

## **B. J. Goldberg's "Jewish Problem In Soviet Union"**

THE JEWISH PROBLEM IN THE SOVIET UNION, AN ANALYSIS AND A SOLUTION, by B. Z. Goldberg; Crown Publishers, Inc. New York; 374 pp.

**B.** Z. GOLDBERG, a journalist of stature in the American Yiddish press and a frequent contributor to these pages, has undertaken a great task, and, one may say without hesitation, an exceedingly perilous one. But he comes, well-equipped for it, and he approaches it without fear. It is a thoroughly absorbing and well-reasoned study, and, if there are weak points, they are his "fearless" observations.

The greatest part of the book is devoted to the three visits the author paid to the Soviet Union in 1934, 1946 and 1959. A brief introduction on the nature of the Jewish problem in the Soviet Union precedes the travelogue: a chapter on Biro-Bidjan concludes part one; part two is devoted to the analysis of the problem as a whole, its cultural, religious and economic aspects; and part three concludes with a suggested solution.

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### **Eyes Are Opened**

Mr. Goldberg is strongest in the narrative parts of the book. His descriptive observations are much more powerful than his analytical ones. Yet, nothing is written with hate or rancor; throughout, a sad Jewish heart bleeds for its brethren caught in a savage play of history; a heart once ready and eager to understand is now impatient to wait much longer. Perhaps it is the disappointment of the many who see clearly now, because they did not want to see before.

The problem of the Jews in the Soviet Union must be treated apart from the U.S.S.R. as a political entity, and at the same time within the context of Soviet life. Firstly, one must be able to analyze Jewish life and its peculiarities without regard to the bias or sympathy one has for a socialist revolution in the making,

and, secondly, one has to be able to analyze a socialist society in the throes of development and to assign the proper place to the Jewish problem, with its similarities and differences, from any other national problem within this social cataclysm.

It is this fine mental balance one must scale that makes it difficult to approach the problem without getting into emotional side-tracks. For both of the aforementioned sides of the problem, a fair amount of factual and socio-political background is required. For instance, to understand the attitudes of the Soviet leaders, one must be familiar with their reasoning. Mr. Goldberg is well at home in the various fields he covers. As a journalist, very little escapes his eye. As a political observer and analyst, he is too much of a journalist.

To most socialist-thinking people, the Soviet revolution was an achievement of great magnitude. With it was to come within a reasonable time the true fulfillment of man's hopes. Even antagonists paid their tribute to socialism indirectly by pointing constantly to its mistakes and shortcomings to prove that it was not the expected paradise. They were saying in effect that as defined, socialism is a good system, but it simply doesn't work. For the faithful, it was the ultimate panacea for all social ills. This, coupled with a naive belief that a revolution of such magnitude can be achieved within a few decades, led many of the faithful to disappointment and, not seldom, hatred.

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### **Who's To Blame?**

This problem was even more complicated to the Jewish observer. Part of the *naivete* lay in the belief that socialism solves everything regardless of the nature of the problem. Many identified the Jewish problem as a product of the capitalist society, which would disappear from the Soviet scene. Possibly, the early writings of Marx were to blame. Lenin and Stalin allowed that the Jews were a people. Later Stalin promulgated his national theories and applied them to all the peoples of the U.S.S.R.—except the Jews. They defied fitting into the pattern.

The simple fact that the Jews were different escaped the Soviet leaders. Instead of an understanding that the Jews could achieve their socialism only in their own land, as was the right of all peoples, there came a massive attempt to change their status forcefully. If the

solution fails, let's eliminate the problem; the Jews must assimilate and disappear. Excesses of brutal and despicable nature became frequent, proving only that once again in time of stress, the Jews are the scapegoats.

Mr. Goldberg brings out this background forcefully in the journalistic part of the book. Dealing with the life of the Jews in the Soviet Union as seen by a keen-eyed observer and frequent visitor, he has compiled a treasury of episodes adding up to a panoramic view of Jewish life in the land of the Soviets. He has thereby added an interesting and information-filled work to a skimpy list of works on this subject. And although substantial parts were previously published in various periodicals, both Yiddish and English, their inclusion in a bound volume provides the interested reader with a fair amount of background material for the study of Jewish life in Russia over the past forty years.

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#### Good Stories

The book abounds with true-to-life stories illustrating the day-by-day vexations of Jews in various parts of the country. With his knowledge of Russian, he was able to add a liberal sprinkling of excerpts from the Soviet press and literature. Anything pertaining to Jewish life, remnants of anti-Semitism and the struggle against it are presented and documented. Right or wrong are no longer the issue, for one hardly argues with historical facts. Regrettably, they are not always accepted as such. Sometimes the illustration of the exception tends to be blurred into proving the generalization.

Unfortunately, the last part of the book is the weakest. For those readers who seek the analysis and solution of the problem, as subtitled on the cover, it will be a lean exercise in superficial observations and conclusions. Bleak as Jewish life has been in the Soviet Union in the past forty years, there has been a process of socialization going on with some positive results. That it will not be a solution is the evident conclusion the Soviet leaders have not yet learned. For the sake of the Jews in Russia, we hope the lesson will not be a costly one once more.

The author concludes with an impassioned plea for the restoration of equal rights to the Jews, the restoration of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, and the allowance of Jewish

emigration as "the safety valve" for Jewish life everywhere.

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#### An Absence

For a book dealing with the problem of the Jews in a socialist state, it is strange to find the name of Borochoy totally absent. I am certain that Mr. Goldberg knows full well that the anomaly of the situation of the Jews does not differ fundamentally whether the diaspora is socialist or capitalist. The reluctance to so state categorically and unequivocally is a weakness and not a moderation. It may have reader appeal in certain quarters, but it does not do credit to the analysis.

Last, a word about an omission, possibly, also as a result of a desire not to antagonize certain readers. The Cold War has been an important factor in the attitude of the Soviet leaders towards certain aspects of Jewish life, and particularly Israel. As such, it has had its effects on the life of the Jews in Russia. But in drawing conclusions, one must always look at both sides.

The fact of the matter is that because of the many pertinent questions raised in the book, it is imperative that the Jewish people, and particularly Israel, as its foremost spokesman, remain neutral in the East-West struggle. This conclusion is inevitable after reading the facts presented by Mr. Goldberg. Yet, it is totally absent in his plea for a solution.

Regrettably, we have not found the answers to many of the questions raised, even after we have closed the book.

— M. K.



Interior, Debat el Carmel,  
Druze Village, Israel

—Israel Youth Horizons