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**The Tale of a Tour:  
Solomon Mikhoels, Itzik Fefer, and the Soviet Encounter with  
American Jewry**

By

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Honors Thesis  
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Swarthmore, Pennsylvania,  
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**Abstract**

In June 1943 Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer, members of the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, embarked on a tour of the United States and several other countries. The aims of the tour were to raise funds for the Red Army, and to improve American perceptions of the Soviet Union. Reactions to the tour in the American Jewish community can be gauged through coverage of the events in the American Jewish press. These publications represent a wide range of political viewpoints, contributing a variety of perspectives on the tour. Aside from newspapers, another major presence in the events of the tour was that of American Jewish organizations. Like the press, these each had a political agenda of their own, which added to the complexity of relationships within the American Jewish community, and relations with the Soviet Union. This work investigates the significance of the tour in the Soviet Union and the United States. In particular, it views the tour and discussions surrounding it as a point of entry into understanding the landscape of tensions animating American Jewry and its reckoning with the Soviet Union during World War II.

## Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the advice and support of many people—professors, advisors, family, and friends. At Swarthmore, Robert Weinberg was a constant source of information, guidance, and encouragement. His freshman seminar set me on the path of studying Russian language and history, so it seems fitting that he has seen me through the end of my history career at Swarthmore as well. Above all, he made me believe that this project would actually come together in the end. Timothy Burke and BuYun Chen provided invaluable advice that set me in the right direction in the writing process. The J. Roland Pennock Fellowship in Public Affairs from Swarthmore allowed me to spend a summer doing archival research in New York and Washington DC, an experience without which I could never have hoped to tackle this project. I also owe a debt to Valery Dymshitz at Smolny College in St. Petersburg, who took my vague knowledge of the JAC and helped cull it down to a coherent and manageable research project. In Chicago, Susan Shapiro helped orient my research in its earliest stages, and introduced me to Walter Roth, my only living source for research. Hershl Hartman's translations helped me make some sense of the mess of Yiddish I found myself confronting, and his insight into the JAC was more than I could have hoped for when I set out looking for a translator. Finally, my parents Nancy Joseph and Ken Petchenik never questioned why I wanted to spend nearly two years studying two obscure Yiddish artists. They were always prepared to suggest study skills, proofread sections, and keep me motivated, even when I did not think I needed it.

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## **Glossary of Terms**

### *Organizations*

JAC—Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee

AJC—American Jewish Committee

WJC—World Jewish Congress (with subsidiary American Jewish Congress)

JDC/Joint—American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

JCRWR—Jewish Council of Russian War Relief

Writers' Committee—Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists

### *Archives*

YIVO—YIVO Institute of Jewish Research

USHMM—United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

UPenn—University of Pennsylvania Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies

## Introduction

On July 8, 1943 Colonel Itzik Fefer stood before a crowd of more than 47,000 onlookers, most of them Jews, gathered at the Polo Grounds in New York. Sharing the stage with many of the country's most prominent Jewish leaders, Fefer delivered his address:

Hitler has resolved to destroy the Jewish people. But the Jewish people live and will continue to live. Hitler has resolved to destroy Jewish culture. But our culture lives and will continue to live. Hitler has reached to destroy Jewish courage. But we have united all our forces and courage has become second nature to our people. We are fortunate in being able to meet with you to cement still greater unity among our people.<sup>1</sup>

The repeated references to Hitler signified the gravity of Fefer's cause, yet he left no doubt that the Jewish people were equal to the fight. Against each threat presented—to their culture, courage, or very existence—the Jews resisted. As Fefer emphasized, the strength of the Jewish people was in their unity. This speech was part of an event to welcome two Soviet Jewish delegates, including Fefer, to the United States. It was one of the first stops on a tour that was to last several months, encompassing four countries, many cities, and an untold number of meetings, speeches, dinners, and other public appearances. The object of the tour, in the broadest sense, was to foster fellowship and unity between Soviet and American Jews.<sup>2</sup> Fefer and his fellow delegate were emissaries of the Soviet Union in its entirety, but they were also representatives of the country's only Jewish organization, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC). Though the JAC only existed for less than a decade, from 1941 to 1948, it represented a unique moment for the Jews of the Soviet Union and the world.

The Mikhoels-Fefer tour provides insight into the state of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union at their highest point. The tour and its immediate aftermath marked a

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<sup>1</sup> "The Jews of Russia: Excerpts from Speeches Delivered at the Rally of 47,000 New York Jews to Welcome the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Delegation, *American Hebrew: The National Weekly of Jewish Affairs*, 152, no. 11 (July 16, 1943), 8.

<sup>2</sup> While tour comprised four countries, the focal point was the United States, in which the Soviet delegates spent by far the most time.

brief interlude of cooperation, out of 85 years of hostile relations between the two countries. As such a momentous occasion, the it garnered a great deal of public interest. The events of the tour, and commentary on them, were documented in the American press, primarily in Jewish publications. These represented a spectrum of political views—most were products of the political left, but a significant rift existed between communists and socialists within this subset of the population. Through this media coverage, a record was preserved of the concerns and opinions of the American Jewish community regarding the tour, Soviet-American relations, and other pressing issues of the day. Furthermore, the articles reporting on the tour reveal many of the tensions and rivalries within the American Jewish community, which were given heightened attention in the increased media presence for the Soviet delegates. Reporters used the events of the tour as springboards to discuss some of the most pressing issues in their community and the country—the dubious American alliance with the Soviet Union, the role of Zionism in Jewish organizations, and the place of the genocide of European Jewry in the formation of wartime politics and conduct of the war, to name only a few. Through this mosaic of reporting on the appearances of the delegates, and deeper editorializing on the moral and ethical issues, a picture forms of the nature of the American Jewish community while the country was at war.

Forming the foundation of this community were several large Jewish organizations, the most prominent being the American Jewish Committee, the World Jewish Congress, the *Jewish Daily Forward*, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. These groups saw themselves as the face of American Jewry, which naturally brought them into contact with the most important visitors the community had seen in recent memory. These groups each had interests and agendas that they pursued, often in conflict with one another. Though all professed to have as a core value the ideal of Jewish unity, this was rarely realized in practice. As the



record of their relations with the delegates reveals, the groups jockeyed for influence with the JAC, in the hopes of gaining a foothold with Soviet Jewry, but at the expense of Jewish unity. At the most tragic point in modern Jewish history, American Jewry was characterized by factions, squabbles, and a degree of self-absorption. The historic tour that had the potential to markedly increase connections among Jews served to underscore the inability of American Jews to sustain a unified front. Ironically, the presence of the oppressed Soviet Jews revealed the dysfunction of the supposedly model American Jewish community. Indeed, among the most significant contributions to the historical record that arise from the tour are the insights into the American Jewish community that the tour brought to light. The tensions in this community existed before the tour, and continued on after its conclusion. But the tour provided a moment in time when these disparate threads of conflict could coalesce around a single issue, exposed clearly before the public. In this way, inquiry into the Mikhoels-Fefer tour offers a point of entry into the complex scheme of relations within American Jewry, and the ways in which this conflicted community reckoned with the policies, influence, animosity, and friendship of the Soviet Union.

#### *A Note on Sources*

This work relies on two sets of primary sources: newspapers and archival collections. The most important materials in each of the categories were obtained from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The newspapers that form the basis of the work are primarily American Jewish publications, although some general interest American and Soviet publications and one Soviet Jewish publication are also discussed. The majority of American newspapers consulted are English-language publications, though there were also many Yiddish publications in print at the time of the tour.

While language made most of these inaccessible to the author, use of a translator allowed the inclusion of a small selection of Yiddish sources. The Soviet newspapers were published in Russian and Yiddish; the Russian publications are included, while the Yiddish publication is not.

The Archival materials come from several collections. From the USHMM, the records of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee from the State Archives of the Russian Federation and the World Jewish Congress in New York provided information on each of these organizations, respectively, as well as the other groups with which each conducted business. From YIVO, the records of the American Jewish Committee Executive Offices, Morris Waldman files, were of particular significance. Because the bulk of these collections comprise the papers of individuals, mainly correspondence and memos, the subject matter is limited to that which the writers chose to discuss. Thus, some areas related to the tour are not easily studied through the sources discussed. For example, additional materials would have greatly expanded the section on the *Forward*. The Zionist perspective on the tour is likewise underrepresented; while Zionists were a significant political force in the American Jewish community, the sources here are insufficient to make up an entire section of the work, though Zionism will be discussed in related sections throughout.

## Chapter One: The Troubled History of the JAC

### The Pretext to the Tour

The Soviet government had a complicated relationship with the country's Jews. In the early years of the regime, the government followed a nationalities policy that fostered the development of national identity and culture for ethno-national minorities in the Soviet Union. Officials believed that Soviet ideals could be best communicated to national minorities in their own communities, in a context they could understand.<sup>3</sup> Soviet Jewry benefitted from this policy, as it was allowed to develop schools, newspapers, and a national arts movement in its native language—in short, a Yiddish culture. As part of this effort, in 1934 the territory of Birobidzhan was designated the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, an official home for the diaspora people. The Kremlin continued to promote Yiddish culture throughout the 1930s. However, this was complicated by the religious, as opposed to national, elements of Jewish identity, which were seen as antithetical to Soviet power. Thus, expressions of Jewish culture that could not be convincingly incorporated into the ideals of the Soviet regime fell out of favor, and were targeted by authorities. For the regime, it was essential that the identity of Soviet citizen took precedence over that of Jew. Jewish identity was simply a conduit for creating Soviet citizens. Nevertheless, the government continued to combat antisemitism in this period, and individual Jews even attained prominent positions in the government before and during the war.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1940s the Soviet government created several anti-fascist committees to mobilize various segments of the population—women, youth, scientists, Slavs, Ukrainians, and

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<sup>3</sup> Shimon Redlich, K. M. Anderson, and I. Al'tman, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic, 1995), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), 113.

Jews—for international propaganda and fundraising efforts in the fight against fascism.<sup>5</sup> However, none had the reach, impact, or renown of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC). This marked a shift in policy, as for more than a decade, the Jewish people had had no official representation in the Soviet Union. The JAC was the successor to another Jewish committee with the same purpose. This earlier organization was formed after Germany violated the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, an agreement between Hitler and Stalin that included a non-aggression pact, as well as an understanding between the respective countries that divided the surrounding countries into spheres of influence for each power. With its newfound power over Poland, the Soviet Union embarked on a campaign to rid the country of individuals hostile to the Soviet cause. Prime among them were socialists, particularly the members of the Jewish labor party known as the Bund.

In July 1941, one month after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the NKVD arrested two Bundists, Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter. Their sentences were promptly commuted, and they were released contingent upon cooperation with the Soviet government. Erlich and Alter were members of the Bund leadership, and as such had valuable connections with members of the Jewish labor movement in the West. The Soviet leadership enlisted them to help build a so-called Jewish Anti-Hitlerite Committee, an international Jewish representative body designed to support Soviet interests against the Nazis.<sup>6</sup> Presiding over the presidium of representatives of world Jewry were Erlich, to serve as chairman, Alter as general secretary, and the actor Solomon Mikhoels as representative of the Soviet people. The decision to sanction an international body held great significance in the insular world that was the Soviet Union, and thus reached all the way to Stalin himself. Stalin opposed idea of an international organization outside his control,

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<sup>5</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Arkady Vaksberg, *Stalin Against the Jews*, tr. Antonia W. Bouis, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994, 110

but recognized that he “needed the support of the world Jewish diaspora—politically, morally, and financially.”<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, however, the international nature of the Jewish Anti-Hitlerite Committee proved too much of a liability for the Soviet leadership. It could not reconcile the potential benefits the committee promised with the vulnerability of an organization with international representation, or relying on two men with loyalties not only to world Jewry, but also to Poland. In early December 1941 Erlich and Alter were rearrested, and both were dead within the year.<sup>8</sup> Yet the failure of Erlich and Alter’s attempt did not dissuade Soviet leadership from pursuing the idea of a unified Jewish body. However, it became clear that such a body needed to exist securely under a framework of government oversight. The recently founded Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo), the government propaganda organ, was just the apparatus to house a reformulated Jewish committee.

Founded late in 1941, the JAC was first and foremost a propaganda and fundraising apparatus, but at various times it took on a range of additional roles. Its leaders struggled with the Committee’s identity and function, unsure of whether it should serve as a representative body of Soviet Jewry, take on responsibilities as a cultural organ, or restrict itself to activities directly related to combating fascism. To some degree the representative function was unavoidable, as, particularly when World War II ended, Soviet Jews appealed to the JAC for assistance with resettlement, and relief from the antisemitism they faced while trying to rebuild their lives.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the JAC was the major cultural organization of Soviet Jews, supporting Jewish writers

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<sup>7</sup> Vaksberg, *Stalin Against the Jews* 108.

<sup>8</sup> The fact of Erlich’s suicide was not revealed at the time.

