

THE BOOK REPORTER

Soviet Jewry: And Yet, the Stalin Legacy Lingers on

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: A MEMOIR, by Nadezhda Mandelstom. Atheneum, N.Y. 1970. 431 pp. \$10.

SOVIET JEWRY TODAY AND TOMORROW, by Boris Smolar. Macmillan, N.Y. 1971. 288 pp. \$5.95.

Reviewed by ISIDORE HAIBLUM

Pavlik Morozov was a hero. During the Stalin years his name became a household word in the Soviet Union. He died young, a mere lad, but his one outstanding deed was destined to live on in legend and song. Books—histories and novels—were written in praise of it. Poems, by the hundreds, extolled it. Statues of the boy-hero, in innumerable public places, were a constant reminder. He was touted throughout the land, his splendid achievement held up as a model of the new morality.

What Pavel ("Pavlik") Morozov did was denounce his father.

The whole of Russia, in those days, was aboil with its giant collectivization program—the year was 1933—but not everyone, it appears, rejoiced at the prospect of being collectivized. Those who did not were said to harbor "Kulak" sympathies and this was deemed a crime, one punishable by death. The elder Morozov was therefore shot at the behest of his fourteen-year-old son. Pavlik himself, however, did not live long enough to bask in much glory: he was promptly done in by a band of revengeful peasants led by his own uncle. The glory came, but it was mostly posthumous.

Past, Present and Future

What sort of a society, one might ask in some wonder, would choose such a hero, and what must life have been like under its aegis? Two new books give us the answer. *Hope Against Hope*,* a memoir by Nadezhda Mandelstom, widow of the great Russian poet, Osip Mandel-

*Magnificently translated by Max Hayward

ISIDORE HAIBLUM, a specialist in the field of Yiddish language, literature and culture, is a frequent contributor to our pages, most recently with a two-part interview of Molly Picon and Jacob Kalich. His *The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders*, a "Yiddish science fantasy novel," published by Ballantine in December, will be reviewed in a future issue.



(Photo: Credit: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research. Courtesy, The Macmillan Co.)
MOSCOW JEWS greet a group of young Israelis who came to participate in the Moscow Youth Festival in summer of 1957, some ten years before the Soviet Government broke off diplomatic relations with Israel.

stom, tangentially deals with Russia as a whole, in the heyday of the Stalin terror. *Soviet Jewry Today and Tomorrow* touches only on one ethnic minority—the Russian Jews—and sketching their past, lays bare their present and perhaps future. Both books are an education.

Harrison E. Salisbury has said:

Mandelstom was the most improbable of Stalin's victims—a poet, whose like Russia has not seen in this century, a man so unworldly, so artistic, so gifted, so far from the tortured mainstream of Russian and Soviet politics, that it requires a staggering leap of the imagination to understand how Stalin could even have become aware of him, let alone to have driven him deliberately to his death in one of the most terrible of the Siberian concentration camps. Yet this happened.

Mandelstom himself had an explanation when—as his wife records—he declared: "Poetry is respected only in this country—people are killed for it. There's no place where more people are killed for it."

Osip Emilievich Mandelstom was born in Warsaw on January 15, 1891 and grew up in St. Petersburg. His parents, prosperous Jews, sent him to the very best institutes of learning. By 1907, having graduated the renowned Tenishev school (whose rolls read like a veritable "who's who" of Russian luminaries) and acquired a first-rate education, the young poet was firmly en-

trenched in Paris, across the street from the Sorbonne, immersing himself in world literature. His earliest work appeared in *Apollon*, an elegant Russian journal of art and literature. Five of his books were published during his lifetime: three of verse, two of prose. The year 1928 marked the last of the books. Thereafter his poems were to be circulated only in manuscript form. But his stature continued to grow by leaps and bounds.

In a splendid introduction to *Hope Against Hope* Prof. Clarence Brown states:

At the present moment there can be little doubt that among connoisseurs of Russian poetry he (Mandelstom) is the supreme verbal artist of this century.

Mandelstom's plight with the Soviet authorities did not stem from his Jewishness, although there are some scattered poems of Jewish content in his works. He was known to leading figures of the Soviet-Yiddish community: Peretz Markish, the Yiddish poet, and Solomon Mikhaels, creator of the State Jewish Theater in Moscow, were close friends. But mostly Mandelstom was infatuated with the Russian language and culture; it sang in his blood, drove him to wild poetic heights. In the end, it was his integrity both as poet and man, his inability to compromise principle, that led to his downfall.

