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My Visit to the Soviet Union, Part I, 1961.

ABRA HILLEL SILVER

THE TEMPLE

CLEVELAND, OHIO

My dear friends, these are not propitious times in which to report on a visit to the Soviet Union. The international weather is very foul at the moment. Whatever one says is likely to be misconstrued. I would, therefore, like to remind you that prejudice is a poor listener, even as it is a bad reporter. I should also like to point out that hatred in international relations is a bad counselor.

I have visited the Soviet Union three times since its founding -- once in 1926, when the country was slowly re-building itself after the ravages of revolution and the chaos of civil war. That was before the First Five-Year Plan had been launched, and before the forced collectivization of the peasant holdings had begun. I was in Russia again in 1935, on the eve of the bitter struggle within the Communist party, the notorious public trials and Stalin's bloody purges, which ushered in what has been aptly called the Years of Fear. When I visited Russia for the third time last July, Stalin had been dead some eight years. The Twentieth Congress of the Party had exposed and down-graded him, and Russia, which had emerged victorious from the Second World War, was now a recognized world power, second only to the United States.

On each occasion of my visits, I saw a different Russia. So many things changed during the intervals, changed outwardly and changed inwardly. The basic text, of course, of the Soviet government always remained unchanged and sacrosanct. So did the fundamental socialist structure of the country. But, like all sacred texts, life forced upon it many radical commentaries and



interpretations to meet the exigencies of changing conditions and the ineluctable facts of experience and reality.

We flew into Russia from London in a few hours on a Soviet Jet Plane -- actually, the very plane on which Yuri Gagarin, the Russian hero, who was the first human being to orbit the globe, had arrived in London that very morning for an official visit. Subsequently, all our travels in the Soviet Union were on these fast Soviet-built planes which are as fine as any in the world.

We were lodged by the Intourist in an imposing new hotel in Moscow; our room had a fine view of the Moscow River and of the city itself. Soviet hotels, the best of them, whether in Moscow, Leningrad or Kiev, by Western standards are second-class. The service is slow, off-hand and, on occasion, non-existent. The menus in the dining rooms ~~offer~~ <sup>include</sup> many interesting items, but only a few of them are, unfortunately, available. But the tourist gets enough food, even though the choice is limited.

We were intrigued to find that the hotel lobbies, wherever we went, and the dining rooms full of visiting Asians and Africans, many of them in their native dress. Some of them were members of visiting theatrical groups and dancing groups, others belonged to delegations who had been invited as guests of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union actively cultivates these visitors and guests from Africa and Asia. There is no color line in the Soviet Union. African dignitaries are not subjected to the humiliating experiences that some of them have experienced in the hotels and restaurants of our own country.

While we were in the Soviet Union, President Nkrumah of Ghana and the President of the Sudan were on special visits to the Soviet Union. They



were received with all honors -- the streets were decorated with welcoming flags and streamers. In Leningrad, we attended a superb ballet performance, "The Blue Danube" and the President of Sudan, who attended this performance, was escorted to what you might call "The Royal Box". He was warmly greeted by the audience and welcomed by a Soldiers' Band which played the national anthems of Sudan and of the Soviet Union. The Russians do not miss a trick to win the good-will of all the dark races of the earth.

One of the amusing sights we saw in our hotel lobby in Moscow was an eighty-year-old man who was dressed as an African prince, in the full regalia of colorful ostrich-feather head-dress and a cloak of blue and green and gold. He carried a racing stick and binoculars. Upon inquiry, we were told that he was actually a bogus prince, called Monolulu, a racing tipster, who went about displaying a sign which read: "Horse-racing with stops all wars because as soon as a man backs a winner, he becomes a capitalist". I thought that Monolulu had something there....

We spent three weeks in Russia, principally in its three largest cities, Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, and their environs. Of course, these three cities do not represent the whole of Russia. In a sense, they are its show-cases and its best supplied areas. There are parts of the Soviet Union which are out-of-bounds for foreigners. This is especially true of the villages and small towns which have not yet been readied for tourist inspection and which have remained very much what they were in Tzarist days -- no side-walks, no pavements, deep mud and tumble-down hovels, although they have all undergone a marked cultural and social revolution since those days. There were many things in the Soviet Union which we did not see, and no state secrets, I assure you, were revealed to us. They tell the story of a Russian who insulted some high



Soviet official by calling him an idiot. He was promptly arrested and fined twenty-one rubles; one ruble for insulting a public official and twenty rubles for revealing a state secret.... There is much in Russia that the Soviet Union is not ready to boast about, and much that it boasts about that is not entirely so. But, if your eyes and ears are open, and your heart is not filled with prejudice, and if you did not go there just to prove a point, and to exclude all else which does not fit in with your pre-conceived notions, you will learn much -- very much -- about this startlingly different, challenging and exciting new world and a new way of life which have brought the whole of mankind to new cross-roads of destiny.

Were we spied upon when we were in Russia? I have frequently been asked that question since my return. Were agents looking over our shoulders? No, we were not aware of being followed or of being spied upon. We used guides whenever we wanted to go to places or needed interpreters, but we did not have to take them along. We could look about for ourselves and did look about by ourselves, without guides. We walked the streets freely, watched the people at work and at play, saw how they were dressed, entered the shops and stores, saw what people were buying and what they were paying for their purchases and the quality of the merchandise. We went to concerts and theatres, sports arenas and cinemas, cultural and recreation parks and libraries, all by ourselves. We saw the small out-door markets and what house-wives were carrying home for their family dinners. We saw the open-air book stalls and what people were buying and reading. Even when we visited a State farm, or a pioneer camp, or a huge factory and were taken by the director on a tour of inspection and listened to his explanations, and the answers which he gave to our questions, we could always check and re-check on the information which we received.



