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**SURVEY  
OF  
JEWISH  
AFFAIRS**

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**1991**

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# 11

## Jews in the Soviet Union *(i) Jewish Life and Culture*

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The essence of Jewish life in the Soviet Union in the year 1990 was a trend towards organization and institutionalization of a renewed communal activity that must almost surely vanish for lack of a continuing Jewish presence. The same consciousness that underlay the impressive range of Jewish activity which we will attempt to analyse here, made the Jews of the Soviet Union painfully aware of the instability of their life. In the final weeks of 1990 this led to an emigration numbering over a thousand a day, with the pressures to leave rising steadily. Soviet Jews were already a demographically fragile entity, with the European portion aged to the extent of not reproducing itself, and the Caucasian and Central Asian communities peripheral, as well as relatively small and isolated. In the light of this basic structure, it must be considered that any long-term continuation of this rate of emigration, taking from the Soviet Jewish community its most fertile and active elements, must almost certainly reduce the Jewish presence below the minimum necessary for maintaining any national, cultural, or social community. Paradoxical as it may seem, the emergence in 1990 of a vigorous and autonomous Jewish community in the Soviet Union could be considered as the swan song of one of the most creative, influential, and important Jewish communities of modern times.

The new freedoms that grew up under Gorbachev's policy of glasnost permitted a public articulation of Jewish consciousness and an intense attempt to rediscover the long-buried historical and social roots of Jewish existence in the USSR and pre-revolutionary Russia. However, the social tensions that emerged in the Soviet environment also laid bare the precarious and controversial posi-

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tion of the Jews in contemporary Soviet society. My analysis here is devoted to the development of this contradictory whirlpool of pressures during 1990.

The most significant event in Soviet Jewish life during 1990 was the rebirth of a Jewish community. For close to seventy years, since the disbanding of the Jewish National Commissariat, no body, governmental or public, had coordinated the affairs of all the Jews of the USSR. The First Congress of Jewish Community Organizations of the USSR, convened in Moscow in December 1989, created Vaad, an executive body that was to draw together all the activities of the individual Jewish publics scattered across the Soviet Union. However limited and tentative the activity of this new executive, it expressed the re-awakened consciousness and self-identity of a long-smothered Jewish public.

The creation of Vaad, an initiative of Jewish activists themselves, created an address to which Jewish individuals and groups could turn for assistance in solving both personal and communal problems. It thus filled a historic function as intercessor for petitioners far from the seats of power. Such an institution had been traditional in Russia since the days of the tsars, and the pressure for someone to perform this function had been evident throughout the years when no central Jewish community institution had existed. In the history of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, created in the Second World War to mobilize world Jewish opinion on the side of the Soviet Union, the phenomenon of individual Jews addressing appeals for assistance to the committee was common. Even the recent Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public, formed at the beginning of the 1980s as an anti-Israeli propaganda organ, was addressed by Jews from various places in the USSR, appealing for resolution of questions involving both personal and communal difficulties. Vaad thus had a traditional field of activity open to it from its very inception.

### **The Renaissance of Autonomous Jewish Cultural Activity**

The December 1989 congress in Moscow was deliberately billed as a gathering of Jewish community organizations, leaving the nature and activities of these groups in the hands of each local community. Nevertheless, the dominant aspect of activity was culture in its broadest sense. The country-wide spread of Jewish cultural activity was the most convincing proof of the continuing Jewish identity of Soviet Jewry even after a prolonged history of cultural starvation.

Two characteristics of these cultural activities should be noted. First, they were spread truly across the entire breadth of the Soviet Union. Cultural centres sprang up not only in such traditional Jewish centres as Riga, Vilna, Kishinev, or Bukhara, but in cities in the Soviet heartland that had never been noted for Jewish activity, such as Alma-Ata, Donetsk, or Krasnoiarsk. More than seventy different localities were represented at the First Congress of Jewish Community Organizations, and estimates of the total number of cities hav-

ing some form of organized Jewish life ran as high as 126. The 498 delegates at the Moscow meeting represented 204 different organizations. New community organizations sprang up steadily throughout the year, and representatives of Vaad assert that no Jewish community of 5,000 Jews or more is without some form of organized Jewish activity. A second congress was being organized by Vaad for January 1991.

