

good. With such a situation developing there is no future for the small State of Israel other than in friendship and collaboration with its Arab neighbours. Our Party comrades in Israel have put this line clearly in the Knesset but Ben Gurion cannot see beyond dollars from America.

Yiddish

Regarding the question of Yiddish in the Soviet Union: I took a considerable interest in this, and on several occasions raised it with our Soviet comrades. Comrade Waterman and other Jewish comrades feel strongly on this issue, although they have to admit that it is not such a question as should affect our faith in the Soviet Union or in Socialism as the ultimate solution to all the evils of anti-Semitism. Comrade Waterman puts the question thus: "Should Marxists attempt by artificial means to eliminate a living language and culture, by 'administrative measures', instead of allowing the historical process of cultural integration to take its natural course?"

If this means anything, it means that Yiddish in the Soviet Union is passing away, but that it hasn't yet reached the stage of decline that can justify the decision that was taken to stop subsidising the Yiddish theatre and the Yiddish press. For that was the "administrative measure". The comrades with whom I discussed this assured me that in Moscow, as distinct from Kiev, the process of integration had advanced very far, and that support for Yiddish had declined accordingly. Surely Comrade Waterman will agree that integration has made a very great advance from 1917 till 1948?

Also he must take note of the fact that since 1948 Yiddish, outside the Socialist countries, could make no claim to represent the workers or poor Jews.

As for the statement by Comrade Ramelson, taken up by Comrade Waterman, that "Wherever the Ghetto walls were broken down—as in Western Europe and America—Yiddish ceased to develop"—are the Ghetto walls broken down in Europe or America? If the Ghetto walls are broken down, why isn't there integration? Isn't it clear that centuries of Ghetto life have left their legacy, the form and much of the psychology, and, for the older people, the language of the Ghetto?

But Comrade Waterman indignantly repudiates the idea that Yiddish was a "Ghetto language". He exclaims, "Ghetto language indeed! One may as well call Negro culture in the U.S.A. Ghetto culture".

Negro culture in the U.S.A. has taken a specific form arising out of conditions of slavery and the discriminations and persecutions that have followed on its ending. It has taken the form of Negro spirituals with an accompanying heartbeat of their ancient tribal life in Africa. It expresses the sufferings

and aspirations of the millions of American Negroes and is therefore a living and progressive cultural expression, dear to all who believe in Socialism—in the Brotherhood of Man. So with Yiddish, as Comrade Waterman says, "It became a weapon of the working class and poor Jews, embraced and loved by them, sinking deep into their consciousness and daily life."

No one could claim that for Yiddish publications today. The language of working class and "poor Jews" is the language of the trade union and broad Labour movement, which includes the Communist Party.

Thus the only question at issue is, to use the words of Comrade Waterman: Has "the historical process of cultural integration" advanced sufficiently in the Soviet Union to make necessary the decision to discontinue subsidising a diminishing language culture, or has that stage not yet been reached? There may be a difference of opinion on that without making it a major issue. The big question is the menace of Zionism, as a tool of imperialism, to the Jewish State and to the Jews in every capitalist country.

Michael Cohen

IN introducing his article "An Old Problem Re-discussed", Bert Ramelson refers to anti-Semitism as the essence of the problem. I would like to draw attention to a new aspect of the question, which, if not the essence, is nevertheless of interest.

Marxists are, I think, agreed that socialism is the only real answer to anti-Semitism. Socialism, in smashing the economic base of anti-Semitism, liberates Jewish citizens of the new society for the fullest participation and assimilation in the building of Communism.

The question that I am thinking of is: Does it follow from the general Marxist analysis made by Bert Ramelson and others, that in time this process of assimilation will really be *complete*? In five or six generations will no citizens of a Communist society be in a position to distinguish themselves as of Jewish descent?

These projections into the future may appear to be academic and of little importance. I feel, however, that a consideration of this question from a Marxist point of view might help us to see the question of Jewish culture more clearly.

Many Jewish Communists appear to think that Jewish culture can be equated with Yiddish culture. This is not so. Although the origins of the Yiddish language go back to the influx into Eastern Europe of Jews (particularly from Germany) in the Middle Ages, its poetry and song

developed as a disciplined culture of the people mainly from the nineteenth century onwards.

Thus Yiddish culture is relatively young, compared to the history of the Jews. What is more, because it developed so late, long after the worldwide dispersion of the Jews had reduced them from a Semitic nation into communities of a minority character, the Eastern European Jews among whom Yiddish developed represented only one section, though a large one, of Jewry.

Numerically and historically then, Yiddish appears as only a part of a whole.

