

On the Jewish Question

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Further Probing Needed

The draft resolution on the Jewish question is a document of great importance. The resolution raises many ideological and political questions that require further discussion and deeper probing. Among these questions are the following:

a) While it is correct to say that since the end of the Second World War the dominant trend in Jewish life in our country has been identification (the reasons are given in the resolution), it seems to me that it is not enough to say so and leave it at that. For while most major Jewish organizations have shown signs of growth, all face the problem of keeping their own membership intact. In fact most organizations have developed activities, in trying to hold on to their membership, which have nothing to do with Judaism or Jewishness (bowling leagues; card and bingo games; lectures, often by non-Jewish speakers; etc.). I raise this not because I feel this to be wrong, but because merely to mention growth, without discussing problems, creates the impression that the Jewish people are automatically flocking into these organizations.

b) While the dominant trend has been identification, a second trend exists which the resolution has nothing to say about—that is, assimilation. The resolution refers to linguistic integration, but it is more than that. If this is so, then some practical conclusions have to be drawn from such a fact.

c) More discussion is required on the problems and work amongst the English-speaking Jews, who constitute the overwhelming section of the Jewish population.

d) More probing is necessary on such matters as the changing composition of the Jewish population, on problems relating to class questions, on the role of the Right-wing and on bourgeois influences in Jewish life.

e) Much more thought is necessary on how to meet head-on the challenge of anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism in the Jewish community.

f) There are many questions relating to Israel as well as other problems that can be posed and discussed.

I am aware, however, that the resolution cannot go into all questions that bother people, and much

less try to answer them. The discussion that is unfolding brings to light differences of opinion on estimates of various questions and how to meet problems facing the Jewish people. This should not be surprising for they reflect the differences that appear within the Jewish community itself. The resolution cannot undertake to resolve all matters where such differences exist. They will continue for some time, and as the discussion unfolds we will have to have a great deal of patience and tolerance toward one another, while striving to achieve unity on the most decisive questions.

The resolution correctly focuses attention on the main problems facing the Jewish people at home, and the need of mobilizing all Americans in the struggle against anti-Semitism and Nazism. In my comments, I should like to deal with only a few questions.

Involvement of the Jewish People

Close to six million Jews live in the U.S.A., the largest Jewish community in the world. While the Jewish people live in many parts of the country, including small towns, they are mainly concentrated in New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, Boston and Detroit.

Large numbers of them are involved in the struggle for peace, against U.S. aggression in Vietnam, against the growth of Nazism and Nazi-influence both here and abroad, for civil rights, and in struggles on a host of other

issues. Their involvement is through individual participation and often through many of the mass organizations of the Jewish people. We are proud of the positive contributions made in these struggles by progressive Jews, including Communists.

New opportunities for winning even greater participation of the Jewish people in struggles on all fronts are constantly emerging. To carry on successful work in this direction requires proper evaluation of both possibilities and problems. It cannot be denied that often many progressives, including Communists, tend to gloss over many problems faced in the Jewish community. Speeches and articles often create the impression that the Jewish community is united on all questions. Sometimes people speak about "unzer folk" (our people) as though it is a homogeneous people. Often they gloss over the vicious Right-wing forces, the bourgeois leadership and influence, and the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet forces (Dubinsky, Lovestone, Jewish Labor Committee, *Daily Forward*, some sections of the leadership of the Jewish War Veterans, etc.).

We must not minimize the positive contributions of the Jewish people. At the same time we dare not underestimate the nature of the struggle we face against the anti-progressive, Right-wing nationalist forces in Jewish life.

The resolution points to the need of mobilizing *all Americans*, Jew and non-Jew, in a struggle against anti-Semitism as part

and parcel of the struggle against racism, for greater democratization and against the ultra-Right.

At the same time, it makes clear that *especially* Jewish progressives, including Communists, can and in fact *must* help win greater participation of the Jewish community in the struggle for peace, against U.S. policy in Vietnam, etc.