No one needs to be taken in if he bears in mind that what he hears is never the entire story, and what he sees is not all that there is to be seen. On the other hand, you quickly realize that all about you are unmistakable evidences of real achievement and of great construction. You feel the pulse of a dynamic and intelligent people at work, and you see how they are earnestly experimenting, not only with new techniques of production, but also with radically new social programs and ideas.

In the cities which we visited, the construction of buildings, apartment houses, schools, factories, hospitals, sports palaces, new streets and the widening of old streets was going on at a remarkable pace. Gigantic hoisting cranes and tractors were everywhere in sight and I was told by reliable informants -- many of them Americans and Europeans who had visited other parts of Russia -- that this was true of other cities in the Soviet Union, as well, where new industrial cities and vast industrial projects were being built, especially in Siberia, whose limitless mineral and water resources were being built, especially in Siberia, whose limitless mineral and water resources were being systematically and rapidly developed. These may be taken as facts. Whether the Soviet Union is out-matching the United States in this or that field of production, in steel, or meat, or milk, is really of little importance except to Russian propoganda, but the achievements are very impressive in themselves. Oil production has risen in Russia from about one-fifth to about one-half of that of the United States in a few years. Steel production has increased by seventy percent to sixty-five million tons. And while Russian progress in other fields of industry has not been as marked -- Russia, for example, produces fewer cars in a year than the United States does in a week -- nevertheless, its total industrial out-put is rising sharply every year. The government is deliberately concentrating on the



production of heavy industry at the expense of light industry and concentrating on its military establishment, and this has been responsible for certain marked imbalances. But it is clear to an observer, that industrially, Russia is definitely on the march. When one recalls that only a few decades ago this country under the Tzars was eighty percent Muzhik-peasant, and that it is now the second most industrialized country in the world, the transformation must be viewed as truly remarkable.

One could speculate, of course, whether as much or more could not have been accomplished in forty-four years by a progressive and democratic government without the costly and tragic social upheavals which took place under communism. But, such idle speculation belongs to those intriguing and un-answerable "ifs" with which history abounds.

The Soviet has not been equally successful in its agriculture. Its collectivized farms and its state-operated farms, for whose establishment so much of peasant blood was spilled, and such an appalling price in human suffering was paid -- four million kulaks, that is, the richer peasants, were either liquidated in the process or exiled, and millions more of peasants perished from famine in the course of their violent resistance to collectivization -- I say that these farms for which such costly price was paid are not fulfilling the high hopes which were entertained for them. Here Communism may be facing its greatest defeats. With one-half of its population on the land, Russia scarcely raises enough food to feed its people on an adequate diet. The United States, with far fewer people working on the farms, produces huge surpluses.

The Russian people one sees on the streets in the large cities appear to be better dressed and better shod than before -- than when I saw them before. The shop windows on Gorky Street, Moscow's main thoroughfare, or on the main streets of any other large city now cater to the universal feminine love of



style and elegance. The Russian people are not averse or disdainful of the material things of life which they know to exist far more plentifully in capitalist society. They, themselves, would like to have more of them, and the government is increasingly under pressure to provide more and more of consumers' goods which are still very scarce in Russia and of inferior quality, and very highly priced. I was told that they are somewhat more plentiful today than they were before and cheaper than before but great shortages still exist in many essential commodities. This story makes the rounds in the Soviet Union: St. Peter asked Stalin, "which hell would you like to go to when you die -- the communist or the capitalist?" "The communist, by all means," replied Stalin. "I'm sure there will always be a shortage of fuel there."

The privately owned automobile, which is a commonplace for Americans, is very scarce in the Soviet Union but it has a particular fascination for many Russians, especially the young people. I watched out of our hotel window in Leningrad -- when I say "I", you should always substitute the word "we", Mrs. Silver was along with me. I "schlepped" along with her to all these places -- We watched out of our hotel window a crowd gathered around an automobile which an American tourist had brought with him to Russia. Day and night, curious Russians circled around that automobile, studying its every feature. There was everything there except the symphonic music with which American auto manufacturers announce their new cars every year on television. Transportation is very cheap in Russia. It isn't that Russians can't move about. There are tramways, buses, taxis and very plush subways. But the private car is a rarity. Even if a man has the thousands of rubles necessary to purchase a car, he must wait two or three or even four years to obtain one, for the out-put is extremely limited.



The housing problem is very severe. Many houses were destroyed during the war. The big cities have received an enormous influx of people from the country. While many new apartment houses are being constructed annually, in a crash-housing program, they have not met the demand by any means. The average family must live in one room, the size of a small bed-room, and must share kitchen and bath-room facilities with four, five or six other families living on the same floor. Some more fortunate families have a one-room flat with a small kitchen and bath-room all to themselves. They are the more fortunate. Somewhat more generous provisions are made for important public officials, specialists, managers, artists and others belonging to the new elite, the new class, the elite class. Some of these people even have small summer cottages, dachas, in the country. But, private homes, even very modest homes, such as are enjoyed by millions of our people in the cities, towns and villages of America, are practically non-existent in the Soviet Union.

