissions committee. There is a big shortage in the sector of psychology. They announced an additional selection, but are not taking Jews (Pritsker, Levit). Five months ago, all the Jews passed the credentials committee, after which they were accepted by the examination and admissions committee and by the bureau of the division of graduate studies and the historico-philosophical sciences.

The rejection is signed by the member of the Presidium of the AN SSSR, Academician Nikitin and by the director of the division of graduate studies, Korotaev.

Notes to the Documents

1. All documents have been translated from the original Russian manuscripts by Stefanie Hoffman. They are arranged in chronological order. My own interpolated comments appear in square brackets [].

2. 1939 marked the eightieth anniversary of the birth of the great Jewish writer Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinowitch). The event was marked publicly throughout the Soviet Union during 1939–40. Seventeen of his works in Russian translation were published, in addition to new editions of books in the Yiddish original. A special committee was formed to mark the jubilee by the Writers' Union in Leningrad. The Russian writer Mikhail Zoshchenko (1895–1958) headed the committee, which also included actor Boris Gurin-Guryanov (1883–1944) and the composer Ermler. (*Oktyabr*, 6 March 1939).

3. According to press reports, a recitation (in Russian), of passages from Sholem Aleichem's works, dedicated to the writer's memory, took place in the Leningrad Conservatory. The readings were performed by Emanuel Kamenka. (*Oktyabr*, 6 March 1939).

4. The letter was written to Anastasia Pavlovna Pototskaya-Mikhoels, whom friends called Asyka, Asyonok, etc. Anastasia, the daughter of Varvara Vaikov-Pototskaya, founder of the “Progressive Gymnasium,” was born in 1907 and was trained as a biologist. In 1936 she married Solomon Mikhoels.

5. On 31 March 1939, Mikhoels received the title “People's Artist of the Soviet Union,” along with the Order of Lenin medal.

6. The play was staged in Birobidzhan by Samuil Margulin, and the premiere performance took place on 12 June 1939, in honor of the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Jewish Autonomous Region and of the establishment of the theater there. F. Arones, “Five years of the Birobidzhan Jewish State Theater,” *Nay-lebn* (New York) August/September, 1939; *Oktyabr* (Minsk) 3 May, 1939.

7. Polina Semyonovna Zhemchuzhina (?–1970), the Jewish wife of Vyacheslav Molotov, was born in Odessa, and was active in the revolutionary movement until 1917. After the Bolshevik takeover, she fulfilled a variety of functions in the Soviet *apparat*. During 1939–40 she served as Minister of Fisheries, and in the second half of the 1940's was a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Despite her involvement in general Soviet affairs, she displayed great interest in Jewish matters and made a point of sprinkling her conversation with Yiddishisms—as is reported by Mordecai Namir, at the time, first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Moscow. Zhemchuzhina was apparently connected indirectly with the proposal to establish a Jewish republic in the Crimea. She was arrested in 1949 and exiled to Kazakhstan. She was permitted to return only after Stalin's death. (See Mordecai Namir, *Shlihut bemoskvah* [Tel Aviv, 1971] pp. 83–84; *Khrushchev ma'aleh zikhronot* [Tel Aviv, 1971] pp. 186–87.)

8. Veniamin Zuskin (1899–1952) became associated with the Yiddish Theater in Moscow in 1921, and played a number of outstanding roles. From 1935 on, he served as an instructor in the drama school attached to the theater. In 1939 he was awarded the title of “People's Artist” of the RSFSR. After the murder of Mikhoels (14 January 1948), Zuskin became the director of the GOSET. He was arrested at the end of the 1940's and was murdered in prison in 1952.

9. See note 24 in my introduction.

10. Leah Romm (1894–1959) joined the Yiddish theater in Petrograd in 1919, where she continued to perform until its demise in 1949. During the last years of her life, she avoided all public activity.

11. Sarah Rotbaum (1899–1970) studied in drama schools in Warsaw (1916–1918) and Berlin (1918–1921). In 1921 she joined the Yiddish Theater in Moscow, where she performed until its closure in 1949. During the 1950's she returned to Poland.

