

American and Soviet Collaboration on Jewish Studies Program

For the first time in more than fifty years, Jewish languages, history, literature, and culture will be studied and researched within the framework of Soviet higher education. The Moscow State Institute of History and Archives (MGIAI), a Soviet university with both undergraduate and graduate programs, will sponsor a program in Jewish studies in cooperation with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Because of the shortage of Judaic scholars in the Soviet Union and because of the wealth of existing documents, MGIAI was eager to establish a collaborative program with JTS and YIVO.

The program, slated to begin in the fall of 1991, will be a combined Soviet and American effort. It is the first collaborative degree-granting program between an American and Soviet university. Each year teams of professors from JTS and YIVO will go to Moscow for a semester or a summer to teach Jewish subjects. MGIAI faculty will complement these with courses in history and archival skills. Soviet students will also spend one year of the four-year program in New York at JTS and YIVO.

Conceived by Dr. David Fishman, assistant professor of Jewish history at JTS and research associate at YIVO, the program will benefit both scholarship in Jewish history and the Soviet-Jewish community. Graduates of the program will be equipped to catalog the vast quantity of Jewish manuscripts now surfacing in the U.S.S.R. MGIAI has launched a drive to locate and compile a complete list of materials throughout the Soviet Union and to make them accessible to scholars. It is envisioned that other graduates of MGIAI's program in Jewish studies will become teachers and scholars of Judaica and intellectual leaders of the Soviet-Jewish community.

MGIAI is headed by Dr. Yuri Afanasyev, a leader of the Democratic faction of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. and a prominent historian committed to promoting historical truth. According to Dr. Fishman, "MGIAI represents the best of the Soviet intelligentsia. It is a pleasure to be in partnership with a faculty that has been at the forefront of the movement for Democracy and is outspoken in its condemnation of anti-Semitism."

MGIAI, which has 5,000 students, specializes in the teaching of archival skills and the methodology of identifying and cataloging historical documents. It is concerned with the relation between the study of language and culture and documents and archives. The acquisition, translation, classification, and preservation of Hebrew and Yiddish documents marks the fourth culture embraced by the institute, which already has extensive programs in Greek, Latin, and ancient Russian. There are future plans for the establishment of archival collections in Arabic and in Parsi (Persian).



Signing American-Soviet agreement are (seated, left to right) Ismar Schorsch (JTS), Natalya Basofskaya (MGAI), Samuel Norich (YIVO); standing, Davis Fishman (JTS), Victor Mouraviev (MGAI).

Call for Papers

The Department of Germanic Languages of Columbia University has issued a call for papers for an interdisciplinary conference on "Race and Ethnicity in German, German-Jewish, and Jewish Thought." The conference will be held on March 8-10, 1991, at the Deutsches Haus of Columbia University. Possible topics include: "Expressions of Jewish Ethnicity and Race in Culture, Literature, and the Arts"; "Local and Regional Forms of Jewish Self-Identification"; "French and German Race Theories about Jews"; and "Anti-Semitism and Gender." Two-page abstracts should be sent as soon as possible to the attention of Delphine Bechtel, Department of Germanic Languages, 319 Hamilton Hall, Columbia University, New York, New York 11027; telephone 212-222-4807.