In composing verse, Mandelstom adhered solely to the dictates of an "inner voice;" the poems took form in his mind and when put on paper were all but complete. His definition of art abjured the party line, left no room for hymns to five-year plans or the construction of dams. The poet, in short, would not—indeed, could not—play the game. This was his first crime.

Secondly, he was constitutionally unable, it seems, to sit still for injustice. Time and again he would intercede on behalf of friends and even *total strangers* in trouble—the latter a true anomaly in those days when keeping a "low profile" could literally be a matter of life and death. His wife writes:

He had no self-control—he joked, shouted, hammered on closed doors, raged and fumed and never ceased to express astonishment at what was going on around us.

Denounced Stalin

In November 1933 he committed the ultimate "error." Driven to despair by the bloody course of events, he produced a scathing, blistering poem denouncing the tyrant Stalin. This was his third and final crime.

His story, as set down by his widow, is a tale—indeed many tales and vignettes—out of Kafka. Surely the reference to the Kremlin official who complained in his diary that Stalin smudged the books he lent him, and was at once carted off to a labor camp, reads like a work of the wildest imagination. The Roman historian Suetonius had also told similar tales. In his classic *The Twelve Caesars*, he recorded a society governed by madmen and ravaged by murder. But all that occurred long ago; and Kafka, after all, was merely a storyteller. But the events depicted in the Mandelstom memoir happened yesterday in a social order avowedly dedicated to nothing less than the welfare of humanity.

Mrs. Mandelstom recounts:

The secret police: Their motto was:

Give us a man, and we'll make a case . . . They were not in the least bit interested in *real facts* . . . to meet their quotas, all they needed were names. . . .

Profits:

Some people had adapted to the terror so well that they knew how to profit from it—there was nothing out of the ordinary about denouncing a neighbor to get his apartment or his job.

Mandelstom, who was denied the right to publish, subsisted on translation assignments; he and his wife were proficient in a number of languages. Even these not overly lucrative offerings soon vanished. The poet's footsteps were constantly dogged by swarms of clumsy and amateurish informers (not unlike a slap-stick comedy sequence out of Chaplin or Keaton). He lived on hastily, secretly-given handouts

from colleagues and friends. He was arrested twice: the first time for having written his anti-Stalin poem. (Someone among the small circle who heard it read, informed; who was never determined.) The intervention of the late Boris Pasternak, poet—and later author of *Dr. Zhivago*—no doubt prolonged his life. Mandelstom's interrogation and exile are described in harrowing detail by his wife, her words often assuming the aspects of nightmare surrealism. Returned finally from exile, the poet was again arrested for the same "crime!" A commonplace, it seems. Sentenced to a slave labor camp this time, he perished. Only a number of minor miracles saved Nadezhda from a similar fate. Her survival also rescued the bulk of her husband's unpublished works—she hid some in manuscript; memorized them all—which, along with this memoir, have now reached the West, a kind of testament to art and the indomitable spirit of man.

Valuable Picture

Boris Smolar's *Soviet Jewry Today and Tomorrow* continues the story and is, in its own way, equally enlightening. Mr. Smolar, a globe-trotting foreign correspondent for over half a century, speaks ten languages—Russian among them. He was born in the Ukraine and his knowledge of Russia is first-hand; his picture of the social, economic, religious and cultural lives of Jews in the USSR is a valuable one. We learn:

Jewish life in the Soviet Union today is centered around three posi-

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IN BRIEF

ALONE IN THE WILD FOREST, by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Illustrated by Margot Zemach. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., N.Y. 1971. 80 pp. \$4.50.

A lovely and charming tale by the master story teller of an orphan boy at the time of the Baal Shem Tov, whose life is transformed after he meets an angel in the wild forest. Although designed for "young readers," it will delight anyone who loves Singer's work—or for that matter, any type of "fairy" tale.

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN THE UNITED STATES: 1654-1875, edited by Morris U. Schappas. Schocken Books, N.Y. 1971. 790 pp. \$12.50.

