

# UKRAINIANS AND THE JEWS

By

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On June 18, 1961, Israel's President Isaac Ben-Zvi received 150 representatives of Ukrainian Jewry now resident in the Jewish State. Himself born in Ukraine, where he organized the first Jewish self-defense units at Poltava to protect the local Jewish community from a wave of anti-Semitic *pogroms* in 1905, the President was proud to see top Israeli Cabinet Ministers, scientists, poets, writers, educators, statesmen, parliamentary leaders and army generals among the 150 Ukrainian Jews invited to his residence in Jerusalem.

Mr. Ben-Zvi stressed again and again that the contribution of Ukrainian Jewry to Israel's growth and development cannot be overestimated. The Ukrainian Jewry, the President declared, was the spearhead of modern Zionism which redeemed the Holy Land from twenty centuries of neglect and oppression, and gave the dispersed and persecuted Jews firm soil under their feet.

Today, although the greatness and glory of the former Jewish-Ukrainian communities of Kiev, Odessa, Kharkiv, Lviv, Rivne or Berdychiv is gone—buried forever under the nameless mass graves into which the victims of Nazi massacres were dumped by their killers—Jewish Agency chiefs in Jerusalem estimated that there still are some 900,000 Jews within the present borders of Ukraine.

The distinguished guests of President Ben-Zvi were plainly worried about the persistent reports of officially-inspired anti-Semitism filtering in from Ukraine. But for the first time in many years, perhaps for the first time in Jewish history, it became apparent to most Israeli experts and informed observers of East European affairs that the "traditional" Ukrainian anti-Semitism is now being deliberately and artificially fostered by the Soviet authorities, for Moscow's own political purposes.

A Jewish doctor, who was allowed to leave Lviv last year, reported that his 15-year-old daughter was forced to ridicule the

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\* All names of Ukrainian cities and provinces are spelled here according to the accepted transliteration pattern used by *The Ukrainian Quarterly*—EDITOR.

Jewish faith in front of her class. When she refused, she was expelled from school, and all appeals made by her father, a senior surgeon at one of Lviv's hospitals, to have her reinstated, since she was an *otlitchnitsa* (best pupil in her class), were summarily rejected by local educational authorities. The father appealed their ruling to the Ministry of Education, but was allowed to leave the Soviet Union before any reply arrived. The curious thing about this case is that the history teacher who forced the Jewish girl to say that "Judaism and Zionism are tools of exploitation of the masses, and the Star of David is a symbol of oppression and deceit," was himself not a Ukrainian, but a Russian, from Novgorod. The headmaster of the school, to whom the father went to protest when his daughter was expelled, called himself a Ukrainian, but his name was Fiodor Arsenyevich Velikanov, and he was born in Sverdlovsk.

Local Ukrainian officials of the Lviv Education District Administration told the worried father in strict confidence that he was lucky his daughter was merely expelled from school. Orders came from the "central authorities," they said, to crack down on any Jewish pupils and students in Ukrainian schools who refuse to castigate Judaism and Zionism, and publicly repeat ridiculous Nazi-like anti-Semitic statements.

An Israeli newspaperman who recently returned from a 30,000-kilometer tour of the Soviet Union, during which he visited the Jewish communities of Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, Vilnius, Minsk, Kiev, Lviv, Odessa, Simferopol, Yalta and Tiflis, disclosed that official Soviet anti-Semitism has many nuances and meanings. The worst anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union is in Moscow, because of the heavy concentration of Jews in the Soviet capital, and official restrictions are imposed on their employment and higher education. No Jews are allowed to serve in the Foreign Ministry, secret police, security service, regular armed forces, Ministry of Foreign Trade, and VOKS (Soviet Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries—a front organization for Communist espionage and subversion, as well as political propaganda, abroad).

This is a far cry from the late 1920's and the early 1930's when these very departments and services were almost entirely staffed and dominated by Russian Jews. A very strict *numerus clausus* selection limits the entry of Jewish students to universities, colleges and higher academic institutes. Some branches of higher learning are entirely closed to Jews, like the Foreign Diplomatic Service School, Civil Aviation Institute, Merchant Fleet College and others.