<sup>9</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 47.

and poets and providing a forum for their work.<sup>10</sup> In 1942, the Committee established a Yiddish language newspaper called *Eynikayt* (Unity).

Though these roles were important, the main purpose of the JAC, at least from the perspective of the Kremlin, was directed towards international propaganda. Stalin was wary of allowing the Committee to gain too much power domestically. He understood its political benefits, but feared it "might foment Jewish nationalism within the Soviet Union."<sup>11</sup> To prevent this, he "arranged to have it direct its work exclusively to the outside world. The JAC was given the tasks of favorably influencing world opinion on the Soviet Union through propaganda and through contacts with international Jewish organizations, and of initiating an extensive flow of Western aid to Russia."<sup>12</sup> By directing JAC energies outwards, Stalin both lessened its ability to exert influence over Jews domestically, and gained a powerful tool for international relations. Initially the JAC reached the larger Jewish community through limited publications and broadcasts sent overseas. Notable among these were a series of radio broadcasts addressed to world Jewry, intended to mobilize support in the struggle against Hitler.<sup>13</sup>

In a more radical step, top Soviet officials approved a seven-month overseas tour in 1943 for two members of the JAC leadership. Most of the time would be spent in the United States, with brief trips to Canada and Mexico and a more extended stop in England on the return. The delegates were to speak publicly and privately with members of the Jewish community in each of the tour's stops, fostering goodwill towards the Soviet Union and raising funds and material support for the Red Army. Though they were relatively free to conduct their business, the Kremlin ultimately controlled the itinerary and placed some limits on acceptable subjects for

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<sup>10</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Vaksberg, *Stalin Against the Jews*, 107.

discussion, particularly on issues related to Palestine.<sup>14</sup> This control was deemed necessary, given Stalin's general suspicion of the JAC, though was not unexpected given the nature of the project. Despite the loyalty of the Committee's members to the Soviet Union, "close and independent contacts with Jewish communities abroad as well as with allied government, must have been considered politically dangerous."<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Kremlin took pains to ensure that the tour remained a government project.

A great deal of planning went into the tour, not the least of which included the selection of delegates. The first of the two was Solomon Mikhoels who, on December 15, 1941, had been informed by the Kremlin of his appointment as chairman of the JAC. Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels was born on March 16, 1890, in Daugavpils, Latvia. His education was typical of Eastern European Jewish families of the time, including Yiddish, Hebrew, and Talmudic studies. It was through this education that he first encountered Yiddish theater in the annual Purim spiel.<sup>16</sup> He began acting at age 28, and soon after became the director of the Moscow State Jewish Theater (GOSET). Mikhoels was a prolific actor in both theater and film, with noted roles from Tevye in Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman* to the title character in a Yiddish version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. His success did not go unnoticed; he was honored as People's Artist of the RSFSR, People's Artist of the USSR, and recipient of the Lenin Award and the Stalin Prize. He was also a member of several prestigious arts committees, including the Committee on Arts of the All-Union Council of Ministers, the presidium of the All-Russian Theatre Association, and the Central Committee of the Art Workers Union on the Moscow City

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<sup>14</sup> Yehoshua Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 70.

<sup>15</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948*, Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1982, 78.

Council.<sup>17</sup> In 1941 he became a professor at the school of GOSET. Mikhoels was well respected among the Soviet intellectual, artistic, and even military elite, and as such was a natural choice as chair and figurehead of the JAC.<sup>18</sup>

It was clear to all involved that the first delegate would be Mikhoels. The choice of his companion was not as clear, and bred tensions within the JAC. Though a member of the Committee's leadership, Itzik Fefer was not the undisputed leader that Mikhoels was. He lacked the artistic reputation and international recognition of his colleague that were important in such a high profile setting.<sup>19</sup> Still, there was logic to the choice of Fefer as Mikhoels' companion, which centered on the former's ability to counterbalance the tendencies of the non-Party artist of Mikhoels. While Mikhoels was trusted with the responsibility of leading the JAC, the Kremlin was still wary of giving him too much autonomy. This was likely informed by the experience with Erlich and Alter, which bred an excessively cautious approach to relations with the West. Fefer appeared to be the perfect solution. Itzik Solomonovich Fefer was born on September 23, 1900 in Shpola, a town near Kiev, Ukraine. Though his father taught at a Jewish school and his mother worked as a stocking-maker, they did not have the means to send Fefer to secondary school. When an aunt and uncle moved to the United States in 1912, the family's finances worsened, and Fefer was forced to begin working. He started as a carpenter, then a watchmaker, bookkeeper, and apprentice typesetter at a printing house. Still young at the time of the Revolution, he led trade unions in Shpola, where he was a member of the local chapter of the Bund. In 1919 he officially joined the Communist Party. The next year he published his first poems.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 78.

<sup>18</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 40.



Fefer served as an enthusiastic soldier for the Red Army during the Civil War, and in the 1920s became a party activist. He was among the founders of the Union of Revolutionary Jewish Writers in Ukraine, headed the Jewish section of the All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers, and was elected to the presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1941. This work also crossed over into explicitly governmental activity, as he participated in war propaganda efforts. He served as an army officer from 1939-1941, and propaganda intentionally furthered his image as a soldier-poet.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the artistic and intellectual Mikhoels, Fefer was a “dogmatic Communist, fanatic fighter for the Party, who accused his friends in the JAC of the heresy of nationalism.”<sup>22</sup> Despite this record, World War II reinforced an emerging ambivalence towards the Party. His first experience of disillusionment with the government came in the 1930s, with the widespread closings of Jewish schools, newspapers, and social and cultural institutions.<sup>23</sup> This change in perspective was also evident in Fefer’s writing. While before the war his poetry criticized Soviet Jews as unpatriotic nationalists, after the start of the war it lost some of its proletarian bent, instead drawing upon Jewish themes, both historical and related to contemporary suffering.<sup>24</sup>

Several Jewish organizations in the United States were responsible for organizing the details of the tour. The JAC’s primary contact was Ben Zion Goldberg, journalist and member of the Jewish Committee of Writers, Artists, and Scientists (Writers’ Committee). Born in Russia, he was also the son-in-law of Sholem Aleichem, the Yiddish writer beloved among Jews throughout the world. Goldberg had previous contacts with the Soviet leadership, and developed a close relationship with the members of the JAC. The Writers’ Committee was the closest

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<sup>21</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 86.

organization to the JAC in the United States.<sup>25</sup> Together with the Jewish Committee for Russian War Relief (JCRWR), the primary fundraising body for Soviet Jews during the war, its members were responsible for much of the organization of the tour, and made up much of the National Reception Committee.

Mikhoels and Fefer arrived in New York in mid-June 1943. They remained there for several weeks, and then continued on to a number of other cities, totaling forty-six in all.<sup>26</sup> In July and August they visited a number of American cities, including Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. At the end of August and into September they made other North America stops, with trips to both Ottawa and Mexico City. They returned to New York for a farewell dinner in late September, then spent the next few weeks in London before returning to the Soviet Union. The JAC requested permission on several subsequent occasions to send delegations abroad, but was denied each time.<sup>27</sup> The Committee continued its activities, though reoriented itself towards domestic activities. As part of this work, Mikhoels visited Minsk in 1948 to evaluate plays for a government prize. On the night of January 12, he was hit by a truck and killed. Though at the time circumstances surrounding the accident were unclear, it is now known that Stalin himself signed off on the assassination.<sup>28</sup> This set off the events of the decline of the JAC, culminating in the trial, conviction, and execution of many of the Committee's members for a number of charges related to subverting Soviet interests. Fefer was killed along with the others on August 12, 1952.

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<sup>25</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 130.

## The Evolution of Literature on the JAC Tour

From its very founding, the JAC, product of “unusual circumstances,” presented a paradox to the Soviet government.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, the JAC was a valuable tool at the government’s disposal. It provided a link to the Jewish community, a population that would otherwise have been unreachable by, or uninterested in, the Soviet ideal. On the other hand, the JAC presented a threat to the government by virtue of the qualities that made it so valuable. Its international contacts left the JAC’s government contacts constantly ill at ease.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the organization undermined the hostility towards religion central to communist doctrine, although the Soviet Union of the early 1940s was still relatively accepting of Jews. It is no surprise, given these competing influences, that Soviet officials were unsure how to approach the JAC, and kept strict control over the tour.<sup>31</sup> Many factors were taken into account, from the timing of the tour, to its participants, to the material that could be discussed during its operation. The tour could not have occurred without government sanction, and this was a significant move on the part of Soviet officials. Their involvement in and approval of the tour speaks to the fact that hostility towards Jews had not yet reached its crescendo. Moreover, it underscores the importance of the JAC, its mission, and its unique position to the Soviet Government.

Beginning in the earliest works on the JAC, historians have discussed the motivations and intended purposes of the tour. While this chapter in the Committee’s history has not been the central focus of historians, it is consistently discussed in broader scholarship on the subject of

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<sup>29</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 49.

Soviet Jewish history.<sup>32</sup> The first scholarship on the JAC appeared even before the conclusion of the trial of its members in 1952. As such, this work can be colored by contemporary circumstances, and often takes a vehemently partisan stance on the historical issues, either in support of or in opposition to the Soviet Union. As government archives were still largely restricted at this point, the materials available were limited, and thus the work can at times reflect a more political than historical approach. One such work is Solomon Schwarz's *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, published in the United States in 1951 in collaboration with the American Jewish Committee.<sup>33</sup> In this work Schwarz takes a critical perspective on Soviet policies towards the Jewish population. He claims that the Soviet nationalities policy, held up as a model of tolerance, was actually no more than a calculated step towards ultimately stripping national culture from Jews and other minorities. Permitting the establishment of the JAC, and eventually the Mikhoels-Fefer tour, was an element of this long-term plan against nationalities.

For Schwarz, the propagandistic function of the JAC was clear even shortly after the Committee's dissolution, and before the execution of its leadership. This was the primary function of the Committee's international activities, as its fundraising capacity was not large enough to affect the war effort:

The JAC in practice was not so much a fund-raising agency for the Red Army as an instrument of propaganda. In comparison with what the Red Army needed and what the Soviet Union received from its allies, (which is to say, the U.S.A.) it could only have a negligible influence on the military strength of the Soviet Union. But fund-raising

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<sup>32</sup> These works include: Yehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995); Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Alfred D. Low, *Soviet Jewry and Soviet Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Arno Lustiger and Roman Brackman, *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book: The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews* (New York: Enigma, 2003); Benjamin Pinkus, *Soviet Government and the Jews 1928-1967: A Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Shimon Kostyrchenko, K. M. Anderson, and I. Al'tman, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic, 1995); Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and nationalism in wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Quarterly 1982).

<sup>33</sup> Solomon Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 1951.

campaigns were an excellent means for spreading Soviet propaganda, and had the additional advantage of paying the way of the JAC. By the spring of 1944, the JAC had collected two to three million dollars in the United States.<sup>34</sup>

So long as the JAC continued to contribute to the Soviet cause, and took no resources from it, the government could allow the Committee to continue its work. This was not a mark of tolerance, however, but a calculation of the country's best interest made by officials with no stake in the fate of the Jews.

By the 1970s new interpretations had developed regarding the government's motivations toward the JAC. Historians began to consider the Committee in the broader context of World War II, and the political maneuvering in which Soviet authorities were involved. Yehoshua A. Gilboa, a journalist, researcher, and survivor of a Soviet prison camp, explores this approach in his 1971 book, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*.<sup>35</sup> In this work Gilboa presents the function of the JAC as focused on high level political operations, rather than the more visible foreign propaganda. The significance of the tour is exemplified by the fact that both Mikhail Kalinin, President of the Soviet Union, and Stalin himself met with Mikhoels and Fefer before their departure.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, the Jewish organization was to use its influence with American Jews to lobby the United States government to take direct military action in support of the Soviet Union. This was apparent in the organization of the tour: "The aim was not only to obtain material aid, of great importance in itself, but to prompt Western Jewry to bring political pressure to bear. As the prime object of Nazi hatred, the Jews could be motivated to clamor for the opening a of second front in Europe and for America's entry into the war against Germany."<sup>37</sup> However, Gilboa fails to acknowledge the fact that the Soviet government clearly

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<sup>34</sup>Solomon Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1951), 203.

<sup>35</sup> Gilboa, Yehoshua A. *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry, 1939-1953*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1971.

<sup>36</sup> Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry*, 42.

overestimated the potential political influence of the tour. Any political aims were based on the assumption that American Jews had the ear of powerful government officials. Yet in reality, American Jews at the time struggled to get even their most basic concerns heard. Any hopes of the Kremlin of establishing a channel of influence to the American government were vastly misplaced. Still, Soviet policy may have been driven by a genuine belief in the clout of American Jews, and an effort to influence American policy through this channel.