A valuable contribution to the neglected subject of Jewish American history, this reference work contains 159 documents, many of them reproduced for the first time, relating to all aspects of Jewish life in America, from the arrival of the first unwelcome refugees to Nieuw Amsterdam to the Reconstructionist era. Tied together by introductory comments and notes, they chronicle the roles Jews have played in America's wars from the Revolution to 1812, the Indian and Civil; relationships between Blacks and Jews; and also reveal the disturbingly strong anti-Semitic abuses openly manifested during those two centuries through legal, political, economic, social and cultural restrictions.

—E.F.

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(Photo: Courtesy, Alfred Werner)
"PORTRAIT of a Woman"

Anna Ticho

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of draughtsmanship are strokes and marks that do not copy what exists in "reality," but are symbolic shorthand notes of the inventive mind. Drawing is not seeing, Ticho argues; since one actually never sees black contours, or lines separating one object from another, the artist must convey largely his *spiritual* responses to what his mind tries to capture, as he scans the visual field.

Many Shows

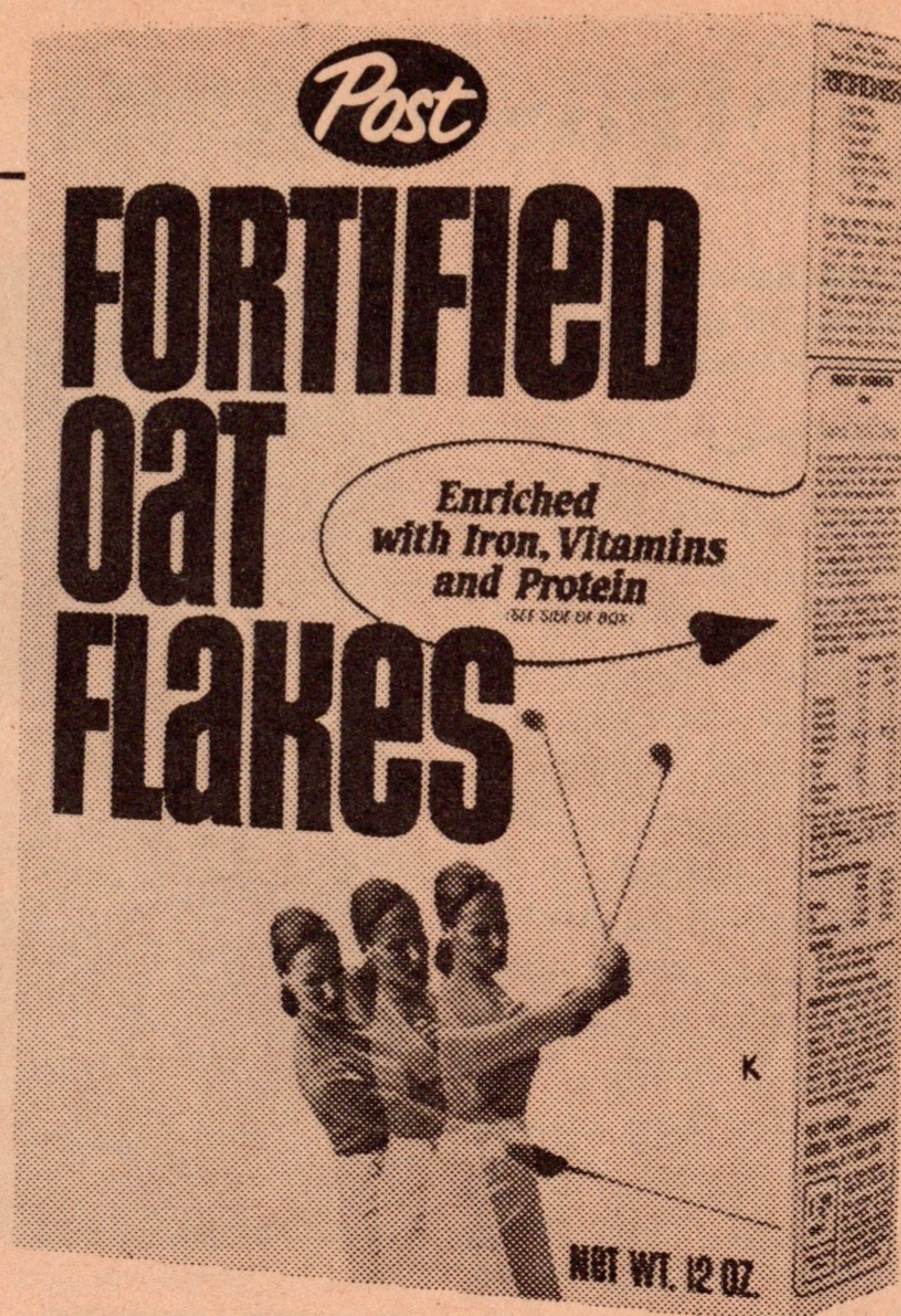
In 1970, some of her drawings were included in the group show, "The Subject is Jerusalem," mounted by the America-Israel Culture House in New York City. A year earlier, she had had a one-woman show at the Jewish Museum. Her delicate, yet vigorous art has made a deep impact on sensitive Americans. Her work is loved especially by those who feel that today's painters, sculptors and draughtsmen have cheated themselves by the rigorous exclusion of the mystery that is the human face, and of the joy derived from looking at trees, rocks, fields. They applaud her for adhering to the humanistic tradition in silent defiance of current fads.