The standard of living in Russia is below that of the West and considerably below that of the United States. Wages are low. The average wage is between eighty and ninety new rubles a month -- about \$100. Some receive more -- scientists, writers, professors, academicians. An academician may receive as high as \$2500 a month, along with other perquisites. Wages in Russia are scaled in fixed categories. Not all Russians receive the same pay. But the average wage, even for the skilled worker, is low, by our standards. But rents are cheap -- very cheap -- six or seven rubles a month, including utilities. Food can be had in factory canteens which, while plain and rather monotonous, is not high. Medical, hospital and dental care are free. Education is free for all children all the way through college. Workers get paid vacations and



old-age pensions. The factory where a man works, and which functions something like a self-contained community, the large factories provide him with many cultural and recreational facilities free-of-charge, or at very low cost. So that one can manage, especially if there is more than one earner in the family. The wife works, the child works along with the family. Russians do not feel the need to save for a rainy day, for sickness, old age, or for the education of their children. They enjoy a sort of "cradle to grave" security -- minimal as it is. If they save, as many of them do, it is for something special that they want to buy -- a piece of furniture, a new suit of clothes, for travel or for a television set. Television sets are very popular in the big cities of Russia.

Women enjoy equal status with men. They share in all things, even in hard physical labor. We were unpleasantly impressed with the sight of women carrying heavy loads and laying bricks in construction work, wielding pick and shovel on the highways, sweeping the streets, loading and unloading freight. We were told that they work even in mines and in all branches of heavy industry. These women are evidently attracted by what the jobs pay. Official discouragement of the practice is only half-hearted. There is a shortage of workers in Russia, due to the great man-power losses sustained in World War II; also, the out-put per Russian worker is well behind that of an American worker. The women are wanted in industry. On the other hand, all careers are open to women. One-third of all the teachers in the institutions of higher learning are women. One-third of all the members of the bar, and forty percent of the judges are women. Thousands of women are directors of industry and farm experts. Of the three hundred and sixty thousand physicians of the country, three hundred thousand are women. The women are not as largely represented in politics or government.



I want to say a word about the family in Russia. The family is being steadily re-instated in its honored traditional status. The Communists, you will recall, were originally hostile to it and contemptuously referred to it as the bourgeois family. The Communist Manifesto of 1848, which is like their family Bible, disparaged the family: "On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family based? On capital, on private gain. The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course with the vanishing of capital." But here, too, as in so many other things, Karl Marx is being proved wrong! The Russian communists, when they first came to power, did proceed to act on the Marxian assumption that the family was a relic of the past. No couple was required to register their marriage. They separated whenever they wanted. When a marriage was registered, either party could un-register it by sending a postal-card. Divorce was free and easy. Abortion was widely practiced. Sex continence was lightly held. But the facts of life forced a drastic change upon the communists -- upon the communist government -- in its attitude. A sharp reversal set in. Today the family is again not only approved but acclaimed. Marriage is now surrounded with official ceremony, even if the ceremony is secular in character and not religious. Divorce has been made difficult by numerous legal restrictions. Abortion is banned, and sex laxity is frowned upon. It is very interesting that the conventional morality of the present generation of Russians would compare favorably with that of the West in nearly all things, also their literature. The Russian novel is free of the sex exhibitionism of so many contemporary American and continental novels, and the Russian movies as well. One is also impressed with the conventional dress of the young people -- no slacks, no jeans, and no shorts. You have to come to the United States for that.



We were greatly impressed with the youth of the people whom we saw on the streets, in the parks, the shops, theatres, factories and farms. "Where are the older people?", we asked. Many of them, we were told, had been killed off in the war -- more than twenty million were killed in the last war -- many more had died of disease or starvation. It is the youth who now dominate the Russian scene. And many of them are crowding into the schools and universities, eager to become scientists and engineers, technicians and teachers. There is a great hunger among them for education. The government is encouraging them in every way. The government is particularly to be credited with practically wiping out illiteracy in a country where seventy percent of the peasants were illiterate. The government is eager to raise a generation of men and women who will be trained in all branches of science. While not neglecting the humanities and the arts, education is slanted towards the natural sciences and technology. We visited the great University of Moscow with its twelve departments, housed in thirty-seven buildings. There are nearly six thousand dormitory rooms for students at the University. The standards and academic disciplines are high and exacting, we were told, although the subjects which are taught, I believe, especially the social sciences, are frequently slanted to conform with communist ideology and Party interests. The scholar and research student is not free to arrive at independent conclusions which deviate from the Party line. The University of Moscow has a student body of more than twenty thousand and they come from fifty-seven nationalities inside and outside of the U.S.S.R. There are many such universities, smaller in size, of course, throughout the Union -- not nearly as many as in the United States, but impressive, very impressive for Russia. Students who pass the rigorous entrance examination are not required to pay any tuition fee. On the contrary, they are given small stipends while they are studying, as well as free board and lodging. The Soviet government has lavished, and is lavishing tremendous sums of money upon its



scientific academies and its scientists. The results are now clearly evident in the country's amazing achievements in outer space, in rocketry and in its industrial progress generally.

The Russian people are voracious readers. We saw many libraries and book shops and open-air book stalls with crowds around them buying books. I was told that new books are quickly sold out. The classics of world literature have been translated into Russian and are avidly read by the people. American authors like Mark Twain, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, O. Henry, Upton Sinclair, and others, are very popular. Up to last year, the works of over two hundred American writers had been translated and published and some ninety million copies of them were sold. I suspect as you will forgive me for this suspicion -- I suspect that Russian people know much more about our American literature than our young people know about Tolstoi, Pushkin, Turgenev, Chekhov or Dostoevsky.