For Gilboa perhaps even more than Schwarz, the JAC was a political pawn exploited by the government for its own purposes. While this interpretation is not entirely discounted, it is less common than others in the scholarly sources. In fact, it received the most attention from sources with the least familiarity with the tour, and the American Jewish community more generally. For example, one of the few articles on the tour in the *New York Times* summarized the largest event of the tour as follows: “Two minutes of cheering by an audience of 47,000 persons at the Polo Grounds last night greeted speakers who called on the United States to open a second front in Europe at the earliest possible moment.”<sup>38</sup> The fact that a major American publication honed in on the second front as a priority of the tour suggests that indeed it must have been a theme repeated enough to make an impression. However, it is telling that this interpretation appears in a mainstream publication, rather than a Jewish one. It is possible that the reporter for the *New York Times* did not understand the issues that were truly important for the Jewish community, or else that the reporter was compelled to exaggerate its importance, seeing the second front as a point of interest for a broader group of readers than would consume Jewish publications. Whatever the motivations, this mention of the second front as a central focus of the tour places Gilboa in the company of journalists not particularly familiar with the intricacies of the American Jewish

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<sup>38</sup> “Soviet Delegates Urge Unity Here: Prof. Michoels and Lieut. Col. Feffer Say That Upon It Depends Allied Victory; 2D Front Plea Cheered; 47,000 at Polo Grounds Rally Hear Messages From Wilkie and Other Leaders,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1943, 5.

community. Moreover, Gilboa received criticism for his treatment of sources in the work. Zvi Gitelman, an authority on Soviet Jewish history, notes, “He draws his evidence rather indiscriminately from a wide variety of sources, and makes no attempt in his notes to evaluate frequently dubious sources...a more scholarly approach would have increased the worth of the book as history.”<sup>39</sup> While it is clear that the Soviet government intended to use the JAC, and the tour in particular, to further its own objectives, Gilboa’s interpretation of the extent of political scheming appears to push further than is supported by the evidence.

There is, however, significant support for another interpretation of the political motivations behind the tour, one that dominates more recent scholarship on the subject. This view focuses on the Erlich-Alter affair as the primary force that necessitated this extreme act of leniency on the part of the government. As noted earlier, Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter were Polish-Jewish Bundists imprisoned as a result of the Soviet takeover of Polish territory in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Both had their severe sentences commuted, and were singled out by government officials to start a Jewish Anti-Hitlerite committee, precursor to the JAC. This first organization had a more international orientation than its successor, utilizing Erlich and Alter’s connections to Bundists around the world. The arrangement, namely placing trust in Bundists, ultimately proved threatening to Stalin and his cohort, who had the men arrested.<sup>40</sup> Upon news of the arrests, Americans both Jewish and non-Jewish sprang into action. A committee under the leadership of William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Philip Murray, Albert Einstein, and Raymond Gram Swing investigated the matter; Wendell Willkie plead their case to officials while in Moscow; Eleanor Roosevelt intervened on their behalf;

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<sup>39</sup> Zvi Gitelman, “Review of Gilboa, Yehoshua, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 34, no. 2 (April, 1972), 186.

<sup>40</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 12.

Americans sent material aid.<sup>41</sup> None of these efforts seemed to have any impact. They were executed in 1942, but the Soviet government did not admit this until February 1943.<sup>42</sup> The news of the executions was broken by William Green, who had received it from Soviet Ambassador to the United States Maxim Litvinov, along with instructions not to reveal it in the interest of “war exigencies.” As an article in *The New Internationalist* described, the details that followed “point[ed] to the utter perfidiousness of the Kremlin regime.”<sup>43</sup>

The news of the Erlich and Alter executions reversed the rising trend of pro-Soviet sentiments set off by the victory at Stalingrad earlier that month. In his 1982 work, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948*,<sup>44</sup> Shimon Redlich traces the reactions of the American Jewish community to the perceived cover up. Much of the debate in the press over Soviet actions in the Erlich-Alter affair can be seen in two American Jewish newspapers: the Socialist *Forward*, and the pro-Soviet *Morgen Freiheit* (Morning Freedom), affiliate with the Communist Party of the United States. While the *Forward* condemned and printed public criticism of the executions, the *Freiheit* “fully adopted the Soviet version and argued that the USSR was the best friend the Jews had,” particularly given the Soviet role in defending Europe’s Jews against the Nazis.<sup>45</sup> Observing this debate, Soviet authorities sensed a very real threat to their relationship with the United States, and faced a dramatic drop in the country’s international profile. Thus, the Kremlin determined that it needed to take concrete steps to repair its perception in the West. This task seemed tailor-made for the JAC. Redlich explains this process:

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<sup>41</sup> The New Internationalist, “The Murder of Ehrlich and Alter (1943),” in *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History*, ed. Tony Michels (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 265.

<sup>42</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> The New Internationalist, “The Murder of Ehrlich and Alter (1943),” 264.

<sup>44</sup> Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Quarterly, 1982).

<sup>45</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 34.



Jewish protests in the U.S. were causing considerable damage to the Soviet war propaganda effort. A major attempt to offset this damage was the Soviet-sponsored mission abroad of Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer...The need to repulse Jewish criticism of the USSR was discussed in JAC circles in February-March 1943. In mid-March Mikhoels launched an attack on those American Jews who did not fully support the Soviet Union; *Eynikayt*, the organ of the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, severely criticized “disruptive elements” in American Jewry. In a Yiddish broadcast Mikhoels called upon American and British Jews to support the Soviet Union. Official Soviet steps to arrange for the visit on Mikhoels and Fefer to the United States followed in April, and the two left Moscow in early May 1943.<sup>46</sup>

In this view, the tour served as a public relations campaign, the direct result of Soviet fears of negative perceptions in the United States. The focus placed on remedying the effects of the Erlich-Alter murders may have been due to the Soviet government’s overestimation of Jewish influence in American politics. Still, at the very least, the scandal reached individuals outside the Jewish community, in broader leftist and labor circles. Redlich adds further detail in a subsequent work, noting that the first suggestion for the tour came from Albert Einstein, an active advocate for support of the Soviet Union, in a conversation with Ambassador to the Maksim Litvinov.<sup>47</sup> The Erlich-Alter affair produced such significant backlash that the government was willing to allow Mikhoels and Fefer to leave its borders in the hopes of ameliorating its relationship with the United States.

Discussion of the JAC extended beyond scholarship specifically on Soviet Jews. One area of history that contributed its own perspective was the study of American Communism, as seen in Maurice Isserman’s 1982 work, *Which Side Were You On?*<sup>48</sup> The Erlich-Alter affair caused a shock among American Communists, who found themselves in the position of defending the Soviet Union for an action they did not support. Members of the Party attempted to discredit the two Bundists as enemies of the Soviet Union, but in general they were most

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<sup>46</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 74.

<sup>48</sup> Maurice Isserman, *Which side were you on? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

concerned that the affair not impede efforts to provide monetary support to the Soviet Union.<sup>49</sup> For Isserman, the tour was successful in its goal of repairing perceptions of the Soviet Union in the United States: “The Erlich-Alter affair only briefly checked Jewish enthusiasm for the Grand Alliance. When the Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels and the poet Itzik Feffer [*sic*] visited the United States...they received a tumultuous welcome from American Jews.”<sup>50</sup> Though many Socialists boycotted the events of the tour, Communists viewed it as a successful reorientation of attention away from Erlich and Alter, and towards the efforts of the Soviet Union to protect its Jewish population.

Even with this focus on the Erlich-Alter affair, the other potential motivations for the tour were not entirely forgotten. The JAC continued to be seen, at least in part, as a general propaganda organization, which shaped the Soviet authorities’ view of the tour. Moreover, despite the relatively small impact of JAC fundraising, its power to connect with American donors was not negligible. Thus, in a 1995 book, *Out of the Red Shadows*,<sup>51</sup> Gennadi Kostyrchenko explained, “The JAC was given the tasks of favorably influencing world opinion on the Soviet Union through propaganda and through contacts with international Jewish organizations, and of initiating an extensive flow of Western aid to Russia.”<sup>52</sup> More simply put, “The Soviet Union intended to use the JAC as a master key to American wealth.”<sup>53</sup> Though the Erlich-Alter interpretation retains its place in the scholarship, the earlier understanding of the Committee’s central responsibilities has not been lost in this second generation of JAC history.

Historians also began to orient the tour within broader Soviet diplomatic policy, suggesting that the tour was not as anomalous as it once had seemed. Shimon Redlich, with K.

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<sup>49</sup> Isserman, *Which side were you on?*, 160.

<sup>50</sup> Isserman, *Which side were you on?*, 173.

<sup>51</sup> Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33.

M. Anderson and Ilya Altman, addressed this perspective in 1995 in *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR*.<sup>54</sup> They note the existence of other Soviet Anti-Fascist groups for specific interest groups, including Slavs, scientists, women, and youth.<sup>55</sup> Though the JAC was the most prolific of these, the other groups also worked to improve perceptions of the Soviet Union within their respective communities abroad. Moreover, “This massive Soviet public relations offensive culminated in visits abroad by Soviet delegations. Local fellow travelers provided support to pro-Soviet front organizations abroad. The usefulness to Soviet wartime propaganda of both was their ability to provide points of contact with non-communist sectors of the society.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the Mikhoels-Fefer tour can be seen as fitting into a comprehensive policy of promoting connections with foreign organizations sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, the latest scholarship has shown that the practice of utilizing tours as diplomatic tools has precedent in Soviet history. Michael David-Fox explores this trend in his 2012 book, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy & Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941*.<sup>57</sup> He discusses the surge of Western visitors to the Soviet Union in the interwar years, numbering around 100,000, many of whom were intellectuals.<sup>58</sup> The interaction between East and West in this context set off an effort by the Soviet Union to utilize cultural diplomacy to raise the international profile of the country. David-Fox places the tours of the JAC and other anti-Fascist committees in the context of this history, noting, “While pre-war cultural diplomacy had hosted delegations in the USSR, these committees by necessity sent their own

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<sup>54</sup> Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR*, Luxembourg: Harwood Academic, 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy & Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 1.

delegations abroad. In this limited context...newly flexible forms of direct Soviet cultural diplomacy could harness the force of anti-fascism, now supplemented by alarm among Western Jewry about the Holocaust in the East.”<sup>59</sup> In this sense, the Mikhoels-Fefer tour was far from unprecedented. It represented the continuation of an established policy of using cultural emissaries and personal contact to cement pro-Soviet public opinion. Following this line of thinking, then, while the Erlich-Alter affair may have been the direct spark for the tour, it prompted no more than a return to a tried and true policy of cultural diplomacy.

Over the course of a half-century, scholarship on the JAC has undergone several shifts in perspective. Interpretations of the government motivations behind the seemingly anomalous Mikhoels-Fefer tour have evolved with this history. Initially, the tour was viewed as part of the general function of the JAC as a propaganda and fundraising instrument. Later studies have identified more complex political aims, the most credible of which was the Erlich-Alter affair. Recent scholarship has suggested that the tour may not have been entirely unprecedented, as the Soviet government viewed tours as an accepted tool of diplomacy. Nevertheless, the extension of this tool to a Jewish organization marked a significant relaxation of control over Jewish activity. It is most likely that these forces all combined to create a situation in which the only logical action for the Soviet government was to send a Jewish delegation abroad. Mikhoels and Fefer benefitted from this confluence of conditions, beyond the aims of the Soviet government. They used this opportunity for the first time to establish meaningful relations between the American and Soviet Jewish communities.

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<sup>59</sup> David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 318.

## Chapter Two: The Tour and the Press

### The Press as a Prism

The Mikhoels-Fefer tour was a major public event for American Jewry, and was seen as having important social and political implications within the Jewish community and beyond. Reactions to the tour are difficult to gauge for a number of reasons. Only a select group of individuals, mainly prominent members of the community and leaders of Jewish organizations, left papers dealing specifically with the tour. For the majority of American Jews, however, it is impossible to know exactly how they perceived the tour, whether as a welcomed sign of collaboration with the Soviet Union, an unwelcome intrusion by pro-Soviet bodies, or any number of other interpretations. General sentiments of the Jewish community as a whole, and particularly broken into various political constituencies, can be approximated by looking at coverage of the tour in the Jewish press.

For as long as it has existed, “the Jewish Press represent[ed] a microcosm of the Jewish public sphere.”<sup>60</sup> From the eighteenth century onwards, these publications continued to reflect the Jewish community, first in Europe and later throughout the world. Changes and trends in the press reflected those of the broader Jewish community. Though not always the case, “a long life and/or a healthy paid circulation for a journal bespeak an at least partial consonance between producer and reader.”<sup>61</sup> Readers would not continue to lend their support, financial or otherwise, to a publication in which they saw no value. Thus, a paper with a loyal following can be said to represent the views of that following, at least to some extent.

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<sup>60</sup> Derek Penslar, “Introduction: The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere,” *Jewish History* 14, no. 1 (2000), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Penslar, “Introduction: The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere,” 4.