The second characteristic worth noting is that the organizations created in the various localities covered the entire range of community interest, social, cultural, and religious. The most active Jewish centres had a range of activities that would do honour to any well-organized Jewish community anywhere. They included youth activities, adult education and contemporary affairs, social activities to facilitate contacts between young unmarried Jews, religious services and studies, and community welfare projects to assist the elderly and infirm. The central activities common to all, however, are the study of Hebrew and the state of Israel, for the question of emigration today overshadowed all other aspects of Soviet Jewish life, and the existential question facing each individual Jew was the determination of his own position regarding emigration.

In the light of this situation, Hebrew study grew immensely. A network of study was created ranging from seminars in Moscow for Hebrew teachers from various communities to an 'each one teach one' system in which students who had completed a few lessons passed the fundamentals of their knowledge on to others. So great was the demand for Hebrew teaching that several non-Jewish Soviet officials whose work involved their developing a good knowledge of the Hebrew language, augmented their salaries by offering private lessons to select groups. Two factors facilitated the spread of Hebrew teaching. The growth of legitimate community cultural centres meant that Hebrew teaching was no longer an underground activity as it had been through much of the 1980s, but could be conducted openly and in public premises. This removed much of the fear that restrained Hebrew teaching in the days of the refuseniks, when both teachers and students might find themselves under criminal indictment. The second factor was that the improvement of Soviet-Israeli relations has made possible the sending of relays of professional teachers of Hebrew from Israel to a large number of Jewish community centres across the Soviet Union. In May of 1990 there were six such teachers in Moscow alone, along with 155 Soviet Jewish teachers of Hebrew. The Israeli teachers spent 2-3 months in a community, concentrating on training future teachers of Hebrew, but at the same time conducting classes at all levels. When one team completed its stint in a community and returned to Israel, it was replaced by another team. This continuity made possible a quantum leap in the numbers of those studying Hebrew and in the level of indigenous teachers. In Tashkent, at mid-year, the Jewish community centre claimed 1,200 students of Hebrew; in Moscow, 5,000 students were reported; and in other communities such as Donetsk, Kharkov and Alma-Ata, the number of those studying Hebrew at any point during 1990 was said to be in the hundreds. With virtually all restrictions on import of textbooks, diction-

aries and audio-visual aids lifted (and with an agreement signed with a Soviet publisher to print Russian-Hebrew dictionaries and textbooks for the study of Hebrew), the students of Hebrew were able to make impressive progress in their knowledge of the language. The main limitation on the spread of Hebrew language was the instability created by the mass emigration. Teachers often received their exit permits and plane tickets in mid-course and left their classes, and just as often, newly-enrolled students left the USSR to complete their studies as new immigrants in an *ulpan* in Israel. In recognition of this fact, efforts were made to systematize the teaching of Hebrew in all parts of the USSR, building a curriculum based on that of the *ulpanim* in Israel. This one facet of Jewish life in the USSR became in 1990 the symbol of the turning point in recent development of the community.

In parallel with the resurgence of public religious activity all over the Soviet Union, Jewish religious activity also grew. For the first time since the 1917 revolutions, the number of active synagogues rose. Typical of this process is the Donetsk Jewish community. The only existent synagogue building in Donetsk had been confiscated by the authorities in 1935 and converted into the workshops and store rooms of the municipal puppet theatre. Originally it had been constructed with the aid of contributions of the city's Jews, to replace a synagogue destroyed in the October 1905 pogrom. After a two-year campaign, the building was returned to the Jewish community by the municipal authorities, and was refurbished and inaugurated during the High Holidays. It serves now not only for religious services, but as the community centre for the city's Jewish Cultural Association.

Similar events took place in other communities where religious life had been minimal since the Second World War. Here again the support of Jewish communities outside the Soviet Union contributed to the Soviet Jewish renaissance. For many years, even before the advent of perestroika, emissaries of Jewish groups and communities had helped keep some knowledge of religion alive, and the 1980s had witnessed the flowering of a yeshiva and of a number of Jewish religious groups in Moscow and Leningrad, with offshoots in some of the other larger cities. This began to be institutionalized toward the end of the 1980s when an officially sanctioned Institute for the Study of World Civilizations was established under the aegis of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The teaching of Jewish religious and cultural subjects was negotiated by Rabbi Adin Steinzaltz of Jerusalem (hence the popular nickname of the programme as 'the Steinzaltz Yeshiva'). The programme that developed involved advanced study of Jewish history, Bible, Talmud, Hebrew language and all related subjects, taught by a few Soviet teachers and rabbis and university personnel from various parts of the world. In 1990 a faculty member of the Department of Jewish History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was seconded to the Institute to teach Jewish history for three semesters.