I want to conclude this first report of mine, the second report on the position of the Jew and Judaism in Russia and how the Russians feel about America, about co-existence, about war and peace, I will discuss with you next Sunday.

And I want to address myself at this moment to the question: Are the Russians resentful of their regime? Would they over-throw it if they could? Are they happy? Really, it is impossible to answer these questions. You cannot look into the hearts of people and you cannot take any census. It would be silly to put such questions to the average Russian, just as it would be folly for him to answer them, especially to a stranger. Again, it should be remembered, and it is frequently over-looked, that there are different kinds of Russians and that they would naturally react differently

to the regime. One can only go by general impressions, and, if you are fortunate, by the opinions of people who have been a long time in Russia, whose judgment is valuable and who are not averse to sharing their opinions with you. I am sure there are those in Russia who would like to leave Russia but, the fundamental fact is that most of the Russians who live today have it better than they had it before. They haven't many things that they would like to have, but far more than they or their fathers had under the Tzars. They also believe that their government is trying to get them more of the good things in life, that their government is working for them, not against them. The Russians are also very proud of their country's phenomenal progress in recent years, its heroic victories in the last war over the Nazis, and more especially of the latest scientific achievements of Russia in space which have amazed the world. On Arbat Square, one of the principle squares in Moscow, one can see huge panels, one after another, on which are proudly displayed Russia's successive achievements in space from the first Sputnik in '57 to Gagarin. I suppose that by now they have added another panel for the phenomenal achievement of Titov. The Russians see that. They derive a great deal of national pride from their country's achievements. Moscow has a permanent Exhibition of the Economic Achievements of the U.S.S.R. Some fifteen large pavilions which we visited -- wherein the progress of the country and its new techniques in industry, agriculture and transportation, in atomic power and space rockets are displayed -- are visited daily by thousands of Russians, young and old, many of them brought in from surrounding cities and regions. Other cities in the Union have similar exhibits on smaller scales.

This, too, should be said, that the people are also experiencing something of a grateful relaxation from the grim days of Stalin. The terror



of the police state has considerably abated. Stalin was feared, and by many hated. Khrushchev is not. Stalin's name is now seldom mentioned in Russia. It is all Lenin now. This story goes the rounds: When Stalin died, the members of the Supreme Council wanted to get rid of his body. They wanted it out of the country and so they inquired of all the neighboring countries whether they would receive Stalin's embalmed body. They all declined. Finally, an inquiry was sent to Ben-Gurion of Israel. Ben Gurion replied that he would be pleased to accommodate the Soviet government, but he would like to remind them that in Palestine dead men have been known to come to life again -- and so the members of the Supreme Council promptly decided to keep Stalin's body in Moscow....

There has, unquestionably, taken place a definite change in the climate of Russian life. Mr. George F. Kennan, who was formerly our ambassador to the Soviet Union, and who is one of our best informed diplomats, writes in his recent book, "Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin", the following:

"I am inclined to ascribe deep and encouraging significance to some of the changes in the character and structure of the Soviet regime that have taken place since Stalin's death. The drastic alteration in the role of the police has constituted a basic change in the nature and spirit of the Soviet society. It has also altered somewhat the character of the political process, particularly in the senior echelons of the Party, away from the horror of un-adulterated police intrigue and in the direction of a rudimentary parliamentarism, at least within the Central Committee....The relaxation of the Iron Curtain has, to date, remained within modest limits. But I think it has gone so far that it would not be easy to bottle up again the intellectual and cultural life of this talented people as it was bottled up under Stalin."



So, I close, dear friends, this first report of mine with this thought. Russia is still a dictatorship. There can be no doubt about it. The freedoms which we, of the Western world cherish, are either non-existent or sharply circumscribed. There is but one political party there and its leaders rule the country with an iron hand. There is no free press. There is no free speech. But, it should be remembered that freedom and democracy are precious and have priority in the lives only of those who have known them for a long time and who cannot, and do not wish to live without them. This is not the case with the Russians. Their centuries-old tradition is one of dictatorship -- in most instances cruel and exploitative dictatorship. They can be reconciled, without any great wrench, to an absolutist regime which is not cruel or exploitative, one which, they believe, works for them and their welfare and which offers them and their children opportunities which had been denied them in the past.

I am, therefore, inclined to the belief that the Russian people, by and large, while desiring many changes and improvements of their condition are not now resentful of the regime under which they live, and would not wish to change its fundamental structure.

Sunday, October 15, 1961



MY VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION - 1961 (~~Part One~~)

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The Soviet has not been equally successful in its agriculture. Its collectivized farms and its state-operated farms, for whose establishment so much of peasant blood was spilled, and such an appalling price in human suffering was paid -- four million Kulaks, that is, the richer peasants, were either liquidated in the process or exiled, and millions more of peasants perished from famine in the course of their violent resistance to collectivization -- I say that these farms for which such costly price was paid are not fulfilling the high hopes which were entertained for them. Here Communism may be facing its



greatest defeats. With one-half of its population on the land, Russia scarcely raises enough food to feed its people on an adequate diet. The United States, with far fewer people working on the farms, produces huge surpluses.