Moreover, at the very least, the press reliably represents the views of those who produce it: “Even if the press can not be seen as representative of broad social groups, it remains invaluable as a site of representation, representation of the sensibility of the Jewish activist elite and the cultural matrix in which it was formed.”<sup>62</sup> While the press may not perfectly mirror the mood of society as a whole, it does capture the sentiments of one particular segment, namely that with control over the press. In the context of the Mikhoels-Fefer tour this is particularly valuable, as there was a high frequency of overlap between members of the press and individuals involved with the tour. This overlap may be due more to the self-promotion of journalists and editors in their own publications rather than to their actual importance in society. Nonetheless, it allows the press to serve as a measure of reactions to the tour, if only within this limited group. The press provides insight into the sensibilities of the Jewish community, and is instrumental in understanding the range of typical reactions to the Mikhoels-Fefer tour.

The American Jewish press was populated by a number of newspapers representing all sides of the political spectrum. Communists, Socialists, Zionists, and other groups all produced newspapers and journals to disseminate news to their communities, and were intent on representing their own perspectives on the events of the day. The majority of these publications were produced in New York, in line with the high concentration of Jews living in the city. In 1940 there were more than two million Jews in the state of New York, or 46.25 percent of the country’s total Jewish population.<sup>63</sup> This critical mass was large enough to support many different newspapers, produced by groups associated with a wide array of political affiliations, from the socialist *Forward* to the communist *Morgen Freiheit*. Papers outside New York frequently lacked such clear political affiliations, as the communities could not support more

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<sup>62</sup> Penslar, “Introduction: The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere,” 4.

<sup>63</sup> “Statistics of American Jews (1946-1947),” American Jewish Committee Archives, 605.  
[http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC\\_DATA/Files/1946\\_1947\\_13\\_Statistics.pdf](http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1946_1947_13_Statistics.pdf).

than a few Jewish publications. These papers had to appeal to a broader audience, thus requiring a more neutral perspective. Nevertheless, individual articles and journalists did not hesitate to express clear political opinions. Many Jewish publications were written in English, but a substantial number were written in other languages. While Hebrew papers existed, Yiddish publications were more prominent. Of these, the four dailies represented most of the Yiddish-speaking section of American Jewry—*Forverts* (Forward)<sup>64</sup> was Socialist, *Der Tog* (The Day) centrist to liberal, *Morgen Freiheit* (Morning Freedom) was Communist, and *Morgen Zhurnal* (Morning Journal) religious.<sup>65</sup>

Though a Soviet Jewish delegation was unprecedented, Jewish tours in a broader sense were deeply engrained in the history of the people, as one article written in anticipation of the tour emphasized. The piece, reproduced in the Writers' Committee's *Eynikayt* from another American publication,<sup>66</sup> was written by Shimshon Erdberg, a Yiddish journalist. Erdberg situated the tradition of tours in a tradition stretching back millennia, with deep roots in Jewish history. Indeed, "people's delegations from one part of a people in one country to another part in another country is one of the oldest institutions in the history of humanity."<sup>67</sup> This was particularly true for the Jews as a diasporic people, accustomed to movement and to negotiating their place as visitors in alien societies. In the second century, Rabbi Akiba traveled from Israel to Jewish communities throughout Africa and Europe, and he was by no means the first Jew to undertake a

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<sup>64</sup> While most newspapers are referred to by their Yiddish names, the English and Yiddish names of this publication are used interchangeably.

<sup>65</sup> *Morgen Zhurnal* represented the views of Orthodox American Jewry, and so was more attune to religious issues than the other, relatively more secular publications. Sh. Sandler, "The Impressive Meeting of Mikhoels and Fefer with Yiddish Writers and Cultural Activists," *Morgn Freiheit*, July 15, 1943, tr. Hershl Hartman, 3.

<sup>66</sup> The original source for the article is not given, but it is likely for several reasons that it was taken from *Der Tog* (The Day), the paper for which B.Z. Goldberg wrote. First, Erdberg likely wrote for *Der Tog*, and the tone of the article suggests this moderate publication. Second, the article included biblical and later ancient Jewish history, which a Communist-leaning publication like *Morgen Freiheit* would not have published. Finally, the article reproached opposition to the tour, which eliminates the *Forward*, the center of Socialist opposition, as the source. Hershl. Hartman.

<sup>67</sup> Shimshon Erdberg, "The Delegation of Soviet Jewry," *Eynikayt*, April, 1943, tr. Hershl Hartman, 3.

tour. Whenever they occurred, tours “for Torah and for [secular] culture, political, and charitable...are the binds that tie the far-flung Jews into one people.”<sup>68</sup> Aside from tours in the Jewish tradition, Erdberg also mentioned delegations from Ireland that assisted in the Irish independence movement, as well as Czech and Polish groups. The truly unprecedented part of the history, then, had been the dearth of Soviet Jewish delegations since the Revolution in 1917. Given the monumental change that had occurred in formerly tsarist Russia, this was hardly surprising. Soviet Jewry was the only Jewish population not under a capitalist system, so the Kremlin’s isolationist policies in this respect can be explained by a fear of the potential influence of capitalist Jews on their Soviet counterparts, and on Soviet society as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

### **Introducing the Delegates**

As early as April 1943, two months before Mikhoels and Fefer arrived in New York, newspapers began to provide coverage of the upcoming visit. One article even speculated that they would attend a unity banquet on May 2.<sup>70</sup> Information about the delegates varied among articles, even in a single publication. For example, one article in *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests* described Mikhoels as an “actor and president of the Anti-Fascist Committee in U.S.S.R.,” and Fefer as only a “Jewish poet.”<sup>71</sup> While Mikhoels was frequently described as an actor, as well as director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater, his affiliation with the JAC is often buried in an article, if mentioned at all. Likewise, this piece says nothing about Fefer’s involvement in the JAC, nor his identity as a soldier. Elsewhere in the *Congress Weekly*, he was

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<sup>68</sup> Erdberg, “The Delegation of Soviet Jewry,” 3.

<sup>69</sup> Erdberg, “The Delegation of Soviet Jewry,” 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Eynikayt*, April, 1943, tr. Hershl Hartman, 6.

<sup>71</sup> “Chronicle of the Week,” *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests*, June 25, 1943, 2.



presented as “a Yiddish poet and member of long standing in the Communist Party,”<sup>72</sup> and “the poet Col. Itsik Feffer [*sic*].”<sup>73</sup> Other publications described him as “outstanding poet,”<sup>74</sup> “noted Jewish poet of the Soviet Union,”<sup>75</sup> or “famed poet of the USSR.”<sup>76</sup> Though they often included the title of Lieutenant Colonel, Fefer’s membership, much less position of leadership, in the JAC was rarely mentioned. Introductions of Mikhoels more frequently mentioned the JAC. He was described as “director of the Yiddish Art Theater in Moscow, who is chairman of the Committee,”<sup>77</sup> “Professor Solomon Michoels [*sic*], director of the Moscow Jewish State Theatre, president of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of the U.S.S.R. and member of the City Council of Moscow,”<sup>78</sup> and “Director of the Moscow Jewish State Theater, and member of the Moscow City Council.”<sup>79</sup> The discrepancy in the level of detail in descriptions of Mikhoels versus those of Fefer make clear the perception of Mikhoels’ superior position on the delegation. He was seen as a prominent artist and statesman, whereas Fefer was often presented only as a poet, and sometimes a soldier.

In some cases, however, the delegates were given more colorful introductions. An article in *Liberal Judaism* chose to highlight rather obscure accomplishments of the delegates:

“Professor Michoels [*sic*], founder and director of the Moscow Jewish State Theatre, was the first man to organize front line theaters with actors from the Moscow professional theaters,” and “Mr. Feffer [*sic*] is one of the most noted poets of the Soviet Union....During the fighting on the Kiev front he organized nightly radio broadcasts from the front lines for the fighting

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<sup>72</sup> “Delegation from Russia,” *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests*, June 25, 1943, 2.

<sup>73</sup> “Highlights of the Year 5703: The Russian Jewish Delegation” *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests*, September 24, 1943, 21.

<sup>74</sup> “Reception Held Here for Delegates from Russia,” *Jewish Review and Observer*, July 16, 1943, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Franklin Gordon, “Russian Jews Send Envoys,” *Liberal Judaism*, July, 1943, 56.

<sup>76</sup> “Delegates Bring Greetings to City from Russia,” *Jewish Review and Observer*, July 23, 1943, 1.

<sup>77</sup> “Delegation from Russia,” *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests*, June 25, 1943, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Franklin Gordon, “Russian Jews Send Envoys,” *Liberal Judaism*, July, 1943, 56.

<sup>79</sup> “Delegates Bring Greetings to City from Russia,” *Jewish Review and Observer*, July 23, 1943, 1.

men...Among his other war jobs [was] the evacuation of the Jewish population from the Ukraine.”<sup>80</sup> The *New York Times* also provided a detailed introduction, though again failed to connect Fefer to the JAC. Here, the delegates were presented as “Prof. Solomon Michoels [*sic*], director of the Moscow Jewish State Theatre and chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of the Soviet Union, and Itzik Feffer [*sic*], noted Jewish poet.” The article further described Mikhoels as “wearing the Order of Lenin, the highest Soviet award, and Mr. Feffer [*sic*], wearing the Honor Badge of the Soviet Union, which he received for his contributions to literature.”<sup>81</sup> This article again characterizes Mikhoels’ accomplishments as both artistic and political, to the extent that the JAC was a political organization, while confining Fefer’s success to the artistic realm. This was somewhat ironic, as in reality, Fefer was far more involved than Mikhoels with the Soviet government. By some accounts the Kremlin selected him as a delegate specifically to serve as Mikhoels’ “censor and supervisor” in the United States.<sup>82</sup> Thus, it may have been to the advantage of the Soviet government to minimize Fefer’s political nature. Keeping his Party activity concealed both allowed his clandestine activity to continue, and protected him from criticism in the American press.

In general, there was little consistency in the titles and biographical information provided about the delegates across different publications. In fact, the greatest point of similarity may have been a failure in many cases to mention the JAC. Some publications were vague in their descriptions, calling Mikhoels and Fefer merely the “representatives” of the “Jews of Soviet Russia.”<sup>83</sup> Often, they were referred to as a “Jewish cultural delegation,” without further elaboration. While in reality this was a fairly accurate description of the tour, it does not capture

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<sup>80</sup> “Delegates Bring Greetings to City from Russia,” *Jewish Review and Observer*, July 23, 1943, 5.

<sup>81</sup> “Visitors from Soviet Honored by Consul,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 1943, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia : the Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1982), 80.

<sup>83</sup> “Jewish News In Brief--Soviet Jews Pleased With Reception of Michoels and Feffer,” *American Hebrew*, July 16, 1943, 3.

the full extent of what the Soviet government hoped to achieve. Particularly under the more politically minded interpretations of the tour, Soviet officials saw this as a clearly political mission. However, it is unlikely that American officials and citizens would have been as welcoming if the political aims had been given full weight in the media. It is unclear where American publications received their information about the tour, but it is possible that Soviet sources provided only the artistic and cultural credentials of the delegates for this very reason. A cultural delegation of two artists was far less threatening to the American public and government than a tour of representatives of the Communist state. Aside from the fact that the JAC likely had little significance for most Americans, the public relations and propaganda aims of the tour were best served by cultural figures, as apolitical as an official Soviet delegation could hope to be.

Still, the delegates each had significant credentials in the realm of the arts, which should not be diminished. They did not hesitate to incorporate their experience as artists into their addresses. On July 13 Mikhoels and Fefer were the guests of honor at a meeting for individuals representing the cultural sphere of American Jewry. In all, they spoke to nearly 200 Yiddish writers, actors, and cultural activists.<sup>84</sup> The list of attendees included Marc Chagall, who had close ties to the *Morgen Freiheit*, B. Z. Goldberg, journalists Shimshon Erdberg and Berl Lapin, *Morgen Freiheit* editor Paul Novick, and Dr. Raphael Mahler, a leading Jewish historian, among others. In addition to more general information, Mikhoels included in his address a description of the status of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union. He specifically spoke of the advanced state of Yiddish theater, reporting that before the war, there were twenty government-sponsored Yiddish theaters in the country. Even during the war, the artistic spirit prevailed: “In Moscow in August, 1941, when airplanes protected the theater against Hitlerite bombardment, there took place the

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<sup>84</sup> Sh. Sandler, “The Impressive Meeting of Mikhoels and Fefer With Yiddish Writers and Cultural Activists,” *Morgen Freiheit*, July 15, 1943, tr. Hershl Hartman, 3.

premiere of [Sholem Aleichem's] "Wandering Stars," and that before his departure for America, there was a production of [the latter's] "The Enchanted Tailor."<sup>85</sup> Theater was the lifeblood of Soviet Jewry, and even war could not subdue it.