Secular Jewish education of a formal nature also showed a measure of institutionalization. The Riga Jewish Day School entered its third year of activity

with some 40 children aged 7-15 years studying Yiddish as part of their educational curriculum, and about half studying Hebrew as an extra-curricular subject. The numbers of those studying Yiddish in Riga were the same as in Birobidzhan, where 400 children studied Yiddish in 14 school-age and 5 pre-school groups. During the year, the Leningrad Jewish Open University that had hitherto been a tentative and little-organized continuation of previous cultural circles began to organize both curriculum and teaching, taking their inspiration from the Leningrad Hebrew University that had operated at the beginning of the 1920s. The teaching of Jewish studies as a regular part of the humanities curriculum of the University of Vilna was resumed after a fifty-year hiatus. The significance of these activities was the open emergence of organized study of Judaic subjects in a variety of institutional frameworks covering the entire range of schools from kindergarten to graduate specialization.

In 1990, a concerted campaign was made at Pesach and at the High Holidays to send from Israel to the USSR people who could combine the tasks of conducting religious services, teaching Hebrew and answering the multitude of detailed, practical questions about Israel that occupied the minds of Soviet Jews. From the New Year through to Simhat Tora there were Israeli emissaries in some thirty-five Soviet Jewish communities all across the USSR, helping to revive for a broad Jewish public traditions that had been nearly forgotten and in many cases were known only through reminiscences of an older generation.

Alongside these attempts to return to Hebrew language and Jewish tradition, activists of the Jewish cultural associations were attempting to rediscover their own history. Many centred around memorialization of the Holocaust. Thus a group of Kharkov Jews created a martyrology of their community's victims, the Donetsk Jews created a memorial site at an abandoned mine at which the city's Jews were murdered by the Nazis and the semi-clandestine memorial services held at Babi Yar in Kiev, Romboli near Riga, Ponary near Vilna, or at a Jewish grave in the Leningrad cemetery, became mass public occasions, attended by local officials, and reported in the local press. After years of official denial, the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust experience was now publicly recognized.

Beyond these was evidence of a deep psychological hunger among Soviet Jews, particularly the young ones who grew up in total ignorance of the historical Jewish presence in the USSR, to give substance and depth to their newly-discovered identity. During 1990 groups of historians were active in conducting individual and group activities to publicize the Jewish past of their community. Whether it was a history of the Jews of Turkestan during the Soviet period, written by an archivist in Frunze, or a campaign to place a plaque noting the activity of the late Soviet-Jewish writer, Vasilii Grossman, in the Donetsk Medical Institute, these reflected a need to establish a place for Jews both as individuals and as a collective entity in the panorama of Soviet history.

Significant in this respect was the meeting held immediately following the First Congress of Jewish Community Organizations. With the participation of

Jewish historians from all over the world, an Association of Young Jewish Historians of the USSR was founded, giving organizational form and encouragement to persons working in the field of Jewish history, professionals and amateurs alike. The members included academics, archive workers and independent persons interested in any field of modern or ancient history of the Jews of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. In addition, a country-wide Association for Judaica and Jewish Culture was founded in September at a meeting in Rostov-on-the-Don, drawing together the various local associations that had become active in the study and spread of all aspects of Jewish life. In a dozen ways the dry bones of Jewish community life were coming together, taking on flesh and sinew, and resuming their long-dormant vitality.

This upsurge of cultural activity was constructed on the foundation of a vastly increased flow of Jewish information. The first title of the 'Aliya Library' to be published in Moscow was available in summer 1990, augmenting shipments of close to 200,000 copies to Jewish centres across the Soviet Union. This series of over a hundred titles of Jewish history, philosophy and culture, as well as biography and literary classics, could be credited with totally changing the landscape of public Jewish knowledge in the USSR. The volumes, published in Israel over the last thirty years, provided the Russian-speaking Jewish lay audience with a broad and readily understood view of Jewish thought, literary creation and the historical Jewish experience. Only a short time ago these books were highly-cherished *rara*, to be passed from hand to hand and read until they fell apart. Today they are the foundation of every Jewish community library across the USSR, lending breadth and depth to the burgeoning Jewish consciousness of Soviet Jews.