The Russian people one sees on the streets in the large cities appear to be better dressed and better shod than before -- than when I saw them before. The shop windows on Gorky Street, Moscow's main thoroughfare, or on the main streets of any other large city now cater to the universal feminine love of style and elegance. The Russian people are not averse or disdainful of the material things of life which they know to exist far more plentifully in capitalist society. They, themselves, would like to have more of them, and the government is increasingly under pressure to provide more and more of consumers' goods which are still very scarce in Russia and of inferior quality, and very highly priced. I was told that they are somewhat more plentiful today than they were before and cheaper than before but great shortages still exist in many essential commodities. This story makes the rounds in the Soviet Union: St. Peter asked Stalin, "which hell would you like to go to when you die -- the communist or the capitalist?" "The communist, by all means," replied Stalin. I'm sure there will always be a shortage of fuel there."

The housing problem is very severe. Many houses were destroyed during the war. The big cities have received an enormous influx of people from the country. While many new apartment houses are being constructed annually, in a crash-housing program, they have not met the demand by any means. The average family must live in one room, the size of a small bed-room, and must share kitchen and bath-room facilities with four, five or six other families living on the same



floor. Some more fortunate families have a one-room flat with a small kitchen and bath-room all to themselves. They are the more fortunate. Somewhat more generous provisions are made for important public officials, specialists, managers, artists and others belonging to the new elite. Some of these people even have small summer cottages, dachas, in the country. But, private homes, even very modest homes, such as are enjoyed by millions of our people in the cities, towns and villages of America, are practically non-existent in the Soviet Union.

The standard of living in Russia is below that of the West and considerably below that of the United States. Wages are low. The average wage is between eighty and ninety new rubles a month -- about \$100. Some receive more -- scientists, writers, professors, academicians. An academician may receive as high as \$2500 a month, along with other perquisites. Wages in Russia are scaled in fixed categories. Not all Russians receive the same pay. But the average wage, even for the skilled worker, is low, by our standards. But rents are cheap -- very cheap -- six or seven rubles a month, including utilities. Food can be had in factory canteens which, while plain and rather monotonous, is not high. Medical, hospital and dental care are free. Education is free for all children all the way through college. Workers get paid vacations and old-age pensions. The factory where a man works, and which functions something like a self-contained community, the large factories provide him with many cultural and recreational facilities free-of-charge, or at very low cost. So that one can manage, especially if there is more than one earner in the family. The wife works, the son and daughter work along with the family. Russians do not feel the need to save for a rainy day, for sickness, old age, or for the education of their children. They enjoy a sort of "cradle to grave" security -- minimal as it is. If they save, as many of them



do, it is for something special that they want to buy -- a piece of furniture, a new suit of clothes, for travel or for a television set. Television sets are very popular in the big cities of Russia.

Women enjoy equal status with men. They share in all things, even in hard physical labor. We were unpleasantly impressed with the sight of women carrying heavy loads and laying bricks in construction work, wielding pick and shovel on the highways, sweeping the streets, loading and unloading freight. We were told that they work even in mines and in all branches of heavy industry. These women are evidently attracted by what the jobs pay. Official discouragement of the practice is only half-hearted. There is a shortage of workers in Russia, due to the great man-power losses sustained in World War II; also, the out-put per Russian worker is well behind that of an American worker. Women are wanted in industry. On the other hand, all careers are open to women. One-third of all the members of the bar, and forty percent of the judges are women. Thousands of women are directors of industry and farm experts. Of the three hundred and sixty thousand physicians of the country, three hundred thousand are women. Women are not as largely represented in politics or government.

I want to say a word about the family in Russia. The family is being steadily re-instated in its traditional status. The Communists, you will recall, were originally hostile to it and contemptuously referred to it as the bourgeois family. The Communist Manifesto of 1848, which is their family Bible, disparaged the family: "On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family based? On capital, on private gain. The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course with the vanishing of capital." But here, too, as in so many other things, Karl Marx is being proved wrong! The Russian communists, when they first



came to power, did proceed to act on the Marxian assumption that the family was a relic of the past. No couple was required to register their marriage. They separated whenever they wanted. When a marriage was registered, either party could un-register it by sending a postal-card. Divorce was free and easy. Abortion was widely practiced. Sex-continenence was lightly held. But the facts of life forced a drastic change upon the communists -- upon the communist government -- in its attitude. A sharp reversal set in. Today the family is again not only approved but acclaimed. Marriage is now surrounded with official ceremony, even if the ceremony is secular in character and not religious. Divorce has been made difficult by numerous legal restrictions. Abortion is banned, and sex laxity is frowned upon. It is very interesting that the conventional morality of the present generation of Russians would compare favorably with that of the West in nearly all things, including their literature. The Russian novel is free of the sex exhibitionism of so many contemporary American and continental novels and this is true of Russian movies as well. One is also impressed with the conventional dress of the young people -- no slacks, no jeans, and no shorts.

We were greatly impressed with the youth of the people whom we saw on the streets, in the parks, the shops, theatres, factories and farms. "Where are the older people?", we asked. Many of them, we were told, had been killed off in the war -- more than twenty million were killed in the last war -- many more had died of disease or starvation. It is the youth who now dominate the Russian scene. And many of them are crowding into the schools and universities, eager to become scientists and engineers, technicians and teachers. There is a great hunger among them for education. The government is encouraging them in every way. The government is particularly to be credited with practically wiping out



illiteracy in a country where seventy percent of the peasants were illiterate. The government is eager to raise a generation of men and women who will be trained in all branches of science. While not neglecting the humanities and the arts, education is slanted towards the natural sciences and technology. We visited the great University of Moscow with its twelve departments, housed in thirty-seven buildings. There are nearly six thousand dormitory rooms for students at the University. The standards and academic disciplines are high and exacting, we were told, although the subjects which are taught, I believe, especially the social sciences, are frequently slanted to conform with communist ideology and Party interests. The scholar and research student is not free to arrive at independent conclusions which deviate from the Party line. The University of Moscow has a student body of more than twenty thousand and they come from fifty-seven nationalities inside and outside of the U.S.S.R. There are many such universities, smaller in size, of course, throughout the Union -- not nearly as many as in the United States, but impressive, very impressive for Russia. Students who pass the rigorous entrance examination are not required to pay any tuition fee. On the contrary, they are given small stipends while they are studying, as well as free board and lodging. The Soviet government has lavished, and is lavishing tremendous sums of money upon its scientific academies and its scientists. The results are now clearly evident in the country's amazing achievements in outer space, in rocketry and in its industrial progress generally.