## OFFICIAL SOVIET ANTI-SEMITISM

At other schools on the academic level, restrictions against Jews are never officially published, yet are very severely enforced. To be sure, Jews get around these restrictions, just as they get around most other government-imposed limitations, by paying heavy bribes to the university authorities, who register the Jewish students as "Armenians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks," and almost every other nationality, except their own.

Parallel with the official anti-Jewish measures, popular anti-Semitism in Moscow is felt everywhere—in queues for movie tickets, on the football fields, in the giant Parks of "Culture and Relaxation," in the open-air peasant markets and in the *Metro* subway.

Jews are openly insulted and sometimes even beaten up in the streetcars and if militia patrolmen happen to be standing nearby, they do not interfere, but either turn away to look in the opposite direction or smile to encourage the anti-Semites. Popular anti-Semitism in Moscow stems from daily campaigns of vituperation against Israel and Zionism in the Soviet press and radio, from envy of the Jews who—so the Muscovites believe—live in better apartments and have more money without doing any heavy work, and from the traditional Russian attitude of "Kill the Jews—and Save Russia!"

On the other hand, the Soviet government is careful not to allow this latent anti-Semitism to get out of hand. With so many foreign diplomats, journalists and tourists on hand, any bloody excesses would have a negative impact on public opinion abroad. Official Soviet anti-Semitism is explained as a "struggle against Zionist reactionaries on behalf of honest Jewish toilers and exploited proletariat of Israel." Popular anti-Semitism is naturally encouraged by this official attitude, but kept in control by the authorities in Moscow and Leningrad, for the reasons stated above.

In Ukraine, things are vastly different, according to reports of Israel newspapermen who visited Ukrainian cities recently, Jewish Agency officials and recent arrivals from Lviv, Rivne, Tarnopil, Stanislaviv, Kovel and other parts of Western Ukraine. But before moving on to Ukraine, two more authentic stories of Jewish life in Moscow may be of interest to the readers of this article.

A few years ago an Israeli youth delegation was invited to participate in the Communist-sponsored International Youth Festival, then held in Moscow. The Soviet authorities, who knew that only Communist or Communist-front groups would accept such an invitation, hoped to make political capital out of the visit by ex-

plotting the Red-front Israeli delegates for purposes of anti-Zionist propaganda.

Indeed, the Israeli youngsters who went to Moscow were mostly members of Marxist-front organizations. But when they felt the poisonous air of anti-Semitism, when they met weeping Jews who had travelled to Moscow from as far as Murmansk to see the Israelis and hear Hebrew spoken in public, when they heard the tales of woe and suffering told to them by local Jews—they refused to cooperate with their Soviet hosts and foiled their anti-Zionist propaganda plans.

A scheduled lecture on "Zionist Chauvinism and Nationalism in the Service of American Imperialism" had to be cancelled when the Israeli delegation refused to participate. An Israeli Communist, Samuel Gordon (who was later expelled from the Communist Party) was invited to speak on "The Ruling Circles in Israel—Lackeys of Neo-Nazi Reaction in West Germany." He refused, saying: "Everything you want me to say may be quite true. Personally, I believe it to be true. But Israel is my country, for better or for worse, and there is no son in the world who will publicly call his own mother a prostitute, even if she really is one..."

Another Israeli delegate, a folk dancer named Ovadia Bartosh, twisted an ankle and was taken to a hospital reserved for Youth Festival participants. Because he was of Oriental descent (his parents came from Yemen) and looked like an Arab, the Russians put Bartosh in a room reserved for the Egyptians. There were five Egyptians in the room, and the Israeli was put in the sixth vacant bed. Soon after a doctor examined his ankle, a team of Russian radio reporters and television cameramen arrived with their bulky equipment, glaring lights and other paraphernalia of the trade. Bartosh's bed was the one nearest the door, and the Russian reporters zeroed in on him right away. Speaking through an Arabic interpreter, the Russian interviewer asked the Israeli boy: "And how do you like it here in Moscow, our Egyptian friend?"

"I like it fine," Bartosh replied in fluent Arabic, "but I am not an Egyptian, I am an Israeli..."

The thunderstruck Russians tried to back out, but it was too late. The chief interviewer tried to save the situation by asking again: "Could you perhaps tell us in a few words the reasons for the difficult economic conditions in Israel, why so many people are out of work, why only the wealthy ones eat meat, and why you allow the Germans and the Americans to rule your country?"