Progressive Jews often place the question: Where shall I work—in the peace organizations, the civil rights movement, the Human Relations Committee, the labor unions, etc., or in the Jewish organization and community? To place it in this way is wrong. No Jewish person should weaken his ties or activities in the labor unions, peace, civil rights movement or in other general fields of activity, although at times he may have to modify the scope of his activity.

The real problem that has to be tackled is, how can the Jewish community be more effectively won over to greater participation in all of the people's struggles—and by so doing would it not be easier to win the entire community, Jew and non-Jew, in the struggle against anti-Semitism? Any other approach means deserting the Jewish masses and leaving them under almost exclusive influence and pressure from the Jewish bourgeois, Right-wing and nationalist leadership.

The Soviet Jews

The last point I want to deal

with, if only briefly, relates to some questions concerning the Soviet Union and the Jewish people. A major anti-Soviet drive has been on foot, inspired, organized and led by the Right-wing in Jewish life, by certain bourgeois, nationalist and Zionist leaders. Alleging a Soviet policy of anti-Semitism, of Jewish persecution and discrimination, these forces have initiated petitions, placed ads in newspapers and organized numerous anti-Soviet meetings and picket lines. By spreading lies and distorting the actual conditions of Soviet Jews, these anti-Soviet provocateurs have been able to confuse and mislead many decent-minded people. It is extremely important that we fully understand the meaning, purpose and forces behind this anti-Soviet campaign and meet it head on.

To be most effective in combating the smear campaign, we have to be clear on some matters. Have mistakes, even crimes, been committed against Jewish people in the Soviet Union? The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was itself first to expose these and to admit that, yes, crimes had been committed in the USSR, especially during the latter part of the Stalin period. But to make things clear, the CPSU said such crimes were committed against the Soviet people *as a whole*, including the Jewish people. Now it is true that this does not make it easier for the Jewish people, but to speak about the mistakes and crimes as having been only or primarily against the Jewish people

feeds the idea that the source was anti-Semitism.

What is most important, at least to me, is that while six million Jews were wiped out by Nazism, while the Jewish community of Poland was almost completely destroyed, and while the Jewish communities in other parts of Eastern Europe, as well as in France and other Western European countries were seriously weakened, we can speak of the second-largest Jewish community in the world being in the Soviet Union. And since this is so, does not the Soviet Union deserve highest praise and respect for its policy of saving the Jews from the same fate, let us say, of Polish Jewry?

Coming back to the wrongs against the Soviet Jewish people, it is generally conceded that since the 20th Congress of the CPSU,

a process of rectification has taken place. Some people may be unhappy with the scope or tempo of this rectification. Some can argue for a Yiddish newspaper or a theatre. I am not against people having their opinions and expressing their thoughts on such matters. I would, however, prefer leaving these matters to be decided by the Soviet Union and its Jewish people.

What concerns me is how we are meeting the anti-Soviet campaign. Often I feel that because of the pressure of the Right-wing, some people take a defensive position. They will tell you the good things about the USSR, and then add a "but—" I feel that this section of the resolution needs strengthening, so that it takes a very positive position with no ifs or buts about the USSR.

D. N.

The Jewish Community Is A Reality

It would be unfortunate if the methods of work proposed in Irving Potash's criticism of the draft resolution were to gain wide acceptance. The position he takes would completely cut us off from the thinking of organized American Jewry. Thus the field would be left wide open for the nationalists and chauvinists.

Potash's Rejection

Potash rejects the concept of a

Jewish community as a distinct cultural entity in the U.S., although as the draft resolution correctly points out, it is a highly organized community, "possessing over 200 national organizations and thousands of local groups" as well as 20 Yiddish, 7 Hebrew and 144 Anglo-Jewish periodicals. He will not admit that this "Jewish Community" plays a significant role in the fight for peace and progress