Surprisingly, she is also respected by those ordinarily opposed to all pre-abstract contemporary art, for, about a decade ago, she was included in "Art Israel," the first large show of Israeli art ever to tour North America. Ticho's drawings were the only clearly "realistic" works in this group show, assembled by a curator of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Her art is much appreciated by connoisseurs. In recent years, she has had one-woman shows in Paris, London, Rotterdam, in several American cities, and, of course, in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa. She participated in the Venice Biennale of 1953, and her drawings are included in the permanent collections of many public institutions, among them the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and the British Museum, London. And she has many admirers among contemporary artists. In a letter, which served as the introduction to one of her catalogues—the famous sculptor, Jacques Lipchitz, hailed her achievement:

As soon as I started to look at your drawings I felt that I was in the presence of a master draughtsman. With such a modest medium as a pencil you succeed in creating the atmosphere and the light of your beloved country. Precisely your country, because without love you could not have done it, despite your mastery. □□

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tions: (1) the approximately sixty synagogues throughout the country, which reflect Jewish religious existence; (2) the Yiddish monthly magazine, *Sovietish Heimland*, which represents the only expression of Jewish culture since the mass liquidation by Stalin of all Jewish cultural institutions; and (3) the Jewish youth, which knows nothing about Jewishness but is nevertheless developing a strong Jewish consciousness.

But in the years directly following the Bolshevik Revolution, it was quite another matter. Jews held a variety of important government posts; Yiddish schools flourished. Yiddish books, periodicals and newspapers were widely distributed and avidly consumed. Scholarly institutions were set up, subsidized by government funds, to study Jewish history and culture. Synagogues still functioned in hundreds of cities, and Mr. Smolar observes: "each with its own rabbi." Even kosher restaurants could be found, in Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov or Minsk.

Jewish Culture Ignored

All this has vanished from today's Russia. An entirely different situation exists, and Mr. Smolar explores it with his customary thoroughness. We discover, for example, that while other ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union are still continually urged to develop their own cultures, Jewish culture is steadfastly ignored and discriminated against. Not one book of Jewish history is available to the general reading public. No "official" anti-Semitism prevails, but many industries and institutions are *slow* in promoting Jewish personnel. Job security, it should be noted, does exist—unless one is an outspoken "Jewish Nationalist." Among students, Mr. Smolar finds, there is no trace of anti-Jewish feeling. Many Jewish scientists, however, complain privately that their work—and its triumphs—is often hushed up. Jewish pride, in short, is discouraged, but the appellation "Jew" is still retained on identity cards. Inter-marriage—and assimilation—is the rule:

A look into the marriage register in one of the fifteen city districts of Moscow establishes that of each one hundred Jewish marriages sixty-six are mixed. . . .

But, according to Smolar, the aftermath of the Six Day War has given rise to a new self-awareness among Jewish youth. An ardent minority of them—and a meaningful percentage of the older generation—would immigrate immediately if given the opportunity. The vast majority, however, would not. To them, the Soviet Union is home.

They seek, Mr. Smolar, states, "equal opportunity and Jewish cultural regeneration" within its borders. These ends are, the author believes, attainable. But world pressure will first have to be exerted on a grand scale.

The duration and extent of this struggle are, for the moment, impossible to predict; but in sketching its contours Boris Smolar has shown us its form, and hopefully, we can go on from there. □□