12. Moyshe Goldblatt (1896–1974) started his career as an actor in a traveling troupe in 1918. In 1924 he graduated from the Yiddish Theater studio in Moscow and continued to perform there for a number of years. From 1931 to 1936, he was the theatrical director of the Gypsy Theater in that city. In 1935 he was awarded the title of “Outstanding Artist” of the RSFSR. He was appointed as the theatrical director of the Lazar Kaganovich Yiddish Theater in Birobidzhan, in 1937. He contributed significantly to the artistic level of the theater, but left the area in 1939 for “health reasons.” In 1940–41 he was a director at the Yiddish theater in Kiev. From 1941 to 1944 he served as theatrical director at the Kazakh Drama Theater in Alma-Ata. From 1944 to 1951 he worked as a director at the Russian theater in Kharkov and while there (1945) received the title of “Outstanding Cultural Figure” of the Ukraine SSR. The rising wave of anti-Semitism led him to return to Alma-Ata, where he continued to work in the Kazakh theater until 1959. He emigrated to Israel in 1972. (For his activity in the Gypsy theater, see *Shvut* IV, pp. 119–22.)

13. From 1936 to 1940, a "journal for the arts, politics and society" appeared in the Jewish Autonomous Region, called *Forpost*. From 1936 to 1938 it was printed in Moscow, and afterwards it was transferred to Birobidzhan. The journal printed work by Jewish writers living in the Region, as well as by those living elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

14. During this time, Grigori (Hirsh) Sukharev was the Party secretary of the Region; he was also a delegate to the Council of Nationalities (of the Supreme Soviet).

15. Isai Belikov, a theater critic, wrote reviews for Russian theatrical journals. For a few years in the early 1930's, he served as the administrative director of the GOSET, and was an intimate of the Mikhoels household.

16. On this meeting, see my introduction.

17. Shakhna Epstein (1883–1945) received a traditional Jewish education. In 1903 he joined the Bund, and published a number of articles in that party's press. He was arrested for revolutionary activities, but escaped and in 1909 reached the United States. After the February Revolution of 1917 he returned to Russia, was active in Bund affairs, and wrote for Bund journals in Yiddish and Russian. In 1919 he joined the Communist Party and was active in its Jewish Section (Evsektzia). In 1921 he was sent to the United States to help organize a split in the socialist parties and facilitate the entry of their leftist factions into the Communist Party. He returned to the Soviet Union at the end of the twenties and continued his work as editor of various journals and newspapers. It appears that during the 1930's he was assigned rather important work by the Soviet espionage service, and was sent to Germany, France, Switzerland and the United States. It is quite possible, then, that Epstein indeed lived in Paris towards the end of the 1930's under an assumed name. During the Soviet-German war, he served as the secretary of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and as the chief editor of its newspaper, *Einikayt*.

18. The Red Army entered Latvia on 16 June 1940. From this moment on, sovietization of Jewish life there proceeded apace. It was in this context that a state Yiddish theater was established in Riga, directed by Y. Lanin. In its first year, the theater staged ten plays by Soviet playwrights, both Jewish and non-Jewish. (See Dov Levin, *Im hagav el hakim* [Tel Aviv, 1978] p. 37.)

19. This document, consisting of two typewritten pages, has reached us in this form, with neither its beginning nor its conclusion. It is, most likely, part of the memorandum presented to the authorities by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee on the question of allocating territory in the Crimea or in the former Volga German area for Jewish resettlement. The document is undated, but it can be assumed with a good deal of certainty that it was drafted sometime between April/May and September of 1944. It was in April and May 1944 that the Red Army liberated the Crimea. In September 1944, the pro-Soviet Polish government signed a repatriation agreement with the Ukrainian and the Belorussian SSR's, according to which Polish Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union were recognized as Polish citizens and granted the right to return to Poland.

20. The estimate here of the number of Soviet Jews murdered by the Nazis is much smaller than that usually accepted. The low figure may be attributed to the fact that the memorandum was drafted in the second quarter of 1944, before the authors of the document had received accurate figures on the full extent of the Holocaust.

21. The Kalinindorf settlement was the direct heir of Seidemenukha, the Jewish agricultural colony founded in the steppes of Kherson province during the reign of Alexander I. In 1897 the colony's Jewish population stood at 1,284;

one year later, it was 1,146. Many Jews fled during the Civil War, out of fear of pogroms, but returned to the village when the situation stabilized. In the second half of the 1920's, the village served as a center for Jewish agricultural settlement, and a number of new villages were established in its environs. In 1927 a Jewish District Center was built, and was given the name Kalinindorf. It contained 902 Jews in 1931. The village boasted a large cultural center, a hospital and a school which served the surrounding villages, most of them Jewish.