Fefer in turn spoke about Yiddish writers in the Soviet Union. He emphasized the droves of writers who had volunteered to fight in the Red Army, and whose subsequent works reflected this experience.<sup>86</sup> This talk of culture sparked the interest of the American audience, filled with major artistic personalities in their own right. B. Z. Goldberg seized upon the occasion to announce the Writers' Committee's plans to promote Yiddish culture in the United States. These included a weekly Yiddish radio program, with American and Soviet guests; a semi-monthly literary journal for Yiddish writers of the world, an anthology to include longer writings, and a Black Book<sup>87</sup> of Nazi atrocities to be presented at the anticipated peace conference.<sup>88</sup> Though the bulk of Mikhoels and Fefer's engagements were of a political nature, focusing on the Soviet war effort and themes of unity, their cultural credentials did not go ignored, and indeed shaped parts of the tour's agenda.

The majority of articles covering the tour provided basic information about events in which Mikhoels and Fefer took part—speeches, luncheons, meetings, and other gatherings. These accounts are often mildly positive, conveying both wishes of welcome to the delegates, and thanks to the American Jewish public from Mikhoels and Fefer. This piece in the "Chronicle of the Week" section of the *American Jewish Congress Weekly* is typical:

A Jewish delegation from Soviet Russia consisting of Solomon Michoels [*sic*], actor and president of the Anti-Fascist Committee in U.S.S.R., and Itzik Feffer [*sic*], Jewish poet, arrived in the United States last week. It brought greetings from the Jews in Soviet Russia

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<sup>85</sup> Sandler, "The Impressive Meeting of Mikhoels and Fefer With Yiddish Writers and Cultural Activists," 3.

<sup>86</sup> Sandler, "The Impressive Meeting of Mikhoels and Fefer With Yiddish Writers and Cultural Activists," 3.

<sup>87</sup> The Black Book became an enormous project, the joint effort of the Writers' Committee, the JAC, and several other organizations in the United States and Palestine. Starting from discussions on the tour, the project was published in the United States within a few years, but took decades to be published in the Soviet Union.

<sup>88</sup> Sandler, "The Impressive Meeting of Mikhoels and Fefer With Yiddish Writers and Cultural Activists," 3.

and described the purpose of the visit as the desire “to unite the efforts of the Jews of all countries in the sacred struggle “for the destruction of Hitlerism.” The delegation came at the invitation of the Jewish Council for Russian War Relief, and the Committee of Jewish Writers and Artists.<sup>89</sup>

The emphasis on unity in the fight against Hitler in the delegates’ greetings appears in almost every publication’s coverage of the tour. From this constant message, it is clear that one of the primary goals of the tour was to create a bond between American and Soviet Jews, strengthening the alliance of the two countries in the commission of war. This aim also comes across in a speech delivered by Fefer: “The American Jews are with us. They are with us in battle. Their hearts and their thoughts are with us. We are united in sorrow. We are one large family living through a great disaster, forgetting trivial matters in the face of the terrible danger which threatens our people.”<sup>90</sup> Fefer made no attempt at subtlety here. By instructing his audience to disregard any past tensions, he preempted any reservations towards cooperating with the Soviet Union, a subject of suspicion by many Americans. Further, the family metaphor emphasized that the unity between Soviet and American Jews was intrinsic, deeper than a mere wartime alliance could hope to be.

In a number of articles, this union was cited to imply an obligation of American Jews to provide monetary support for the defense of Europe’s Jews, realized through the efforts of the Red Army. For example, the American Jewish Congress’ *Congress Weekly* on multiple occasions tied financial or material support for the Red Army to gratitude for Soviet efforts to protect Jews. In its yearly review the publication summarized the highlights of the tour. An account of one event mentioned “greetings from ‘fellow Jews and blood brothers’” and the announcement that “the Red Army saved 4,000,000 Jews from the Nazis... Soviet diplomats

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<sup>89</sup> “Chronicle of the Week,” *American Jewish Congress Weekly*, June 25, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> “The Jews of Russia: Excerpts from Speeches Delivered at the Rally of 47,000 New York Jews to Welcome the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Delegation, *American Hebrew: The National Weekly of Jewish Affairs*, 152, no. 11 (July 16, 1943), 8.

praised Jewish achievements there and promised that the Russians will never forget their help. That help was in the form of field ambulances equipped with medical supplies, hospital tents and other products of Palestine factories.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, a description of the farewell events for the delegates included both themes, unity and monetary support, in immediate succession:

The need for continued and closer cooperation between the two strongest branches of the Jewish people who live in free countries was stressed by twenty-seven speakers, among whom were Rabbi Israel Goldstein, James N. Rosenberg, Dr. Nahum Goldmann and other Jewish leaders. A resolution pledging assistance to the Red Army and expressing appreciation for the Soviet Union’s efforts in helping to save 1,500,000 Jews from the Nazis was adopted at the dinner.<sup>92</sup>

By placing these priorities of the tour next to one another, the reporter for the *Congress Weekly* emphasized, if subconsciously, the intrinsic link between the two. American Jews were obliged to support the Soviet war effort in order to repay their debt to the Soviet Union for protecting the Jews, and to cement the bonds of unity between the two Jewish populations.

### **The Polo Grounds Rally**

The central event of the tour was a rally at the Polo Grounds in New York on July 8, 1943, organized by the tour’s National Reception Committee. Mikhoels and Fefer both addressed the crowd, with translators interpreting their Yiddish speeches. They shared the stage with the leaders of prominent American Jewish organizations: Rabbi Stephen Wise, President of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and Honorary Chairman of the Jewish Committee for Russian War Relief (JCRWR), Dr. Nahum Goldmann, one of the organizers of the reception committee and a WJC leader, poet Sholem Asch<sup>93</sup> of the Writers’ Committee, and Ben Zion Goldberg. In

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<sup>91</sup> “Highlights of the Year 5703: The Russian Jewish Delegation” *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests*, September 24, 1943, 21.

<sup>92</sup> “Chronicle of Events: At Home,” *Congress Weekly: A Review of Jewish Interests*, September 24, 1943, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Sholem Asch’s membership in the Writers’ Committee was a major achievement for the organization. Asch was a major figure in the community of American Yiddish-speakers, and his support of the Committee was rivaled in importance only by that of Albert Einstein. However, it was not without consequences. After publicly expressing his

all, around 47,000 people attended the event, making it the largest pro-Soviet rally ever to take place in America. It was impossible to ignore the effort that went into projecting a sense of unity between the United States and the USSR.<sup>94</sup> The stadium was hung with flags representing the Soviet Union, the United States, and the future state of Israel, and the crowd sang the national anthems of the United States and USSR, as well as the Hatikvah. Paul Robeson, a popular African American singer with pro-Soviet sympathies, sang songs in Yiddish and Russian. The general consensus among all those involved was that the rally was hugely successful.<sup>95</sup>

The speeches at the rally were highly propagandistic, many characterizing the Soviet Union as the sole protector of Europe's Jews. In this vein, Mikhoels proclaimed, "The Red Army avenges the bestial atrocities of the Nazi enemy,"<sup>96</sup> and Fefer added, "The Soviet people have become a nation of Red armymen...For the Red Army is with us [the Jews], and Stalin is with us."<sup>97</sup> Several speeches outlined the steps that the USSR had taken to protect its Jewish population, including taking in refugees from Western territories and outlawing antisemitism. Elsewhere, Mikhoels and Fefer even claimed, "at a time when every railroad car was needed for the war effort, the Soviet government was allotting dozens of trains for the rescue of civilians and Jews."<sup>98</sup> To some degree, this portrayal was warranted, as no other country could claim the Soviet Union's record of protecting Europe's Jews. The Soviet Union had done a great deal to protect the Jews of Europe, which came across clearly at the rally.

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support for a pro-Soviet organization, Asch was "excommunicated" by Abraham Cahan, founder of the *Forward*, and by all of the publications and productions under *Forward* management. This spurning by the Socialist wing of American Jewry appears not to have rattled Asch, as he continued to write for the Communist *Morgen Freiheit* and to publically support the JAC tour. Hersh Hartman.

<sup>94</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 119.

<sup>95</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 75.

<sup>96</sup> "The Jews of Russia," *American Hebrew*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> "The Jews of Russia," *American Hebrew*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Ben-Cion Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?: The Case of the Annexed Territories," *Slavic Review* 39, no. 1 (1980): 44.

However, there was some exaggeration in these claims. Outlawing antisemitism did little to combat anti-Jewish sentiments in the populace, or even among members of the government. Moreover, the assertions of a concerted Soviet rescue effort are difficult to substantiate in fact. Most of the references to these measures were made abroad, appearing as propaganda for particularly receptive foreign audiences, in Jewish or Communist-sympathizing publications.<sup>99</sup> Within the Soviet Union, discussion of Jewish experiences in the war was avoided, particularly in the Russian-language press.<sup>100</sup> In the context of the tour, as well as other relevant appearances by Soviet officials, addresses focused on the debt owed to the Soviet Union for its remarkable rescue efforts. However, these tropes likely originated in the West, with Communists and sympathizers stoking the discussion in order to improve perceptions of the Soviet Union. While the Kremlin may have encouraged this line of discussion, the debate over the existence and extent of Soviet rescue efforts was largely restricted to the Western Jewish press.<sup>101</sup>

Evidence is scarce of Soviet wartime policies towards Jews, but general plans for evacuating civilians make no mention of Jews. Certainly some managed to escape, but these were mainly Jews with some connection to the Communist Party or Soviet state who relied on their own ingenuity, or those involved in work deemed to be of vital national importance, and therefore evacuated to the east.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, among those who did try to escape, many were prevented from crossing the border to the Soviet rear. Inhabitants of annexed territories faced restrictions on their movement, which were enforced for the first few days after war began. The only people allowed to cross the border were those who had been Soviet citizens before 1939, or had connections to the state. The majority of those seeking refuge were turned away. The

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<sup>99</sup> Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?" 44.

<sup>100</sup> Discussion of the Jewishness of the genocide did occur in the Yiddish press in the Soviet Union. David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 194-204.

<sup>101</sup> Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?" 45.

<sup>102</sup> Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?" 49.



restrictions were lifted after a few days, but a great deal of damage had already been done to Jews now surrounded by German troops, or victims of air attacks.<sup>103</sup> In all, about two million Jews in annexed territories were unable to evacuate, and thus fell victim to Nazi advances. This situation was more likely the result of administrative incompetence and the breakdown of communication as war set in than a deliberate policy to abandon the Jews, but it does nothing to bolster the assertion of concerted rescue efforts. Rather, the Soviets did nothing to help civilians, Jewish and non-Jewish, deemed unimportant for the war effort.

A number of Jews from Soviet Poland did manage to survive the war, but not due to the benevolence of the Kremlin. In 1939 the Soviet Union extended citizenship to the annexed Polish territory, such that Polish citizens living in the territory at the time of annexation automatically became Soviet citizens. In this way, the Kremlin could claim to have taken in a number of Jewish refugees, through no more than an administrative action.<sup>104</sup> Some refused this granting of citizenship, not wishing to distance themselves from family remaining in Nazi territory, or else rejecting the restrictive residence conditions imposed on them. The Soviet authorities did all in their power to force Jewish refugees to accept citizenship, even establishing NKVD commissions to this effect.<sup>105</sup> Regardless of whether these efforts succeeded, officials were concerned that refugees would prove a security risk, as they had significant connections across the border in Nazi territory. In order to remove this threat, the government instituted a policy of mass deportations of Jews to the Soviet interior, to labor camps in Russia and Siberia. This began with refugees who had refused the offer of citizenship, but soon spread to others as well.<sup>106</sup> Through an accident of fate, those Jews deported to labor camps managed to avoid the

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<sup>103</sup> Pinchuk, "Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?" 51.

<sup>104</sup> Ben-Cion Pinchuk, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland, 1939-1941," *Jewish Social Studies* 40, no. 2 (1078): 150.

<sup>105</sup> Pinchuk, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland," 151.

<sup>106</sup> Pinchuk, "Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland," 153.

devastation wrought by the Nazis and survive the war. However, to claim that these lives were saved as a result of policies designed in the interest of protecting Jews was at best a gross exaggeration. Evidence of deliberate Soviet rescue efforts remains largely absent from the historical record. Rather, “The general picture is one of disregard for the unique dangers facing the Jews.”<sup>107</sup>

The Polo Grounds rally built upon the above-mentioned themes of unity and debt to the Soviet Union for its protection of Jews. It was clear from the speeches that all Jews owed a debt to the Soviet Union, and by implication that this debt could be repaid by supporting the Soviet war effort. One report noted that the rally “reflected a spirit of gratitude, love, and devotion for Soviet Russia and for Soviet Jewry unequalled in this country since the early years of this century.”<sup>108</sup> This gratitude was also stated explicitly in the speeches at the rally. Albert Einstein, honorary chairman of the reception committee, was unable to attend the event, but sent a statement to be read. His remarks included the wish that “the delegation find a response in this country commensurate with our loyalty to ethical ideals we hold in common and also with our gratitude for Russia’s heroic achievement in the struggle against the basest criminals who have ever threatened the world.”<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Henry Monsky, leader of the Jewish community and president of the service organization B’nai B’rith, noted in his speech, “In the Soviet Union we have a nation which has given freely of her sons—five million of them—whose gallant fight has cost the enemy double that number.”<sup>110</sup> The Soviet Union had sacrificed a great deal, and it was the duty of American Jews to support it in this continued effort.