These were standard slanders and lies of Soviet anti-Israeli propaganda, and Bartosh did not even bother denying them. He

looked straight into the cameras and admitted: "Well, I know one good reason for unemployment in my own family. My father was a shoemaker and eked out a living of sorts. But for the past two years, he has been out of work..."

The Russians nearly jumped with joy. Here was the real "jackpot." "Yes, we commiserate wholeheartedly with your situation. Our listeners do not know what it means to be out of work. The Soviet citizen does not know what unemployment means. But tell us, our friend, why your father lost his job..." Ovadia smiled: "Well, when the Israeli troops defeated the Egyptian army in Sinai, the Egyptian soldiers were running away so fast, most of them took off their shoes and threw them away, to run faster across the sands of the desert. We captured 100,000 pairs of shoes, and since then my poor father has been out of work..."

The next day, during a political discussion in which Russians, Americans, Indians, Poles and Israelis took part, the Russians accused Israel of "warmongering, aggression and invasion of Arab countries." The Israeli delegate Jacob Almog, sick and tired of refuting baseless Soviet charges and accusations, sadly admitted that all the Russians said was true, but immediately added: "You yourself are to blame for this state of affairs. If you want us to be a peaceful nation, why do you deliver so many tanks, jets, cannons and machine guns to the Israeli Army?"

The stunned Russians denied that the Soviet Union sent even one rifle to Israel. "Well, perhaps not directly," Almog declared, "but you do send all this hardware to Nasser, we capture it from the Egyptians and it winds up in our arsenals and arms stores..."

A quarrel developed, during which Almog was called by the Russians "*parshivaya zhidovskaya mordda*" ("dirty Jewboy face"). Within a few days, the entire Israeli delegation was instructed to leave the Soviet Union and not return.

#### FRIENDLINESS TOWARD JEWS IN UKRAINE

By contrast to Moscow, anti-Semitism in Ukraine is deliberately fostered from above by the Soviet authorities. The two Soviet cities friendliest to Jews are not Moscow and Leningrad, as is mistakenly believed by many Jewish communities abroad, but Tiflis and Lviv. Tiflis (Tbilisi), the capital of the Georgian (Gruzin) republic, has a large and thriving Jewish community, which maintains synagogues, ritual matzo bakeries for the Passover festival, and a regular rabbinate and religious community administration.

All Russian attempts to stir up anti-Semitism among the Georgians have failed so far, and Tiflis Jews interviewed by an

Israeli newspaperman stated that whatever anti-Semitism can be felt in their city invariably comes from the Russians.

Lviv was a great center of Jewish culture and learning before the Second World War. During the German occupation in World War II, over 600,000 Jews were slaughtered in Lviv and nearby Galician districts by the Nazis and local underworld elements who volunteered for the Gestapo-organized auxiliary security police.

But the testimony of witnesses and survivors during the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem shows that only a small part of the local Ukrainian population took part in the Nazi-incited anti-Jewish excesses.

Before the *S.D. Einsatzgruppen* killer squads arrived to kill the Jews with machine guns and rifles, the Nazis hoped that most of their "dirty work" would be done by local collaborators and *pogrom* mobs. There was certainly no lack of pro-Nazi collaborators in the German-occupied Ukraine. But such was also the case in Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, even France and Norway, where Laval and Quisling became symbols of treason and pro-Nazi collaboration.

Each occupied nation had its share of pro-Nazi collaborators, and the Ukrainians were no exception. The results of diligent Nazi efforts to organize "Ukrainian *pogrom* mobs" were disappointing, however. According to official German documents introduced by the prosecution during the Eichmann trial, the Nazi commander of *S.D. Einsatzgruppe "Kommando Lemberg"* complained to his superiors that "...to rely on local people to take the law of retribution in their own hands, and themselves carry out final solution measures against Jews, is hopeless. We organized several action groups, but they soon degenerated into ordinary *pogrom* mobs, more interested in looting and plunder than in energetic and forceful measures against Jews. The number of Jews eliminated by mobs runs less than two thousand in my area of operations, and the damage done by mobs to property, as well as the disruption of order, does not justify this kind of action. I have no choice but to employ my own men."