The regime in Russia is hostile to religion. Its leaders boastfully avow their atheism. They do not seem to be as rabid and gross in their opposition as formerly, but everything that the government can do to eradicate it from among the people, short of completely closing down all places of public worship,



is done. Public worship is permitted, but the number of churches, mosques and synagogues has been drastically reduced, under one pretext or another. The noblest of the church edifices, like St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's Red Square, and the Uspensky Cathedral, have been turned into museums. So has St. Isaacs Cathedral in Leningrad, the third largest in the world, and the Khazan Church which is now a museum of religion, or rather of anti-religion and atheism, and the famous Sofisky Cathedral in Kiev. Many un-used churches are being carefully restored to preserve them for their artistic and historic value. You see their gilded onion-shaped domes, newly covered over with bright gold, glistening in the sun. This should not, however, lead any one to the conclusion that the Russian communists have repented, and are changing their views on church and religion. They are not. All religious instruction is still strictly forbidden, except where a parent teaches his own child. This has been going on for more than forty years -- so that the present generation of Russians has grown up not alone without any positive religious instruction, but with an hostile or negative attitude towards religion which they received at school. The book least read or known in Russia is the Bible.

We attended services in a Greek Orthodox Church on a Sunday morning in Moscow. It was crowded with some fifteen hundred people. They stood closely packed and reverently joined in the chants of the beautiful and colorful ritual. We saw practically no young people among them. In the evening of the same day, we attended a Baptist service. Here again, the church was packed; and the service of song, prayer and sermon was very impressive. There were some young people to be seen in this congregation. But, bearing in mind the paucity of churches which are still functioning in these cities of millions of inhabitants, the number of worshippers in these churches should not mislead anyone. The relentless



anti-religious indoctrination which the children and young people are receiving, and the fact that church attendance is definitely not a recommendation for advancement anywhere, but a sharp liability, makes one feel that the future of the church, the mosque and the synagogue in the U.S.S.R. is dismal indeed. But religion in the past has shown remarkable recuperative powers under the most unfavorable conditions. The deep mystic faith which is a heritage of the Russian people may yet break through the shackles of the present time.

I attended Sabbath morning service in the Moscow Synagogue in the company of the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. Here, too, the Synagogue was filled -- but again with elderly people. The service was impressive. There was a good cantor. I was honored by being given "Maftir", and I chanted immortal words of the prophet Isaiah in a land which was resolved to make people forget them. Only this one synagogue, and two other very small and dilapidated "Bate Midrah", like those which used to exist in the "shtetel" long ago in Eastern Europe, exist in the whole of Moscow, a city where live close to half-million Jews. There is only one synagogue in Leningrad -- a city of three hundred thousand Jews; and one in Kiev -- a city with over one hundred thousand Jews. On the wrought-iron gates of the beautiful synagogue of Leningrad, which was built before the Revolution, one can still read:

וְעַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה שׁוּבוּנָה לֵאלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה  
כִּי אֵינָנוּ יִשְׁכָּח לְעַלְמֵי עַד  
וְעַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה שׁוּבוּנָה לֵאלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה

the Hebrew inscription from Psalm 90: "Return, O Lord! How long?" Makes us glad for as many days as Thou has afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen evil." There seemed to be something of a hope, a wistful prayer and a prophecy in these words....



No instruction in Judaism, in Jewish history or literature, in Hebrew or Yiddish is allowed anywhere in the Soviet Union. A small Yeshivah was recently opened under the supervision of the Moscow Rabbi to train rabbinical functionaries for the Jewish communities of the Union. Some ten students are enrolled. Hebrew prayer-books, Bibles and other ritual objects, such as Scrolls of the Law and Hebrew Calendars, are very scarce. The Soviet government has not permitted the printing of Hebrew books.

As individuals, Jews have equal rights in the U.S.S.R. with all other citizens. It would be untrue, however, to say that all anti-Semitism has been eradicated there. This would be a Utopian assumption even for the United States. Cases of discrimination have occurred and do occur. Officially, anti-Semitism is outlawed in the U.S.S.R., but practice, as we all know, does not always keep pace with what is written in the statute books. Anti-Semitism in Russia has had a long and dark history and the October Revolution did not uproot it. The urbanized status of Russian Jews and their concentration in the large cities, their disproportionate numbers in the professions and key-positions, their very ability, have aroused, as was the case so often in the West, competition and antagonism, especially among the new generation of Russians who are now trained and qualified -- as they had not been previously -- for the positions which Jews ~~have~~<sup>had</sup> come to occupy. Human nature has not changed much here any more than elsewhere. I was told that Russian Jews are being steadily pushed out of positions in the top governing bodies of the State and the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the higher echelons of the Red Army, the diplomatic services, and the higher brackets of academic professions and plant management.