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<sup>107</sup> Pinchuk, “Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?” 55.

<sup>108</sup> William Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” *Liberal Judaism*, August, 1943, 49.

<sup>109</sup> “The Jews of Russia: Excerpts from Speeches Delivered at the Rally of 47,000 New York Jews to Welcome the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Delegation, *American Hebrew: The National Weekly of Jewish Affairs*, 152, no. 11 (July 16, 1943), 8.

<sup>110</sup> “The Jews of Russia,” *American Hebrew*, 8.

In accordance with its importance on Mikhoels and Fefer's itinerary, the Polo Grounds rally featured prominently in the press. Coverage of the event did not focus only on its official content, however. It also served as a site for working out disputes within the American Jewish community. An article in *American Hebrew*, a New York publication affiliated with Conservative Judaism, discussed political activities that took place at the event: "During the meeting a petition was passed around among the audience, a petition from the Jewish People's Committee, requesting that the Committee be admitted to the proceedings of the coming American Jewish Conference. The Jewish People's Committee, we understand, includes thousands of left-wing trade unionists. Some are Communists, but many others are not."<sup>111</sup> The article then went on to describe the Jewish People's Committee as a "Jewish organization in perfectly good standing," vouched for by respectable members of the community. The American Jewish Conference was a short-lived organization dedicated to representing a united American Jewish voice on postwar policy regarding Jews. With members such as Rabbi Stephen J. Wise, it was particularly supportive of the Zionist position. The article's author expressed sympathy for the desire of the American Jewish Congress to keep communists out of the Conference, given the history of linking Jews with communists to fuel antisemitic sentiments. However, it then questioned this policy of "appeasement" and "exclusion" as "fatal to democratic procedure, and...to any genuine solution of the problems of the Jewish people."<sup>112</sup> Excluding a valid perspective from an organization purporting to represent a united American Jewish voice was no way to strengthen the community, particularly when the war made Jewish unity so important.

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<sup>111</sup> "Editorial Interpretations of Current Events: Rapprochement," *American Hebrew: The National Weekly of Jewish Affairs*, 152, no. 11 (July 16, 1943), 3.

<sup>112</sup> "Editorial Interpretations of Current Events: Rapprochement," *American Hebrew: The National Weekly of Jewish Affairs* 152, no. 11 (July 16, 1943), 3.

This article illuminated the divisions and internal frictions within the American Jewish community, using the tour as a point of entry into the fray. Even in this segment of the population that was known to be sympathetic towards, if not devoted to the political left, communists struggled to find a place. The marginalization communists felt in broader American society permeated the Jewish community, so that Jewish communists at times could not find a place as part of the Jewish whole.<sup>113</sup> The Mikhoels-Fefer tour brought out this tension, providing a forum at which all segments of the community could come together. Moreover, the heightened press coverage of the tour extended the reach of the petition, as anyone looking for information on the tour in *American Hebrew* was inadvertently confronted with the struggle of the Jewish People's Committee. The Conference, like the rally, was to be a gathering of all American Jews, and so it was logical that a group would use one to gain entrance into the other. Thus, the tour served not only as a meeting of Soviet and American Jews, but also as a meeting of different factions of the American Jewish community.

### **The Politics of the Press**

Regardless of sides, politics were inextricably linked to the tour, and colored perceptions of it. Even before Mikhoels and Fefer arrived in New York, major Jewish organizations discussed the tour and its implications, with preconceived notions of what it would mean. Some articles overwhelmingly supported the delegates. A piece in the Writers' Committee's *Eynikayt* published the year after the tour expressed great admiration for Fefer's poetry, a copy of which the author had been given by the poet himself during the tour. It was not unusual for *Eynikayt* to support Fefer, given the fact that the Writers' Committee was the primary sponsor of the tour. The piece in question was written by Berl Lapin, who lived in New York and was a frequent

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<sup>113</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 100.

contributor to *Morgen Freiheit*. He reviewed a book by Fefer, entitled *Roytarmeyish* (Like the Red Army), published by the Yiddish Cultural Alliance (YKUF), a group associated with the *Freiheit*.<sup>114</sup> Lapin described meeting Mikhoels and Fefer at their final appearance in New York prior to their departure from the United States. He was evidently entranced by the meeting, and was complimentary towards the delegates and the Soviet Union as a whole. He found Fefer's work moving, with the power to unite the disparate peoples who comprised the Red Army: "I can feel from afar how readers there are entranced by the true word and go forward with it into battle. Many fighters of various nationalities there fall or remain in the battle with their own languages on their lips...The poems in your *roytarmeyish* breath with so much truth and with the strength of seeds which must, after the victory, grow on destroyed, explosion-ripped fields."<sup>115</sup> Lapin sees Fefer as first and foremost a Soviet patriot, doing his duty to advance the war effort. In this sense, his Judaism is secondary to his art.

This sentiment is echoed in Lapin's assessment of a specific passage in Fefer's poetry. The choice of these lines is significant, as they were often used to accuse the poet of being a propagandist for the Stalinist state:<sup>116</sup>

When I say Stalin I mean May  
I mean days that are new;  
All roads are open,  
All people are free.

When I say Stalin — I mean you.  
When I say Stalin — I mean me.  
When I say Stalin — I mean wings  
That fly off far, that fly with speed.

For Lapin, these lines were not an exaltation of Stalin, but rather a suggestion that all individuals could embrace the war effort with the same fervor that Stalin had. Indeed: "These lines do not

<sup>114</sup> *Eynikayt*, February 15, 1944, tr. Hershl Hartman, 26

<sup>115</sup> *Eynikayt*, February 15, 1944, tr. Hershl Hartman, 26

<sup>116</sup> *Eynikayt*, February 15, 1944, tr. Hershl Hartman, 26

resound as a mere hymn of praise to a person who is above you, but to one as you, yourself, as *he* [emphases in original], as all people who live on behalf of humanity...*you* and *he*, all can be, and are, Stalins, when they carry on the same courageous struggle for humanity as does Stalin...”<sup>117</sup>

Lapin paid no mind to the criticism of Soviet policy or ideology, nor critiqued its claim to the title of savior of Europe’s Jews. Rather, he believed the Soviet Union to be fighting a noble fight, and one that should have the support of both the American public and American Jewry.

Other reporters were less enamored of the delegates. A June 25th article entitled “Delegation from Russia” in the *American Jewish Congress Weekly* predicted the content of the speeches of the delegates, from details of Nazi atrocities to the refrain of unity among Jews against Hitler. The publication, produced by the American Jewish Congress (AJC), represented the views of this organization. The AJC was one of the major Jewish organizations at the time. It was a progressive group formed in response to another organization, the American Jewish Committee, which was known for the conservatism of its German-Jewish leadership. The founders of the AJC sought an organization more supportive of liberal political causes, as well as of the Eastern European Jewish community in America. Led by individuals such as Rabbi Stephen J. Wise, a member of the National Reception Committee and enthusiastic participant in the planning of the tour, the AJC was a major supporter of the Soviet delegates.<sup>118</sup> Still, its progressive and Zionist tendencies led it to question some of the actions of the Soviet government. This explains a passage in the article urging caution in expectations for the tour:

We must not, however, expect of them any light on matters which many of us regard as most vital...The delegates are not free agents. Their line of thought on every subject, Jewish or general, has been marked for them in advance by the Party or Government which made their visit possible. The only relations between American Jewry and Soviet Jewry that they will be at liberty to discuss are the relations of combatants on a common war front. We must not embarrass them by forcing upon them questions or discussions of

<sup>117</sup> *Eynikayt*, February 15, 1944, tr. Hershl Hartman, 26

<sup>118</sup> Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia*, 103.

subjects which are beyond the limits of their mandate. Regardless of its mandate, however, the visit of the delegation opens a window through which Soviet Jewry may become visible and real after an absence of twenty-five years...It took a world war and Soviet membership in the United Nations<sup>119</sup> to secure permission for a writer and an artist to come here.<sup>120</sup>

This section expresses suspicion as to the motives and sincerity of the Soviet government more than the delegates themselves. It doubts their agency to share information or make decisions free of government control, which in reality was not far from the truth. The prediction that discussion would be restricted to “combatants on a common war front” would prove true for the most part, though, the suggestion that the delegates would be “embarrassed” by other topics is a bit patronizing. The article’s author provided astute commentary however, in recognizing the significance of the tour despite its artificial nature. The last sentence of this passage is perhaps the most telling. The author picks up on the sense of paranoia felt by both the Soviet and American governments. For the Soviet government, even a writer and artist posed a threat to national security, and so had to be strictly controlled. For the Americans, only a writer and artist could avoid suspicion and “secure permission” to enter the country.

In the realm of criticism of the tour, this piece was fairly mild. The tour’s critics took issue with it on many grounds, not limited to the liberty of the delegates to speak their minds. For many, it provided an opportunity to question the alliance with the Soviet Union more broadly. In a *Chicago Jewish Sentinel* article, Chicago businessman G. George Fox articulated this argument: “Just why a Jewish delegation should have been sent here to the Jews is not known to us. Russia is an ally of the Allied Nations, and any goodwill [*sic*] delegation from there should

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<sup>119</sup> The United Nations organization had not yet been founded, but the term was often used to mean the international community or the Allied Powers in the war.

<sup>120</sup> “Delegation from Russia,” *American Jewish Congress Weekly* 10, no. 24 (June 25, 1943), 5.

have been sent to the country as a whole.<sup>121</sup> We just don't see the point in such divisiveness [sic]...Why stop at Russia? We understand that Russia has done more than any of these—but we do have other Allies—and they should not be forgotten.”<sup>122</sup> He continued on to suggest several other allies that might be allowed delegations, if the privilege is offered to the Soviet Union, which he sees as the least worthy of all. He also questioned the wisdom of having a Jewish delegation at all. It is possible that he simply saw no place for religion in international relations, a valid concern. However, it is also possible that he hoped to avoid further emphasis on the connections between Jews and communists, which many saw as damaging to the Jews' reputation.

The Judeo-Communist myth has its roots in the ubiquitous tales asserting a Jewish plot to rule the world. These tropes could be found from Tsarist Russia, to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to nineteenth century France, to episodes throughout American history. While no doubt there were some Jewish communists, including a number highly placed in the Bolshevik Party, entrenched attitudes towards Jews caused the experiences of these individuals to be extrapolated onto the whole of world Jewry. Despite the wide variety in political affiliations of Jews, this myth served to stir suspicions around Jewish involvement in politics, and legitimized antisemitic attacks. Many of this anti-Jewish sentiment originated from right-wing groups, causing Jews to

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<sup>121</sup> The discomfort with the Jewish nature of the tour can also be seen in Soviet newspapers covering the tour. *Pravda*, the official Communist Party publication, and *Izvestiia*, the publication of the Soviet state, published identical accounts of the visit after Mikhoels and Fefer's return. These pieces were clearly meant to express the views of the government, given both the identities of the newspapers and the fact that they were re-printings of the same articles. In these pieces, the Jewish identity and purpose of the tour is again concealed. The reporter obfuscates the reader, presenting the tour as a general Soviet cultural delegation rather than specifically a Jewish one. For the Soviet reading public, praise for an overtly Jewish endeavor was politically dangerous. An achievement could not belong to Jews, if the aim was to advance the Soviet people as a whole. “Митинг в Нью-Йорке в честь Михоэlsa и Фефера (Meeting in New York in Honor of Mikhoels and Fefer)” *Izvestia* (Moscow, July 15, 1943), 4; “Митинг в Нью-Йорке в честь Михоэlsa и Фефера (Meeting in New York in Honor of Mikhoels and Fefer)” *Pravda* (Moscow, July 15, 1943), 4.

<sup>122</sup> G. George Fox, “From The Watch Tower,” *Jewish Sentinel* (Chicago), July 15, 1943, 3.



flock to the left, and creating a self-reinforcing cycle of leftist Jews.<sup>123</sup> Further vitriol was added by the Catholic Church, which from the 1871 Paris Commune tied Jews to revolution. This charge had particular influence in France, Italy, Poland, and Spain.<sup>124</sup> The infiltration of the Judeo-Communist myth into American military intelligence led to discriminatory legislation intended to restrict immigration of Eastern European Jews to America in the 1920s, and the proliferation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the interwar period.<sup>125</sup> During World War II, the American alliance with the Soviet Union complicated anti-Communist sentiments, but by no means lessened them. Many publications, Jewish and otherwise, were filled with admonitions against complacency towards communist threats.