22. The settlement was founded in the seventeenth century by Adam Stanislawski. In 1765 the Jewish community there consisted of 378 taxpayers. The local registry listed 1,151 Jews there in 1847. At the end of the nineteenth century the town was incorporated in the Podolsk province, Ashitsk district. According to the census of 1897, the Jewish population at that time was 2,196, representing 67 percent of the total population. During the twentieth century there was a general trend toward emigration from the town, and the number of Jews living there in 1926 was 1,796, constituting 94.7 percent of the population. It may be assumed that during the Second World War, Jews from the surrounding area fled or were driven to Minkovtsy.

23. Rubtsovsk is a district center in the Altai province. It experienced particular growth during the Second World War, when many refugees from the German-occupied areas were evacuated there. Plants for the manufacture of tractors, agricultural machinery and spare parts for electrical equipment were built there. Among the refugees, apparently, were quite a few Jews.

24. The script for the film "Professor Mamlok" was written by Frederick Wolf, a German writer who settled in the Soviet Union. It was staged by two German Jewish immigrants, Adolf Minkin and Herbert Rappaport. The film focuses on anti-Jewish and anti-communist persecution in Germany of the 1930's. The hero of the film, Mamlok, a Jewish doctor, is the victim of Nazi persecution and dies from a bullet fired by a German soldier. The film was completed in the Soviet Union in 1938 and was shown in cinemas until the Soviet-German pact was signed, and again after the German invasion in 1941.

25. The official debut of the play, under Mikhoel's direction, took place on 23 July 1945, but an earlier version had been staged in 1943. Prior to his departure for the United States, Mikhoels proposed to writer and poet Zalman Shneyer (Okun), then in Tashkent, that he write the script for a revue about Jewish life. The play was staged during Mikhoels' stay in the US, as is apparent from the following (cited from a letter dated 11 August 1943 from Fishman, the administrative director of the GOSET, now in the Mikhoels archive): "We are now showing the play 'Freylechs.' It is a joyful and very successful show." A description of the play as staged in 1945 noted that its content was quite simple really, and centered around a wedding—which, in Mikhoels' words, represented the "table of life." What made the play was not the plot but Mikhoels' staging (with music by L. Pulver and set design by A. Tishler). As the curtain rose on a darkened stage, burning candles—representing the victims of the Holocaust—were slowly extinguished, and were replaced by the wedding scene, which was accompanied by Jewish dances and folksongs.

26. The writer of the letter was the son of an assistant sexton in a Riga synagogue. He studied medicine at the university in Voronezh and was well known as an outstanding doctor. He served as the director of the Botkin Hospital in Moscow. He was a member of the presidium of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and in this capacity was made a member of the editorial committee for the publication of the *Black Book* in the United States. In 1946

he received the Stalin Prize for his achievements in medicine. During the "Doctors' Plot" affair, he was arrested and accused of having been, together with Solomon Mikhoels, a link in the connection between the "Joint" in the United States and Jewish doctors who were alleged to have carried out activities in an attempt to murder Soviet leaders. Shmelovich apparently died in prison.

27. *Spetspereselentsy*: The name given to the special class of "migrants," people who were taken from their homes and forced to live and work in kolkhozes and villages, particularly in Siberia and Central Asia. Those thus exiled were forbidden to leave their new residence, and were obliged to present themselves regularly at the NKVD office, which was the authority responsible for them. The exiles were free to move about in their place of residence, and lived in private homes.

28. The writers of this letter were in error: Mikhoels was not a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

29. In the course of the sovietization of the territories annexed to the USSR during the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of families of those labelled as "anti-Soviet" elements, in a political or social sense, were sent into exile. The deportations continued literally until the Nazi invasion. As agricultural and industrial areas were liberated from Nazi occupation, some of the exiles—young people in particular—were transferred to work on the rebuilding of the destroyed areas. This petition apparently came from among those young people, asking to be reunited with their families and to be recognized as free Soviet citizens.