According to official records of Israel's War Crimes Investigations Office, over 95,000 Nazis and Nazi collaborators throughout occupied Europe were directly connected with anti-Jewish measures, massacres and deportations. Of this number 45,000 were Germans, 8,500 Austrians, 11,000 Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, 7,500 Poles, 3,000 West Europeans, 9,000 Russians and Byelorussians, and 11,000 Ukrainians.



Considering Ukraine's population of some 40 million at that time, this yields a percentage of Nazi collaborators and S.S. volunteers actually smaller than that of any other East European country occupied by the Germans during World War II.

On the other hand, numerous Jews in Israel owe their lives to Ukrainians who saved them from the Nazis. Ivan Hrycko, Irena Mazaniuk, Stefan Dushny, and the nameless public notary at Lviv who issued false "Aryan" birth certificates to Jews until he was caught and killed by the Nazis, are remembered by grateful survivors in Israel.

But all that is in the past. Perhaps because Lviv and other Eastern Galician districts, where only 5,000 out of 610,000 Jews survived, themselves felt later the yoke of German occupation and Russian "liberation," this is now the "friendliest city in the Soviet Union for Jews to live in," a recent arrival reported.

Jews speak Yiddish openly in public, in streetcars and in the marketplace and no one makes fun of them, or utters anti-Semitic remarks, as would be the case in Moscow or Leningrad. There is a triple reason for this pro-Jewish attitude, so surprising to people who live in the past, with their outmoded ideas of "traditional" Ukrainian anti-Semitism:

(1) Israel, Zionism and Jews are now one of the main targets of violent Soviet propaganda. Since the Ukrainians hate Communism, Soviet rule and Russian domination, it is a plain case of "your enemy is my enemy."

(2) The Russians are trying to incite anti-Semitism in Ukraine, deliberately and provocatively, to discredit Ukrainian nationalists as "Nazis and Fascists."

(3) Both the Ukrainian National Movement and the Jewish National Movement (i. e. Zionism) have so many common aims that every intelligent Ukrainian who thinks of his country's ultimate liberation realizes that anti-Semitic incitement is Moscow's best weapon against both national movements.

I feel happy and free in Israel. Despite the friendly atmosphere in Lviv, I felt melancholic and oppressed to live for years near the unmarked mass graves of my people.

These graves are unmarked and unnoticed because of Moscow's specific orders.

This first-hand report by a man who left Lviv in December, 1960, is corroborated from many other sources. Soviet objections to let the surviving Jews honor the memory of their murdered families and brethren stem from a very simple wish to prevent any pro-Jewish sympathies among the indigenous populations of Ukraine, Byelorussia and other parts of the USSR which were occupied by the Nazis in World War II. If Jews are the villains in official Soviet policy, if Zionism is castigated as an "ally of Neo-Nazi reactionaries," Jewish victims of the Nazis may not be mentioned. That is the reason why Soviet dispatches from the Eichmann trial do not

mention the fact that the arch-criminal and his killer squads murdered millions of Jews. The word "Jewish victims" does not appear in the Soviet papers, which speak only of "millions of Soviet citizens murdered by the Hitlerites."

That is also the reason why all mention of Jewish partisans, the annihilation of Jews by the Nazis, or the heroic war deeds performed by Jews, was deleted from books and war memoirs of wartime Soviet guerrilla leaders in Ukraine—Saburov, Naumov, Kovpak, Melnyk, Vershyhora and Kozlov.

Mr. Sholom Golub of Haifa, who recently returned from a two-week visit to his relatives in Kiev, reports the desecration by Soviet authorities of the *Babyn-Yar* canyon on the outskirts of Kiev, where over 40,000 Jews were killed and buried by the Nazis during World War II. The Russians tore down the small wooden memorial tablet put up on the site after the war by the few Jewish survivors who returned to Kiev. Last year they dammed up *Babyn-Yar* and pumped water from the nearby river to turn the mass grave into a giant storage reservoir. Due to faulty planning and shoddy execution of the earthen dam's construction, the accumulated water broke out in the spring of 1961 and swept down a neighboring district of the city, killing several thousand people under the flood and debris.

The site of Jewish mass graves, where over 40,000 martyrs—men, women and children—lie buried, is now a neglected morass of stinking mud.