At the community level, nearly half the local Jewish organizations began publishing their own newspapers, journals, or information bulletins. These ranged from single-page, irregularly published calendars of coming events or one-time efforts published by computer, to substantial bi-weekly or monthly newspapers and journals, carrying items of both local and world-wide Jewish interest, as well as cultural and historical articles of considerable educational value. These community journals were the heirs of the Jewish *samizdat* of the refusenik community. The first of them appeared in 1987, and some have published regularly since. Of the 50 or more titles known, about 20 began to appear in 1990. In some cases, the change in journals was caused by the internal politics of the community, with editors and active contributors leaving one paper to establish another with a different community orientation. The various press organs reflected every possible shade of opinion, Yiddishist and Hebraist, Zionist and anti-Zionist, secular and religious, Israel-oriented as well as Soviet in view.

A great range of attitudes could be found regarding the various other national movements in the USSR as well. All these differences were further complicated by inter-personal conflicts. The Soviet Jewish activists developed the full gamut of opinions found in any other Jewish community. Some publica-

tions ceased when their editors and publishers emigrated. In the case of the Moscow-based 'Information Bulletin', the oldest of the continuously existing publications, that had appeared on a semi-monthly to monthly basis since late 1987, issue no. 44-45, published in the autumn of 1990, announced that it would cease publication and be replaced by a newspaper in an attempt to cope more satisfactorily with the rapidly changing events. Whatever their format or outlook, these community publications represented an instrument of the greatest importance in allowing the core of Jewish community activists to reach out to a broad public, making their full gamut of thoughts and interests known. They also facilitate the exchange of ideas that can be woven into a communal fabric of commonly held values.

### **Soviet Politics and Soviet Jewry**

Inevitably, the Soviet Jewish community's new public activism involved it in the growing turmoil of Soviet politics. Individual Jews, from the beginning of perestroika, had been prominent in various groups, particularly the various popular fronts that had become the leaders of independent politics in the Baltic republics and the Ukraine. In the central conflict between the democratic reform groups and the conservative Russian nationalist forces, representatives of Vaad took part on the side of reform in a united demonstration of democratic groups in Moscow in mid-July, carrying banners demanding recognition of Vaad by the Soviet authorities and condemning the Russian nationalist writer Valentin Rasputin for antisemitic statements. Vaad also addressed an official letter to Gorbachev, condemning the Soviet blockade on Lithuania, and calling for a political solution to the problem of that republic's status.<sup>1</sup> Despite the problem of maintaining close co-operation between the Jewish communities of the various national republics and the native popular fronts, there was a growing awareness among Jewish activists and the Jewish public of the potential for estrangement. The fact that in almost every popular front there existed a coalition tending to move towards radical nationalists of xenophobic tradition was worrisome to the Jews. This was particularly the case in the Baltic republics and Moldavia, where these popular fronts became the effective state power in the 1990 elections and in which a large part of the Jewish population was made up of relatively recent immigrants identified in their language and social orientation with the migrant Russians who were a prime object of enmity. In Lithuania, for instance, it was claimed that only one in six of the 12,000 Jews registered in the January 1989 census, was native-born.

To date there has been a record of co-operation and mutual understanding between the various local popular fronts and the emerging Jewish community organizations. It is the long-term prognosis for a continuity of autonomous Jewish life in an independent Lithuania or Moldavia that aroused concern among those with a knowledge of Jewish history in these areas.



A good deal of the political activity of the Jewish communities centred around the monitoring of antisemitism and organization of public opposition to it. As has been the case for the past two years, rumours of impending pogroms spread widely, this time naming 5 May as the date. Perhaps because such rumours have proved false in the past, they had comparatively little effect on the Jewish public this time. Nevertheless, in some communities the rumours served as a base for gathering together public groups to condemn antisemitism. In a number of cities in the Ukraine this took the form of mass public demonstrations. Elsewhere, representatives of all the various ethnic associations gathered with municipal officials to elicit police assurance that no disorders would be permitted. Only in one instance in the USSR was there violence against Jewish property. In the city of Andizhan in Uzbekistan, a mob of football fans, frustrated at the cancellation of a highly-anticipated match, rioted, and driven from the city centre by armed troops of the ministry of the interior, attacked Armenian and Jewish-owned bazaar stands and homes, causing considerable property damage, but no loss of life. Other incidents involved the daubing of antisemitic slogans on the Moscow synagogue, the vandalizing of a Jewish cemetery in Azerbaydhan, and the preying of criminal elements on Jews in Kharkov and in the North Caucasus who were in the process of emigration. These incidents, and other reports of antisemitic activities of Pamyat and similar groups from various cities were sufficiently widespread and serious to agitate the Jewish community, adding to the uncertainties that were already feeding a record emigration.