30. David Zaslavsky (1879–1965) received both a traditional and a secular education. He completed his secondary education and attended university in Kiev, where he attached himself to revolutionary circles. From 1903 on he was active in the Bund, and published political articles in party journals in Russian and Yiddish. He also published articles in the Russian progressive press. After the Bolshevik takeover, Zaslavsky attacked the new rulers vehemently. When the Bund was dissolved in the early twenties, he did not join the Communist Party, and avoided political activity. In 1925 he published an "Open Letter" in *Pravda* in which he criticized his own political past. Beginning in 1928, he became a regular contributor to *Pravda*. He was a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and published articles in its newspaper, *Einikayt*. He was among the few members of the Committee who were not arrested when it was liquidated at the end of the 1940's. After the death of Stalin, he became involved in anti-religious propaganda, and on this subject published a number of articles and pamphlets.

31. From 1918–1930 there existed within the CPSU Jewish sections, set up to deal with special Jewish matters.

32. In the town of Chervin (until 1923, Igumen), there lived, according to the 1897 census, a total of 2,817 Jews, who represented 62 percent of the inhabitants. In 1899 almost the entire town was wiped out in a fire, but Jewish life was reestablished there soon afterwards. In 1926 the Jewish population stood at 2,027 (about 41 percent of the total) and in 1931 at only 968 (about 34 percent of the total population). On the eve of the Second World War the town had tanneries, a flour mill, artisans' workshops and a total population of some 6,400 people. The copy of the list appended to this letter shows the names of twenty-five of those murdered during the war. If the writers intended to prepare forty such lists, then what was being proposed was the memorialization of some 1,000 Jews. The copy of the list appended to the letter includes five

families, comprised of five men over age 45; five women aged 40 and over; a young woman of 19; and fourteen children up to age 15. The Soviet Belorussian Encyclopedia notes that a monument was erected over the mass grave near the town to commemorate those killed there on 2 February 1942. It can be inferred from this that the plan outlined in the letter was not implemented.

33. The document is undated, but it is very likely that it was written at the end of 1946, based on the fact that it mentions the permission given to 100,000 Jews to immigrate to Palestine, but does not mention the referral of the Palestine problem to the UN (2 April 1947). In addition, it mentions the pamphlet by Lutsky (see note 37 below).

34. Vladimir Purishkevich (1870–1920) was one of the founders of the Union of the Russian People (*Soiuz russkogo narod*) and later of the Union of Archangel Michael (*Soiuz mikhaila arkhangel*), right-wing anti-Semitic organizations that participated in the anti-Jewish pogroms of Tsarist Russia.

35. Semyon Petliura (1879–1926), a member of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Party, was active in the underground as a revolutionary and journalist. In 1917 he was one of the organizers of Ukrainian fighting units and a member of the Ukrainian parliament (Rada). In November 1918 he became a member of the Directorate that established the independent Ukrainian People's Republic, the commander of its army, and afterwards its supreme commander. After the conquest of the Ukraine by the Red Army, he fled abroad. His forces carried out cruel pogroms against the Jewish population, and his name became a symbol for pogromists. He was assassinated in Paris on 26 May 1926 by Sholem Schwarzbard in an act of vengeance for the pogroms.

36. Nestor Makhno (1884–1934) was an anarchist who fought during the Civil War in the Ukraine at the head of a peasant army against—in turn—the Bolshevik and the White forces. After the stabilization of Soviet rule he fled abroad and died in Paris.

37. V. B. Lutsky, "Palestinskaia problema: Stenogramma publichnoi lektsii, pročitannoi 9 avgusta 1946 goda v tsentral'nom parke kultury i otdykaia im. Gorkogo v Moskve" (Moscow, 1946).

38. The document is undated, but since it appears in the Mikhoels archive, it cannot date from after the end of 1947. (Mikhoels was murdered on 14 January 1948.)

39. "Five" is the highest grade given in the Soviet Union.

40. Vasily Petrovich Nikitin (1893–1956) was a scientist in the field of electro-chemistry and a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences since 1939. Between 1933 and 1950 he served as a professor at the N.E. Bauman Higher Technical School in Moscow. In 1950 he became the director of that institute. During 1947–1953 he was a member of the presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.