The conscience of the Russian intelligenzia on the manifestations of anti-Semitism in their midst seems to be troubled. Recently, the eminent young Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, published an eloquent poem, called "Babi Yar" in the organ of the Soviet Writers' Union. Babi Yar is the ghastly ravine outside Kiev where forty thousand Jews -- men, women and children -- were slaughtered by the Nazis and their Ukranian collaborators in the last war. Time and again the Russian government was asked and did promise to erect a monument at Babi Yar to these Jewish victims. But nothing was done. Babi Yar is neglected and forsaken. The Jewish dead have no memorial. Yevtushenko, in his poem, laments this tragic neglect, for he sees in it evidence of anti-Semitism, the same anti-Semitism which has plagued mankind through the centuries, and which, he had hoped, would never rise again in his beloved country, the "international" Union of the Russian people.

I do not know how widespread this type of anti-Semitism actually is in the U.S.S.R. today. Its existence is vigorously denied by the government. But, cultural and religious discriminations directed against the Jewish nationality group, as such, is certainly being practiced. The fundamental law of the U.S.S.R. grants cultural autonomy and equality to all nationality groups. They have a right to their own language, schools, press and other cultural activities. This has been one of the honorable and proud boasts of the Soviet Union. The Jewish group is recognized as a nationality. Every Jew in the Soviet Union is required to indicate on his internal passport that he is a Jew -- just as every Ukranian is required to indicate that he is a Ukranian, and every Goergian that he is a Georgian. But, unlike all the other nationality groups in the Union, and there are many, the Jewish group enjoys none of the rights of these nationalities.



Because it is an extra-territorial community, so to speak, not centered in any one territory or region of the Union, it has been denied these rights. Those who wish or wished to enjoy such rights, it is argued by the apologists of the regime, should, or should have migrated to the autonomous Jewish region of Birobidjan in Eastern Siberia, which the Soviet established. This argument, of course, ignores the historic realities of the Jewish position in Russia. Jews, though widely scattered over the country, always constituted a separate, ethnic and cultural group in Russia which, even in the darkest days of the Tzars, were free to exercise their religion, and free to teach and develop their own Hebrew and Yiddish culture. The argument also overlooks the fiasco of Birobidjan which should have been foreseen. Nor were the motives which prompted the Soviet authorities in 1927 to set up Birobidjan as an autonomous Jewish region, bound up with the thought of stamping out Jewish cultural activities in all other parts of the Soviet Union where Jews would remain in considerable numbers.

Under Lenin, and for a time thereafter, Jewish nationality rights were not only recognized, but encouraged. The teaching of Yiddish and Hebrew was not interdicted. There was a Yiddish press and a Yiddish and Hebrew theatre, and in localities where Jews were predominant, there were Jewish Soviets and courts of law whose business was conducted in Yiddish. There were Yiddish schools attended by tens of thousands of Jewish children. Under Stalin, these rights were brutally abrogated and a campaign of persecution set in. All Yiddish schools and cultural institutions were outlawed. Yiddish writers were liquidated. Many obstacles were placed in the way of Jews who wished to practice their religion.



With the death of Stalin and his official downgrading, at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the situation eased somewhat. Yiddish writers who had been executed during the Stalin terror have been posthumously re-instated, and some of their works have been recently published. Some of the works of Sholom Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Seforim and I.L. Peretz have also been published. I purchased in the principal book-shop of Moscow a volume of the Selected Works of the noted Yiddish writer, David Bergelson, who had been liquidated under Stalin. It was published this year. Also, a volume of the poetry by the Yiddish poet, Asher Schwartzman, who died on the field of battle fighting as an officer in the Red Army. A few months ago, the very first Yiddish periodical since 1948, a bi-monthly literary review, made its appearance in Moscow.

But much still remains to be corrected. In recent months, judging by the public press, the incidents of repression seem to have increased. I had occasion to discuss these matters at great length with some important Soviet officials. In urging upon these officials of the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and others, that a change in the attitude of their government towards the cultural rights of the Jewish nationality group was in order, I drew attention to the inner contradiction which existed in their country, where the works of Yiddish writers were being published, but young Jews were not permitted to learn the language in order to be able to read those books! Why were they doing it? Why were they determined to consign to ultimate death the culture of this nationality group within the Soviet Union? It was not part of the basic philosophy of communism. Lenin certainly did not approve of it. I furthermore drew their attention to the illogic of permitting services in Hebrew in the Synagogue and yet making it impossible for Jewish children



to learn Hebrew, so that they would be able to understand the prayers. How would a knowledge of Hebrew endanger the communist regime? Why should not the Jews of Russia enjoy the same nationality rights as do all other nationalities -- no more and no less? Certainly, they do not wish to give the world the impression that there exists a Jewish problem in the Soviet Union as there existed in the days of the Tzars! I received the official Party line answers. No communist is ever short of an answer. But, I got the impressions that these answers were given without much conviction. I got the impression that further serious consideration is being given to this matter in the circles of the Party.

I am inclined to the belief that further progress in the direction of granting the Jewish minority in the Soviet Union the same cultural and religious considerations which are accorded all other nationality and religious groups can still be made, given a friendly and insistent world Jewish opinion.