The article's author and the publication's background make these sentiments unsurprising. Fox was a devoted capitalist and member of the Union League of Chicago, an organization publicly opposed to communism before the war. While the United States' alliance with the Soviet Union may have tempered these sentiments, Fox's suggestion that focus be widened beyond simply the communist ally seems informed by his background. Moreover, the publication itself was no enthusiastic supporter of the Soviet Union. While it did not have a stated political affiliation, it was the product of Chicago's German Jewish elite. These individuals maintained no allegiance to Germany, but tended to distance themselves from Eastern European Jews, who tended to represent a lower socio-economic class than German Jews, and aligned themselves with the Socialist cause.<sup>126</sup> Thus, this was a sympathetic forum in which to raise questions of the tour's appropriateness, granting attention to a questionable

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<sup>123</sup> Philip Mendes, *Jews and the Left: The Rise and Fall of a Political Alliance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 219.

<sup>124</sup> Mendes, *Jews and the Left*, 223.

<sup>125</sup> The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Reed-Johnson National Origins Act of 1924. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a fraudulent work announcing a Jewish conspiracy for world domination. Based on a French satirical pamphlet from the 1860s, it first appeared in Russia in 1903, and was a rallying point for antisemitism. Mendes, *Jews and the Left*, 220, 222.

<sup>126</sup> Walter Roth, President of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, in conversation with the author, June 10, 2015.

government and dangerous ally. Perhaps this was why Fox was wary to welcome a Jewish delegation at all; further association of Jews with communism, from his perspective, could only be a liability to the reputation of American Jews. Eastern European Jews did enough to impede the assimilationist aspirations of their German counterparts without further emphasizing their ties to communism. German Jews wished to separate themselves from the widespread derision of communism, and an explicitly Jewish Communist delegation did nothing to further these aims.

Other articles used the tour to frame commentary on the state of the American Jewish community as a whole. World War II profoundly altered Jewish identity in Europe and throughout the world, but American Jewry had been in a state of transition even before the cataclysmic events of the Holocaust. Many American Jews were assimilating into mainstream American culture and losing their ties to old world customs and traditions. This could be seen most clearly in trends surrounding Yiddish. Though the language retained a vibrant culture particularly in New York, fewer and fewer Jews learned or knew the language. Especially among the younger generations, Jews sought expressions of their Jewish identity in ways more compatible with modern America, which often meant in English. In an article entitled “Morbidly Antagonistic” in Cincinnati's *Liberal Judaism*, journalist William Zuckerman examined this phenomenon in relation to the tour. The title of the piece sums up Zuckerman's thesis: the older generation's unwillingness to adapt was leading to its extinction. The author himself was a curious case. As the former head of the Chicago offices of the *Forward*, he had control over the strongest socialist voice in the Jewish press. Yet this article displayed a favorable view of the JAC, contrary to that held by most prominent socialists. It is possible that Zuckerman's views evolved over time, as his article advocates for the broader Jewish community. Or perhaps some

of the frustration he expressed with the Yiddish press was directed at his former place of employment.

The tagline of the article is telling: “The Strange Antics and Feuds of the Yiddish Press, Provoked by Visit of Russian Jewish Delegation, Prompts a Bilingual Observer to Doubt Influence of Yiddish Cultural Leadership in America.”<sup>127</sup> Zuckerman noted that despite the widespread support for the delegates, “a small but influential group of Yiddish intellectuals and molders of public opinion have carried on a campaign of vilification against the Soviet delegation which for hatred and animosity reminded one of Nazi campaigns against the Jews. Articles by the score, attacking the delegates directly and Soviet Russia covertly, have filled the pages of Yiddish newspapers.”<sup>128</sup> This account characterized the criticism disseminated by the Yiddish press as both malicious and intentional, engineered by an intellectual elite threatened with the loss of its cultural relevance. In addition to capturing the attention of readers, the comparison with Nazi propaganda made it impossible to misinterpret Zuckerman’s meaning—the attacks on the delegation actively harmed the Jewish people. The unfounded attacks against the Soviet Union were not new, but rather the same ones that had populated the press for years, and “been discarded even by the most conservative American newspapers.”<sup>129</sup> From Zuckerman’s perspective, the Yiddish press had become a sort of extremist force, and its efforts were clearly detrimental to Jewish unity.

Zuckerman saw at the root of this extremism the tensions between communists and socialists that created the broad outlines of political factions within American Jewry. These two groups jockeyed for control of the Yiddish public, manifested largely in the press. The attacks against the delegation, then, could be seen as no more than “crude politics and business

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<sup>127</sup> William Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” *Liberal Judaism*, August, 1943, 48.

<sup>128</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 50.

<sup>129</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 50.

competition between rival vested interests.”<sup>130</sup> However, the conflict was far deeper than a purely economic one. On the one hand, many of the most celebrated American Yiddish writers refused to interact with Mikhoels and Fefer, themselves Yiddish writers, or to join the Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists, and Scientists, which worked in constant collaboration with the JAC.<sup>131</sup> The leaders of the Yiddish press were conspicuous in their absence, given the widespread support for the delegates. On the other hand, enthusiasm stretched even to many Zionist leaders, including Stephen Wise, Nahum Goldmann, and Tamara de Sola Pool, whose politics and priorities could be seen as conflicting with those of the Soviet Union.

Zuckerman traced the animosity in the Yiddish press to the perception of an existential threat: the growth of an English-language Jewish press, the reduction in number of Yiddish speakers, and a general trend of American Jews “receding from Jewish culture,” that permeated deeper than political affiliations.<sup>132</sup> The new American Jewish press was of a different character than the Yiddish, with few of the heated attacks found in its predecessor. Though it could be critical of the Soviet Union, it was free from the “blind hatred” for the Reds that the Yiddish press championed.<sup>133</sup> However, in the face of the Americanization of the Jewish community, “the Yiddish cultural leaders, for obvious reasons, have clung as if consciously to the old world of a generation or two ago--a narrow, little segregated world where passions run high, where party differences are put above humanity, where an opponent is an enemy to be exterminated, and where the colors are either one hundred per cent black or white.”<sup>134</sup> For Zuckerman, much of the criticism of the tour arose from an outdated mindset that sought absolutes and rejected compromise. Though the Americanized press did not always agree with or support the Soviet

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<sup>130</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 50.

<sup>131</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 50.

<sup>132</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 51.

<sup>133</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 51.

<sup>134</sup> Zuckerman, “Morbidly Antagonistic,” 52.

Union, it was able to critique Soviet policies in a reasoned manner. In contrast, the older Yiddish model, clung to its viscous attacks and refusal of compromise. With this paradigm threatened, the Yiddish press could do nothing but mount a full attack against the symbol of modernizing Jewry. In some sense the actual identities of Mikhoels and Fefer, or even the Soviet Union, were immaterial to the attacks. They simply provided a cogent focal point for the conflicts that had long been present within the community.

Of course, not every commentator agreed with Zuckerman's analysis. In fact, several saw the tour as emblematic of the moral decline of the American Jewish community, criticizing anyone who chose to associate with it. While some publications took a subtle approach, hinting at the error in supporting a government as questionable as the Soviet Union, others had no qualms with strong public condemnations. This was the case for an article entitled "Topics on the Agenda: The Jewish Delegation From Russia," published in *The Jewish Spectator*, the journal of the School of the Jewish Woman in New York. The head of both the paper and the school was Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, an intellectual born and raised in Germany; this background may explain her acceptance of such a vitriolic attack on the Soviet Union and its supporters, as an extension of the tensions between the German and Eastern-European sections of American Jewry. The article lists no author, so can be assumed to represent views approved by the editorial staff of the publication.

The article began by detailing the repression of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union. Countering the common refrain repeated by Mikhoels, Fefer and other supporters that the Soviet Union had outlawed antisemitism, the author stated that in reality, Soviet society was hostile to any demonstration of Jewish culture.<sup>135</sup> For the author, the Soviet government was more interested in eliminating religious distinction than fostering an environment of equal rights. This

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<sup>135</sup> "Topics on the Agenda: The Jewish Delegation From Russia," *The Jewish Spectator*, August, 1943, 4.

perspective on the Soviet approach illustrated the frustrations of a significant number of American Jews, but is not an entirely accurate representation of Soviet policy. For in the early 1940s, Stalinist terror had not yet set in, and though Jews indeed experienced animosity from many sources, it was still possible for Jews to attain high positions in the government.<sup>136</sup>

One area in which the author saw the balance between promoting and discouraging Jewish culture, similarly to Zuckerman, was that of language. The author of the article stated that, though the government to some extent encouraged the proliferation of the Yiddish language, this was only as an alternative to Hebrew. Yiddish was seen as a more proletarian form of Jewish culture that could be easily co-opted into the Soviet narrative while simultaneously repressing the more overtly religious character of Hebrew.<sup>137</sup> The suppression of Hebrew was tied to the depletion of Jewish cultural memory and practice in the Soviet Union. The author went so far as to compare Soviet policies to those of the Nazis:

From the long view of Jewish survival...there is not so great a difference between the Jewish situation under the Nazis and under the Soviets. We make this statement advisedly and not in any rash upsurge of a mood of Soviet baiting. We see matters this way because the study of thirty-five centuries of Jewish history has convinced us that *Jews* can only survive as *Jews* if they are absolutely free to live and foster *Judaism*.<sup>138</sup>

Jews could not survive if any part of Jewish tradition was suppressed. While Soviet policies did not approach the horror of those of the Nazis, and the worst of the Soviet policies towards Jews had in 1943 not yet been instituted, any parallel with the Nazis showed the level of disdain the author harbored for the Soviets.

Given its reprehensible record, the Soviet Union was not worthy of the respect of American Jews. For the author, the delegation was an “embarrassment,” as it forced interaction between American Jews and representatives of the Soviet government, even if they were situated

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<sup>136</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 113.

<sup>137</sup> “Topics on the Agenda,” 4.

<sup>138</sup> “Topics on the Agenda,” 4.

as merely a cultural delegation. Jewish hospitality necessitated an enthusiastic welcome for the delegates, but in all the fanfare, the larger issues with the Soviet-American alliance were obscured. One problematic piece that the author highlighted was Fefer's own literary background, filled with writings that "vilified...all that is sacred to *Jews* and *Judaism*."<sup>139</sup> While Fefer's early works criticizing Judaism are a subject of frequent discussion in the secondary literature, they were rarely, if ever, cited elsewhere in the contemporary media. What biographical information was presented tended to be neutral or positive, if, as discussed above, often incomplete. The marked contrast in this work, then, highlighted the author's desire to dismantle any myths associated with the presumed virtues of the Soviet Union. The author blamed not only the Soviet government for its policies, but also the "irresponsibility" of American Jews in welcoming the Soviet delegation in spite of its government's actions:

It is to this irresponsibility more than to anything else that we must look for an explanation of the strange phenomenon of some of the leading figures in American Zionism and orthodoxy joining in public receptions tendered to the delegation from Soviet Jewry. It is as individuals, however, rather than as representatives of their organizations that these men joined in the receptions for the Russian guests.<sup>140</sup>

The author assumed the irresponsibility of individuals, as the alternative would be to accept conscious American approval of Soviet policies. In this view, Soviet treatment of Jews was so terrible that it could not possibly be supported by any American Jewish organization. Though the article highlighted these moral failings of American Jews specifically in relation to the tour, it was easy to extrapolate a broader commentary on the community as a whole. In this way, the author used the platform of commentary on the tour as a point of entry into a deeper discussion on the state of American Jewry.

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<sup>139</sup> "Topics on the Agenda," 5.

<sup>140</sup> "Topics on the Agenda," 5.

The divisions in the Jewish community that made their way into the press did not remain contained there, but rather extended into mainstream American publications as well. In an article entitled “The New Rampage,” B. Z. Goldberg drew attention to the apparent manipulation of the American press by the anti-Soviet sections of the Jewish community.<sup>141</sup> Goldberg was the American closest to Mikhoels and Fefer, serving on the National Reception Committee and leading the Writers’ Committee, the official sponsor of the tour. After the tour he embarked on his own trip to the Soviet Union, where he again interacted with the JAC. This perspective came out in the article, with his vehement defense of the Soviet Union and its actions in support of Jews. Written just as preparations for the tour had begun, the piece observed an increase in hostilities towards the Soviet Union among Americans, concurrent with a string of Soviet victories against the Nazis. Goldberg explained this paradox as the result of fears that significant Soviet contributions to victory would lead to a permanent American-Soviet alliance after the war, which would allow the Soviet Union to expand its sphere of influence and cement the place of communism in the world order.<sup>142</sup>

According to Goldberg, this increasing hostility was the result of fear mongering by enemies of the Soviet Union. With a note of hyperbole, he described: “That dark circle dance is led by the Polish fascists and their laments over the borders; and the Jewish enemies of Soviet Russia have played their part in this dark program to blow up America.”<sup>143</sup> The anti-Soviet perspective adopted in the American press was the result of deliberate action by Jewish labor leaders and others sharing their views. Goldberg went so far as to attest that these labor leaders forced newspapers to run propaganda on the Ehrlich-Alter affair. He did not blame the “gentile

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<sup>141</sup> B. Z. Goldberg, “The New Rampage,” *Eynikayt*, April, 1943, tr. Hershl Hartman, 2.