In this context it is fair to quote a relevant passage from Bert Ramelson's article in full:

"Yiddish developed over the centuries as the mother-tongue of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, owing to the persecution of Jews and the enforced segregation of the Ghettoes. This compulsory isolation developed a common way of life, tradition and behaviour, and this in turn gave rise to a specific Yiddish culture, whose essence was the depicting of Ghetto life and a yearning for revolt against such intolerable conditions."

Marxism Today, Jan. 1959, p. 25.

(Cf. Alec Waterman's edition of this passage, "*Marxism Today*", April 1959, p. 124.)

The satire, humour and poignancy of Yiddish literature, drama, poetry and song will surely survive through the centuries, though mainly in translation, I think (except for philologists and particularly keen students of history).

A national Jewish culture is to be found in the history of the Jews when they were a nation, or in the early period of the dispersion.

The poetry of David, Solomon and Isaiah for example; the precociously civilised legal code of ancient Jewry; the revolutionary monotheism of Moses; the philosophical experiments of Maimonides . . . these contributions to human progress will also survive, long after the Jewish and Christian religions have ceased to be practised of professed.

Up to the twentieth century the "highly organised religion" that Ramelson refers to has indeed ". . . played a part in the maintenance of Jewry as distinctive groups".

Ever since the Babylonian exile the Jewish religious leaders, recognising tacitly that an unbridgeable gulf lay between the religion and the secular existence of the Jews as citizens of many nations, have tenaciously wrapped up the religion with a thousand-and-one traditions and customs, designed specifically to hold together a people in the throes of dispersion, and subject to the ever-growing influences of foreign cultures and ideas. These laws, injunctions, practices and traditions

have, I believe, been an important factor in moulding the well-known, but less well-understood "characteristics" of Jews. Particularly in Eastern Europe, which became a stronghold of the orthodox religion, the ritual and habits, religious in origin, became interwoven and absorbed in many ways into the life of Jews, many of whom slowly drifted further and further away from the practice and understanding of the religion itself.

Yiddish

It is not without significance that the Yiddish language which grew out of the superimposition of German on to Slavic tongues, contains still today, in its fully developed form, a large contribution from Hebrew, the "loshen koidesh" ("Holy language").

It just so happens, then, that a dwindling minority of "rabbis and clerics", that Alec Waterman refers to rather contemptuously, have kept alive, for their own religious motives, this great cultural heritage referred to above; much as a fast dwindling minority of Yiddish-speaking Jews are today still keeping alive Yiddish culture.

Inevitably, there is much that is negative and reactionary in Jewish and Yiddish culture. As the religion and anti-Semitism vanish with the forward sweep of communism, so will these cultural traditions die, in the sense that what no longer has roots cannot grow, but must die. Such a death does not, however, mean extinction; all that which is of artistic value to humanity will be preserved, just as the collapse of ancient Greece has not robbed modern generations of its beauty and its legends.

And what of Israel? The culture of the new State of Israel is as new as the state itself. Whilst naturally it still reflects the past indirectly, it is essentially the medium of a new nation in the twentieth century. It gives expression to the optimism and enthusiasm as well as the chauvinism of a young country.

In the future it must surely reflect in growing measure the mounting struggle of all the people of the Middle East for a better future. For just as surely as the State of Israel is a *fait accompli* so must its working people move towards unity and common struggle with the Arab peoples around them.

What conclusions do I then reach from the above considerations?

1. The advent of socialism and communism has brought with it the final solution of the "Jewish Problem". Given peace and with it the further advance of Communism there appears to be nothing standing in the way of the complete

assimilation of Jews among the peoples of the world. The culture of the Jews, and this includes Yiddish, is an historical fact and a part of the human heritage.

2. There is nothing intrinsically revolutionary about Yiddish; its revolutionary rebellious character is the influence of social conditions, and in modern times, the struggle of the working-class, superimposed upon it. Its origins are deeper and more complex, and have to be recognised.

3. To attempt to unnaturally hasten the demise of Yiddish is to offend against every principle that Marxists hold dear.

That is why I think it absurd for Bert Ramelson to conscientiously quote, and without further comment, an alleged "justification" of the crimes committed against Soviet society ("The justification given for these measures [i.e. administrative measures against Yiddish—M.C.] was that there was not enough demand to justify such undertakings." Ramelson, p. 26). Why make this point?

Bert himself associates these measures with the period of abuse of Soviet Democracy and legality; surely he is not trying to imply that there might have been some justification after all for brutal anti-communist activities condemned by the Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U.

4. The examples quoted by Alec Waterman of continued interest in Yiddish in the Soviet Union today confirm that the abrupt and artificial closing down of institutions does not assist a purely natural process of assimilation; on the contrary, it could well delay it. I agree with Bert Ramelson that the Soviet people are best able to evaluate this, and other related and more detailed factual matters—not just because they are on the spot, but also because they have available to them the most experienced Communist Party in the world.

Recent developments in the Soviet Union justify such confidence anew.