

SOVIET CONFIRMS JEWS' EXECUTION

Correspondent Hears Top Yiddish Writers Were Put to Death in '48 Purge

By HARRISON E. SALISBURY

An eight-year-old mystery over the fate of a group of Soviet-Yiddish writers who vanished late in 1948 appears to be solved.

A correspondent for the Jewish Daily Forward, a New York Yiddish-language newspaper, reported after having visited Moscow that he had learned that the writers were arrested by the Soviet secret police during an anti-Semitic drive.

Several of the writers, according to information obtained by the Daily Forward correspondent in the Soviet Union, were executed in August, 1952. Several of the surviving writers have been released from prison since the death of Stalin three years ago.

The correspondent, Leon Crystal, cabled his newspaper from Paris that he had learned that Soviet authorities had

called the nearest kin of the executed writers.

The relatives, who had been without information as to the fate of the writers since 1948, were told that the men had been arrested and executed in August, 1952, through a "miscarriage of justice."

Deed Attributed to Beria

This was attributed by Soviet authorities to the late Lavrenti P. Beria, former Soviet police chief, who was executed himself in December, 1953, on charges of treason. Beria has been blamed by the present Soviet regime for a variety of misdeeds, including many instances of false accusations.

According to the information obtained by Mr. Crystal during a four-week visit to the Soviet Union, two prominent Yiddish writers are definitely known to have been among those executed in August, 1952. They were Perets Markish and David Hofshstein. Among those reported to have been executed, without confirmation, were David Bergelson, Itzik Feffer and Leib Kvitko. Among the survivors was Shimen Halkin.

No information was available as to the nature of the charges on which the arrest of the writers was based.

The reputation of the Jewish group has not yet been publicly rehabilitated. The present Soviet

rulers are, however, proceeding in methodical fashion to redress many wrongs allegedly committed both by Beria and by Stalin.

Wave of Terrorism

The arrest of the Yiddish writers occurred at the climax of a wave of terrorism against Jewish cultural institutions late in 1948 and early in 1949.

During the campaign the Yiddish-language publishing house in Moscow, Yiddish-language newspapers in Moscow and Minsk, and magazines and theatres in Moscow, Minsk, Birobidzhan and elsewhere were closed. Many Jewish residents were arrested and many prominent Soviet critics, playwrights and other intellectuals of Jewish origin lost their jobs. The Jewish autonomous region of Birobidzhan virtually ceased to be a place of Jewish settlement although the name of the province was not changed.

The men arrested in 1948 constituted the flower of Yiddish literary culture in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Bergelson was considered by many the outstanding Yiddish novelist in the Soviet Union. He was well known in the United States, having visited and lectured here in the late Nineteen Twenties. He was born in the Ukraine in 1884 and lived in Germany for many years after the Bolshevik Revolution

He returned to the Soviet Union in 1928 or 1929. Among his outstanding works were an autobiographical novel, "On the Dnieper," and "When All Was Over," another novel.

Mr. Feffer was of a younger generation and was a staunch supporter of the Soviet regime and of Stalin. He was a Red Army colonel in World War II. In one of his poems he said, "when I say 'sun' I mean 'Stalin.'" He also had visited the United States, having come here in 1943 as a representative of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee with the famed Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels.

Mr. Hofshstein was known as a lyrical poet. Born in 1889 he had visited Palestine before World War I.

Mr. Markish, born in the Ukraine in 1895, spent much of the time until the late Nineteen Twenties in Poland and then settled in the Soviet Union. He was best known for long novels written in verse.

Mr. Kvitko, born in 1893, was prominent among the younger generation of Yiddish writers in Moscow. His nursery rhymes and verse for children were also well known in Russian translation. Mr. Halkin was less well known but was a frequent contributor to Yiddish periodicals in the Soviet Union.