According to the Information Section of the National Religious Movement in Jerusalem, over 20 Jewish rabbis were arrested in the first six months of 1961 in Odessa, Stanislaviv, Chernivtsi and Tiraspol, on trumped-up charges of "drunken orgies in synagogues" and "black market speculations under cover of religious activities." Their fate is unknown, the Religious Movement Council stresses.

All these items, and many others, add up to a policy of planned intimidation of Ukrainian Jews, over and above the general policy of official Soviet anti-Semitism. Top Israeli experts disagree on an actual interpretation of this Moscow line. There are many veteran Israeli officials of Russian-Jewish origin, who albeit outspokenly anti-Communist themselves, still retain the outmoded notions that "real Russians" cannot be anti-Semitic, and that Moscow adopted an anti-Jewish line because Nikita Khrushchev is a Ukrainian, which is also a good reason why the most virulent forms of Soviet anti-Semitism find their expression in Ukraine.

But there are numerous younger officials, diplomats and Soviet affairs experts who point out:

¶ Khrushchev is not, and has never been, a Ukrainian. He was born into a Russian family in the village of Kalinovka which is in Russia proper, just outside Ukraine's border. His only connection with Ukraine was as Stalin's *Gauleiter* in Kiev, before, during and immediately after the war. In this capacity, he killed and deported, or doomed to death by hunger or resettlement, millions of Ukrainians, and also many Jews.

¶ The "real Russians" are anti-Semitic from way back. The first wave of *pogroms* towards the end of the XIXth century, and the second wave of anti-Jewish excesses in 1905, were both instigated and organized by Russian Cabinet Ministers and secret police chiefs of the Russian Czar's government. Father Gapon and his "Black Hundreds" gangs of Jew-killers were "real Russians," while Stalin's anti-Jewish "Doctors' Plot" started in Moscow proper.

Most experts believe there is still another reason why Moscow sponsors popular anti-Semitism in Ukraine, in addition to official anti-Jewish measures elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian population is seething with discontent. By holding up the traditional Jewish scapegoat, Moscow hopes to provide a ready-made emotional outlet for all pent-up hates and resentments against the regime and conditions of life. But the Ukrainians of 1961, according to all authoritative reports, are not the Ukrainians of 1941, just as the Jews of 1961 are not the Jews of 1941.

This is the reason why Moscow gets contrary results in Ukraine. It was easy for the Russians to stage a *pogrom* in a Jewish-populated suburb of Moscow where a Jewish cemetery and synagogue were desecrated and a Jewish woman killed. It is impossible for the Kremlin dictators to stage even a small token anti-Jewish *pogrom* anywhere in Ukraine, although Ukraine is—by all accepted Jewish definitions—the cradle of East European anti-Semitism. Whether the definitions were right or wrong in the past, this is certainly not the case now. In fact, considering the amount of anti-Jewish incitement and vituperation expended daily by Soviet-controlled schools, book publishers, radio broadcasting services and other media of public information in Ukraine, the only results have been a strengthening of pro-Jewish attitudes rather than the *pogroms* and excesses desired by Moscow.

Had such *pogroms* happened, Moscow could have stepped in to pose as a "defender" of Jewish lives, at the same time cracking down on Ukrainian nationalists under the guise of a "police campaign against anti-Semitism." But Soviet *pogrom* plans are foiled by the attitude of the Ukrainian population, which surprises the

Israeli visitors and newspapermen who happen to pass through Ukraine.

Curiously, this strange pro-Jewish attitude (strange in the light of past history) is more noticeable in Western Ukraine than in the Eastern regions, according to Israelis who have studied both parts of Ukraine. There is more anti-Semitism in Odessa than in Lviv, perhaps because Odessa has a large Russian minority, and perhaps also because the Western Ukrainians have always been more nationalist-conscious. They realize now that their own interests, the interests of the Ukrainian National Liberation Movement, demand a new look, a new era in relations between Ukrainians and Jews, a common front against Moscow's destructive policies and against Soviet imperialism, which is just as dangerous to independent Israel in the Middle East as to captive Ukraine in Eastern Europe.

In the light of this information, and its evaluation, the 150 distinguished Ukrainian-Jewish guests of President Ben-Zvi had a feeling that a new era had indeed arrived. "Freedom is indivisible," one of the statesmen told me, "we Jews are already free in a land of our own. We now hope the Ukrainians will soon be free, so that the 900,000 Ukrainian Jews are free to come to Israel."

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