

The Kremlin Stand On Anti-Semitism

By Harry Ring

Is there official anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union? Much light is shed on this complex question by J. B. Salsberg in his report on the status of Soviet Jews in the February issue of the magazine *Jewish Life*. A member of the national committee of the Canadian Labor Progressive (Communist) Party, Salsberg has made a number of trips to the USSR to gather information on the Jewish question.

During his 1955 and 1956 visits he discussed the issue with high Soviet officials. Last week, we reported his findings that discrimination against Soviet Jews began not with the dissolution of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1948 but in the early 1930's. We also reported his conclusion that the denial of the democratic rights of the Jews and other national minorities paralleled the rise of the Stalinist dictatorship.

CLAIM JEWS INTEGRATED

During his recent visit, Salsberg tried to determine from Soviet officials why Jewish cultural institutions had been done away with and precisely what they considered the status and rights of the Soviet Jews to be. In reply, they told him that with the industrialization of the USSR the basis of Jewish communal life had disappeared, that the Jews had been transformed from artisans and craftsmen into industrial workers and that along with this process they had been "integrated" into the cultural life around them.

"Those who still desire specific Jewish activity," he was told, "are small in number and they comprise the more backward elements. It would be an 'anachronism' . . . to base the party's policy on them."

To refute the claim of assimilation, Salsberg gives his own first-hand account of the widespread response of Soviet Jews to the revival of Jewish cultural activity that was recently permitted on a limited basis. He further demonstrates that while the Soviet government refuses to honor Jewish national rights on the pretext that all but a small number of Jews have integrated, it does treat the Jews as a national grouping for the purpose of discriminating against them.

'CAUTION AND SENSITIVITY'

Salsberg, himself, maintains that it is incorrect to speak of anti-Semitism as an official government policy. Nevertheless, he adds, "There does exist an incomprehensible caution, a peculiar sensitivity when it comes to taking an open, bold and militant position against backwardness. This often leads to acts that are essentially discriminatory." Thus, when he asked why the passports and other personal papers of Jewish citizens are stamped "Jew," "I got no clear or satisfactory answer."

Soviet officials refused to confirm or deny the statements of Ekaterina Furtseva, a high-ranking government official, who told the *National Guardian* that in some government departments it was held that there was too great a concentration of Jews and so they were transferred to other jobs. But, Salsberg points out,

Two Standards for Jews in USSR?

Further information on the dual status of Jewish people in the Soviet Union is contained in the terms of the Soviet-Polish repatriation agreement as reported in the *New York Times*, March 28. According to the terms of the agreement, those who had Polish citizenship on Sept. 17, 1939, (the day Hitler and Stalin partitioned Poland), will be permitted to return from the Soviet Union to their homeland. The agreement further specifies that this includes "persons of Jewish nationality who possessed Polish citizenship" on that date. This distinction between Polish nationals and Jews "who possess Polish citizenship" confirms the reports that Jews in the Soviet Union are considered to be in a special category. They are, however, denied the legal rights of a national minority on the grounds that they have all been assimilated in the general population.

their statements more than confirmed the essence of hers.

Salsberg cites a particularly shameful incident related to him by one of the officials in this connection. Trying to explain the "delicate" problems in handling relations between the various nationalities, the official told how six talented music students were selected to participate in a competition. When it was discovered that all six were Jews, four replacements were made from other peoples. "And the first prize was won by a Georgian," the official added.

"This example," Salsberg declares, "is not only in my opinion a slap in the face to the four eliminated Jewish students; it is also a criticism of those responsible for the Soviet Union's nationalities policy. The explanation is full of colossal contradictions. How does it jibe with the 'integration' theory and the concept that Jews 'are expressing themselves in the culture of the people among who they live?'"

SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS

"Who examined," he asks, "and why, the chosen student from Minsk, Moscow or Kiev, to find out if he was a 100 percent White Russian, Great Russian or Ukrainian or if he was only a Jewish White Russian, Jewish Great Russian or Jewish Ukrainian? Are there two classes of citizens in the Soviet Union?"

"Such practices," Salsberg concludes, "are in complete contradiction with the elementary concepts of socialist equality. In my opinion this is an example of an inconsistency and of a catering to the most backward elements in Soviet society, and in my opinion it is a form of discrimination that must be fought, exposed and eliminated."

(Second of a series)