Unprecedented in its impact, and in the subsequent publicity, was the disruption in January of a meeting of liberal writers in Moscow by a group of thirty Pamyat members led by Konstantin Smirnov-Ostashvili, shouting threats and epithets against the 'Yid-Masons' of the writers' group, and threatening, 'Next time we'll come here with sub-machine guns.'<sup>2</sup> Following pressure from the executive of the Soviet Union of Writers, Smirnov-Ostashvili was arraigned on a charge of instigating a group activity violating public order, was found guilty and sentenced to two years in a prison camp. The unique aspect of the trial was, that despite the article under which Smirnov-Ostashvili was charged, the court proceedings revolved around the question of his antisemitic views and actions, and their broader ramifications in Soviet society. The prosecution attorneys, some of them representing various civic and social groups, called on the court to go beyond the single incident, and order the banning of all Pamyat and other similar activities in Moscow.

From a Jewish point of view the holding of the trial, and the conviction of Smirnov-Ostashvili were symptomatic of the change that has been manifested in the attitude of the Soviet authorities toward the Jews and toward the very fact of Jewish life and the existence of a 'Jewish question' in the Soviet Union. For decades, the Jews of the Soviet Union had been non-persons in the Soviet media, except for denunciations of 'swindlers and speculators' in the 1960s, and 'Zionist criminals and conspirators who slandered the USSR in the service

of anti-Soviet imperialism.' The fact that all references to Jews in any of the official media were negative had aroused the first scepticism in many young Jews of the 1970s, leading them on the path to an independent search for the essence of Jewish existence. In 1990, discussions of Soviet-Jewish life and even discussions of the reasons for emigration of so many Soviet Jews took a new turn. The dominant line of thought was that the Jewish emigration was a result of decades of the Soviet authorities' ignoring of Jewish life, culture and problems. This, it was said, along with the adoption of political antisemitism by certain Russian literary journals, had undermined the confidence of Jews in the Soviet Union, and heightened their tendency to emigrate.<sup>3</sup> For the Jewish community, and for the democratic forces in Moscow and in the USSR in general, it was significant that during the sentencing of Smirnov-Ostashvili in early October, the courtroom was packed with Pamyat supporters who were reported to have displayed antisemitic slogans in the courtroom and attacked the judges as 'servants of Zionism'.<sup>4</sup> The supporters of the prosecution did not attend the court session. This was attributed to weariness and a general and growing despair as to the prospects of democracy in the USSR. The deteriorating moral and political atmosphere that characterized all of Soviet life at the end of 1990 could not help but affect the outlook of Soviet Jews.

### **Emigration of Soviet Jews**

Impressive as the achievements of the Soviet Jewish community were, the dominant phenomenon of Jewish life was the huge growth of emigration, to Israel in particular. A quarter of a million Jews left the USSR during 1990, constituting more than half the total emigration from the country. By the end of the year, over 30,000 new immigrants a month were entering Israel, and the numbers were rising steadily. The total for the year reached 185,000, with the bulk of the remainder filling the quota of 50,000 to the US, and several thousand others scattering to the Federal Republic of Germany and other European states. In addition to the growth in numbers, we find that the emigration spread to all parts of the Soviet Jewish community. If, during 1989, the emigration was focused in the European portion of the USSR, with relatively few Jews leaving the Caucasus and Central Asia, this changed in 1990. Where fewer than 500 Jews had emigrated from Georgia in all of 1989, nearly one thousand had left by the end of September 1990. In the same period the emigration of Jews from Azerbaydzhan grew from less than 2,000 to nearly 5,000. Close to 13,000 Jews left the republics of Central Asia in the first nine months of 1990 compared to just over 5,000 in the whole of the previous year. Political instability in Uzbekistan had already stimulated the beginnings of a mass Jewish emigration at the end of 1989, and the Andidzhan riot and Tadzhhik-Uzbek clashes further stimulated this. A report from Samarkand noted: 'There is a large exodus of Jews. Today when you meet someone, the greeting is 'When are you

leaving?', or 'Have you submitted your papers yet?' I believe that if things continue this way for two or three years, the great Jewish community of Samarkand will have ceased to exist.'<sup>5</sup>