I do not believe that Russian Jewry should be written off. It is true that many Jews in Russia have assimilated in the past forty years, having been denied Jewish cultural and religious education, and having been cut off from contact with world Jewry. In some instances, this assimilation was self-willed and quite eager. But, many other Jews have retained an unshaken racial loyalty and an historic attachment, which though not vocal, are nevertheless strong and un-mistakable. Many of them are poorly informed about Jewish life abroad. They have been isolated so long. But they were eager to hear about Jewish life in America, and especially in Israel. They kindle at the very mention of Israel. When news somehow reached them of the rocket which the Israeli had sent up, the sharvit -- comet -- they greeted each other in the Synagogues on Shabbos with



meaningful Mazel Tov. We were in Moscow during an International Film Festival. Israel also exhibited. The evening when the Israeli film was shown -- just a documentary about the progress and development of the country -- crowds of Jews milled around the large Cinema, thousands could not get in, tickets had all been sold out far in advance and at a premium. Inside the hall, the viewers cheered and applauded and wept....Last year on Simchas Torah Eve -- the Festival of the Rejoicing with the Law -- in the street before the Synagogue in Leningrad, thousands of Jews, many of them young Jews, danced and sang....

There is still an un-extinguished spark of Jewish loyalty among many of the three million Jews of the Soviet Union which some day may yet burst forth into the brightness of a new day....

What do the Russian people really think of us? Well, they are as confused as we are about them. I am not now speaking of their government officials and spokesmen. These naturally follow the official Party line. They turn on the spigot of praise or denunciation, frowns or smiles as the political moment dictates. They are only a temporary barometer. Their endless propaganda has undoubtedly influenced the masses of the Russian people, but not to the point of automatic acceptance of all that is told them. Not all of them are quite that gullible. Not all of them, by any means, are persuaded that the American workers live in slums and on the brink of starvation, or that all Americans are race-obsessed, or that our people hate Russia and want war. On the contrary, they seem to like Americans. They are very friendly to American visitors. They harbor, I believe, a secret admiration for the great achievements of our country. They would like to do as well, if not better. Mr. Khrushchev cunningly plays upon this string. They know that the United States has never been



at war with Russia, except in the brief Archangel episode. Some of them recall the generous aid which America extended to their starving millions following the First World war; they remember that we were their country's ally in the last war. They welcome most enthusiastically our artists and cultural emissaries, as we do theirs. They want to live in peace and friendship with us.





The people to whom I spoke, men and women in all walks of life, academicians, professional people, directors of factories and collective farms, and working people generally, all expressed a most earnest hope for peace. Peace seemed to be on everyone's lips. They know war, far more intimately and tragically than we do. Our fighting front in the last war was thousands of miles removed from our homes. Their homes, and towns, cities and villages were the actual battle-grounds. Many of them were laid in ruins in the last war. Russia lost over twenty million people. In Leningrad alone, six hundred thousand men, women and children starved to death during the dreadful siege of a thousand days. So the Russians are very sincere when they talk about peace and peaceful co-existence with the rest of the world. Their country has not yet recovered from the appalling ravages of the last war. They want years of quiet in which to re-build, in which to raise their low standard of living, in which to give their children a quieter and happier life than was their lot.

Their leaders also want peace and co-existence with the non-communist world, but they have not fully thought through the implications of co-existence in terms of self-restraint which they must come to exercise in foreign affairs, in terms of not fostering communist penetration in other countries in the guise of encouraging so-called movements of national liberation. As I told one of the leading academicians in Russia: "You cannot ask for co-existence and in the same breath talk of burying capitalism."

But the Russian people, to whom I spoke, however friendly disposed towards us, are confused. They cannot understand us. Why does the United States insist on re-arming and re-uniting Germany, their former deadly enemy, and ours? Can these ex-Nazis, who ravaged the world just a few short years ago, now be trusted, and should they now be re-armed to preserve the peace of the world?



Why did the United States send the U-2 into the very heart of Russia at the very time when Russian leaders were on their way to a Summit Peace Conference with the leaders of the United States? Why have we surrounded their country with military bases? Why, while advocating self-determination for peoples, did we finance and equip the invasion of Cuba? Why are we keeping Red China out of the United Nations, and insist on the preposterous fiction that a defeated General on Formosa speaks for the six hundred million Chinese?

Our people too, I tried to tell some of the leaders with whom I had the opportunity to speak, however friendly disposed they are towards the Russian people, are confused. They cannot understand the Russians. Why did the Soviet intervene and, in a most ruthless and bloody manner, to suppress the Hungarian uprising? Why did their country sign a non-aggression pact with Hitler, thereby ushering in the Second World War? Why has Russia consistently refused to accept controls and inspection if it is really in earnest about disarmament? Why have they opposed a nuclear test-ban? Why is the U.S.S.R. putting difficulties in the way of the United Nations in carrying out its legitimate functions?

Confusions on both sides, and these confusions and misunderstandings are contributing to mutual distrust. This distrust may get out of hand, even though basically neither people wants war.

I should like to close this sketchy report of mine with this thought. Russia is still a dictatorship. There can be no doubt about it. The freedoms which we, of the Western world cherish, are either non-existent or sharply circumscribed. There is but one political party there, and its leaders rule the country with an iron hand. There is no free press. There is no free speech.



But, it should be remembered that freedom and democracy are precious and have priority in the lives only of those who have known them for a long time and who cannot, and do not wish to live without them. This is not the case with the Russians. Their centuries-old tradition is one of dictatorship. They can be reconciled, without any great wrench, to an absolutist regime which is not cruel or exploitative, one which, they believe, works for them and their welfare and which offers them and their children opportunities which had been denied them in the past. They lack many things but they have more than they had before.

I am, therefore, inclined to the belief that the Russian people, by and large, while desiring many changes and improvements of their condition, are not now resentful of the regime under which they live, and would not wish to change its fundamental structure.