Inevitably the growth in emigration was led by many of those with the most developed Jewish consciousness, and these were the same activists who had stimulated the remarkable renaissance of Jewish community organization all across the Soviet Union. From city after city of the Russian Republic, the Ukraine and Moldavia, the leaders and activists of the Jewish community organizations arrived in Israel through 1990. In more than one case, their replacements also arrived, leaving the activities in the hands of the third rank of activists. In addition, the public for whom these community facilities had been created, was now emigrating in increasing numbers. In particular this was true of the young intelligentsia, for the average age of the emigrants remains in the mid-thirties. This mass exodus could not but affect the continued vigour of Jewish cultural activity, whose roots were in any case not yet deep. Thus the impressive growth of Jewish community organizations in 1989 and 1990 should be seen as an interlude, rather than as a long-term trend.

What were the factors that caused a nearly four-fold leap in Jewish emigration from the USSR in 1990? In the words of a Birobidzhan Jew explaining the expected emigration of 10 per cent of the region's Jews during that year, 'The first reason is social and economic instability, the uncertainty as to what tomorrow may bring. The reports of antisemitism in the western part of the country reach us through the press, and that too is one of the reasons. But the main cause is that things are not getting better in our country. On the contrary, everything is becoming worse. . . . And on the whole, the attitude toward Jews is changing. If previously one did not encounter antisemitism, for instance in queues, or in public transport, it has now begun to appear. The emigration worsens the attitude toward the Jews, and this worsening attitude to Jews stimulates an even larger emigration that once more creates enmity toward Jews. It's a vicious circle. . . . The national future of the region is threatened.'<sup>6</sup>

Thus, despite a freedom of expression and organization unprecedented in the past fifty years or more, and despite the devotion and creative ardor of numerous cultural and intellectual leaders, the growth of Jewish community activity remained precarious. Soviet society and politics showed a growing instability. The economy did not halt its sharp deterioration. The dissolution of the Soviet Union became a fact as republics ignored Moscow's writ and began setting up their own institutions and formulating their own policies. Above all there was a growth of social frustration that translated itself into growing violence between contending groups. In such an atmosphere the Jews were increasingly sensitive to their extreme vulnerability, and chose emigration. The interlude of renaissance of Jewish communal activity was in fact the opening of the last act of modern Jewish life in Russia and the Soviet Union.

## Notes

- 1 *Informatsionnyi biulleten po problemy repatriatsii i evreiskoi kultury* (Moscow), nos. 6-7 (42-43), July-August 1990, pp. 7-8.
- 2 *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 24 January 1990, p. 2.
- 3 Typical of these was the article 'Do we have a Jewish question?' by Sergei Rogov, a well-known commentator on Jewish affairs in an international context, published in *Pravda*, 22 July 1990. In the same issue, two readers' letters were published, one condemning the 'antisemitic hysteria' prominent in the USSR, and the other stating that 'those basically guilty for Russia's tragedy are Lenin and the Yid-Communists . . . who have today seized all positions of influence.'
- 4 *Izvestyia*, 12 October 1990, p. 3.
- 5 Report of B. Beniaminov in *Informatsionnyi biulleten po problemy repatriatsii i evreiskoi kultury* (Moscow), nos. 8-9 (44- 45), 1990, pp. 22-3.
- 6 Letter of Petr Temtsin from Birobidzhan in *Informatsionnyi biulleten po problemy repatriatsii i evreiskoi kultury* (Moscow), nos. 8-9 (44-45), 1990, pp. 220-1.

## *(ii) Antisemitism: In Search of a Scapegoat*

LUKASZ HIRSZOWICZ AND HOWARD SPIER

### From State Policy to Grass-roots Movement

There can be no doubt that the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union had been radically transformed in the six years since Gorbachev came to power. The pace of Jewish emigration soared as virtually all restrictions were lifted. Jewish cultural bodies have proliferated spontaneously in a country where Jewish culture had almost been eradicated by three generations of authoritarianism. A well attested policy of anti-Jewish discrimination in regard to entry to various higher educational institutions were dropped, or at least weakened.

Yet at the same time, the collapse of the Soviet system gave rise to what may well be the most dynamic antisemitic movement to be found anywhere, and turned a relatively orderly emigration process into what was described as an evacuation.

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