<sup>142</sup> Goldberg, “The New Rampage,” 2.

<sup>143</sup> Goldberg, “The New Rampage,” 2.



politicians who did not know any better,” but rather the Jewish leaders who led them astray.<sup>144</sup>

Even the *New York Times* noticed the pernicious tendencies in the program of the labor leaders, when it led to protests against the Soviet Union, a major ally in the war.

Goldberg feared that the inflammatory actions of the anti-Soviet section of American Jewry would be taken to represent the entire community. To this end, he wrote: “To them it must be said: put an end to your speaking in the name of the Jewish people! Do not dare to speak on behalf of the broad Jewish working masses! Neither the people nor the masses but you, yourselves, are the enemy...and the stain remains on you, not on them.”<sup>145</sup> The efforts of subversive Jews was the primary reason for raising anti-Soviet sentiments, which had the potential to spill over into antisemitism. And this in the face of all the Soviets had done—taken in refugees, abolished antisemitism, undoubtedly secure a post-war peace, and protect Jews across Europe—for world Jewry. Goldberg presaged much of the praise for the Soviets heard throughout the tour, but used it as ammunition in a spirited attack against his opposition in the Jewish community.

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<sup>144</sup> Goldberg, “The New Rampage,” 2.

<sup>145</sup> Goldberg, “The New Rampage,” 2.

## Chapter Three: The JAC and American Jewish Organizations

For the numerous Jewish organizations in the United States, the Mikhoels-Fefer tour was an occasion to interact with one another, and to bring out into the open some of the major points of contention that separated their programs. Examination of these interactions reveals that, though each had the best interests of American and world Jewry at heart, they held fundamentally different beliefs in terms of the best way to accomplish these goals. Some believed in publicly pledging support to any parties seen as helping Jews; others were more discerning in their endorsements. Some believed that Soviet efforts to aid Jews should be openly lauded; others were discouraged by the Soviet Union's poor record in different areas. By bringing elements of the war, communism, and the Soviet Union onto American soil, Mikhoels and Fefer's presence heightened awareness of these points of contention in the American Jewish community.

### The Major Players of the Tour

#### *A Divided Community: The Case of the AJC*

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was a leading representative of the Jewish community, and center of Jewish advocacy in the United States. Founded in 1906 by members of the non-Zionist German-Jewish elite, the AJC reflected the preferences of this segment of American Jewry.<sup>146</sup> These individuals tended to be proponents of assimilation, and the policies of the AJC followed this logic. The organization often focused more on work that would improve

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<sup>146</sup> The Executive Committee of the AJC was the organization's main decision-making body, of which James N. Rosenberg was a member. Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 22.

the general climate of United States, specifically regarding civil rights issues, than on those exclusively benefitting Jews. During World War II this translated to a cautious mode of action that focused more on combating antisemitism domestically than on intervening against the Nazis in Europe.<sup>147</sup> Fearing that outspoken protest of German treatment of Jews would prompt resentment towards Jews, the AJC ascribed to a policy of “noiselessness.”<sup>148</sup> In other words, the AJC continued its prewar policies, rather than changing its tactics drastically as a reaction to the war. This approach underscored that diplomatic action taken on behalf of European Jews should be conducted in private, promoted work in conjunction with non-Jews, and emphasized the role of research in refuting the claims of the Nazis. Above all, the AJC hoped to avoid the image of involving the US in a “Jewish war.”<sup>149</sup> This policy was rejected as ineffectual by many observers, both those experiencing the event at the time, and modern scholars analyzing it from some distance. Others felt that, despite the unsatisfying nature of the AJC policy, no other approach could have had more success in the given circumstances.<sup>150</sup> Because of these positions, the AJC found itself positioned in opposition to many openly pro-Soviet and Zionist organizations, including the World Jewish Congress and its American affiliate, the Jewish Committee for Russian War Relief, and the Writers’ Committee.

The arrival of Mikhoels and Fefer in America left the AJC in a difficult position. While it did not wish to alienate any ally of the United States or international supporter of Jewish interests, the AJC also had a number of concerns with the ethics of Soviet policies in general and towards its Jewish communities, the presence of the delegates in America, and the very existence

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<sup>147</sup> Steven Bayme, “American Jewish Leadership Confronts the Holocaust: Revisiting Naomi Cohen’s Thesis and the American Jewish Committee,” *American Jewish Archives Journal*, 2009, 164.

<sup>148</sup> Bayme, “American Jewish Leadership Confronts the Holocaust,” 163.

<sup>149</sup> Bayme, “American Jewish Leadership Confronts the Holocaust,” 164.

<sup>150</sup> For more on this argument, see Naomi Wiener Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966*, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972).

of an explicitly Jewish campaign in the war effort in particular. These tensions came to the fore during the Polo Grounds rally in New York on July 8th. The AJC declined to participate in the gathering, and sent no official representatives, save for an observer in the crowd.<sup>151</sup> The rally was the central event of the tour, and as such, the absence of a major organization did not go unnoticed. Morris Waldman, Secretary and Executive Vice-President of the AJC, who shortly after the tour became vice-chairman of the General Committee, was responsible for fielding a number of questions that arose in response to the Committee's absence. In particular, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an organization involved in many aspects of Jewish relief leading up to and during the war, took issue with the AJC's rejection of the Soviet delegation. Its spokesman on the issue was James N. Rosenberg, Chairman of the JDC, honorary chairman of the JCRWR, and member of the National Reception Committee for the tour. Though Rosenberg was a member of the AJC Executive Committee, he was also involved in multiple ways in the planning and execution of the tour. He was a major advocate for support of the tour by all of American Jewry, apparently breaking with the AJC on this issue.

On July 9, 1943, the day after the Polo Grounds rally, Rosenberg sent a letter to the AJC inquiring into the organization's motives in deciding not to attend the gathering: "Did you have a representative attend this meeting? Are you reporting to the members of the Executive Committee anything in reference to any problems of the American Jewish Committee, vis a vis, the Jews of Russia? Has the American Jewish Committee taken any notice in action, formal or informal, of the presence of Michoels [*sic*] and Feffer [*sic*] in this country?"<sup>152</sup> From this line of questioning, it is clear that the behavior of the AJC was atypical. The fact that a major Jewish organization would choose not to have representatives attend the rally, nor take part in

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<sup>151</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>152</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39. 8

discussions on the plight of Russian Jews, nor even acknowledge the tour was difficult for Rosenberg and others to understand. Rosenberg went on to list a number of participants in the rally, hoping their inclusion would emphasize the significance of the event. Even Mayor LaGuardia issued an official welcome, demonstrating the tour's importance outside the Jewish community.

The letter ends with a final admonition, disguised as a question: "The American Jewish Committee, so far as I know, has stood on the side lines. Is this to continue to be its policy?"<sup>153</sup> The implication is clear that the AJC's failure to participate was perceived as a failure to fulfill its duties. The Committee stood passive and silent as other groups came together to display a major show of support for the Soviet Union, and demonstrate unity among Jews the world over. But the theme of unity, emphasized in nearly every event during the tour, could not come across as genuine if American Jews were divided on this seemingly clear issue. Unlike most Jewish organizations, the AJC chose not to take part in the crowning achievement of American Jewry of the time, the largest pro-Soviet rally held to date in the United States.<sup>154</sup> The event had implications for future relations between the United States and Soviet Union beyond just the Jewish community. Therefore, by refusing to participate the AJC communicated not just skepticism towards the Mikhoels-Fefer tour, but also an implied hostility towards the Soviet Union. This position may not be apparent from the AJC's absence at Polo Grounds alone, but other documents in the exchange with Rosenberg support this view.

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<sup>153</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>154</sup> Joshua Rubenstein, Vladimir P. Naumov, Laura E. Wolfson, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 17.

In response to Rosenberg's inquiry, Waldman penned several drafts of a response<sup>155</sup> outlining the reasons behind the AJC's position. Waldman asserts that, in accordance with the organization's commitment to "take every opportunity to establish contacts with foreign Jewish and non-Jewish personalities visiting this country, who either are in a position to give us useful information or constitute valuable contacts for us," the AJC made an effort to keep up with the events of the tour.<sup>156</sup> And from this effort, the leaders of the organization could discern no legitimate justification for putting on such a tour, nor for the AJC to concern itself with it. Some sources called Mikhoels and Fefer an official Soviet delegation; the AJC would feel no responsibility to interact with any other Soviet delegation. Others considered them official representatives of the JAC, a political organization with no particular Jewish affiliation.<sup>157</sup> Though this seems to be a misunderstanding of the JAC--it was explicitly a Jewish body with exclusively Jewish interests--as the AJC perceived it, the JAC had no particular claim to its attention. Based on Fefer's statements, he wished to present Mikhoels and himself as ambassadors for "Jewish unity in favor of the Soviet Union."<sup>158</sup> Still others interpreted the tour as an effort to support the work of the Jewish Council for Russian War Relief (JCRWR).

It was to this last explanation that Waldman had the greatest objection. Like other critics of the tour,<sup>159</sup> the AJC felt that "action by Jewish bodies on matters outside Jewish interests" were "contrary to the spirit of America."<sup>160</sup> In this mode of thinking, the very existence of JCRWR was un-American. American Jews should, as should all Americans, support the work of Russian War Relief as a whole, as the Soviet Union was an important ally and had contributed

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<sup>155</sup> It is possible that the response was written by a member of the AJC other than Waldman—it was found unsigned among his papers.

<sup>156</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>157</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>158</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>159</sup> See G. George Fox, "From The Watch Tower," *Jewish Sentinel* (Chicago), July 15, 1943, 3.

<sup>160</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

significantly to the fight against Hitler. But this did not represent any specific Jewish interest, as the country as a whole was invested in supporting its Soviet allies.<sup>161</sup> Even the fact that antisemitism was officially prohibited in the Soviet Union, often touted by the delegates and other speakers along the tour, was insufficient to justify a specifically Jewish section of Russian War Relief. Waldman continued:

You know as well as I that even if there is no official discrimination, the Jewish problem has nevertheless not been solved in the Soviet Union, as we envisage a proper solution. And if the absence of discrimination were a sufficient reason for such Jewish support to Russian War Relief, why is there not a Jewish section of the war relief activities of Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, and Norway? In all of those countries there was no discrimination at all against Jews and in all they could practice their religion freely, or even with the support of the government.<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, “Just as we believe that it would be improper to have a Methodist Council of Russian War Relief or a Baptist Council or a Unitarian Council, so we believe it is not acceptable to have a Jewish group.”<sup>163</sup> Mikhoels and Fefer should be honored as representatives of the Soviet Union, and Jews, as Americans, had every right to participate in their welcome. But any specifically Jewish purpose or identity of the tour would be inappropriate and contrary to Jewish interests. In other words, “Jews should act as American citizens, joining with other patriotic Americans, not as members of Jewish organizations.”<sup>164</sup> This was in line with the AJC’s policy during the war of working with non-Jews, lessening the impression of fighting a “Jewish war,” and generally promoting the rights of all rather than just the rights of Jews.<sup>165</sup> Thus, the AJC felt no obligation to take part in the operations of the tour, nor to endorse the presence of the delegates in the United States.

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<sup>161</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>162</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>163</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>164</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>165</sup> Bayme, “American Jewish Leadership Confronts the Holocaust,” 164.

The AJC's skepticism of the tour also reflected other common concerns among the tour's critics in the Jewish press. One main concern was the "alleged tie-up between Jews and Communism."<sup>166</sup> The AJC and other detractors feared that the tour as a whole, and specifically the Polo Grounds rally, would strengthen the association of Jews with communism among the American people. Again, this matter fell within the AJC's general policy of "noiselessness" during the war. Given widespread anti-communist sentiments across the country, associating Jews with these radical politics would only serve to alienate them from mainstream America, and was therefore a liability for the community. This position was deeply ingrained in the institutional memory of the Committee. Since the advent of Bolshevism, the AJC had feared its implications for those who lived under it, Jews included. In 1919 the organization issued an official statement of its policy towards the Bolsheviks: "Everything that real Bolshevism stands for is to the Jew detestable. His traditions wed him to law and order, make of him a legalist. The Bolsheviks are the enemies of law and order...The great mass of Jews are faithful to their ancient religion and are ever ready to help their brethren in distress. The club of Bolsheviks knows no brother and he despises religion."<sup>167</sup> Bolshevism, and by extension communism, was antithetical to everything that made a Jew a Jew. This outlook would continue to shape the actions of the AJC for as long as communism remained a force on the global stage.

As the United States negotiated its relationship with communism, the AJC struggled to formulate its stance on communism in the form that would most undermine the Judeo-Communist myth. Through the first Red Scare following World War I, the publication of *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the 1920s, and the operation of the House Un-American Activities Committee starting in the late 1930s, the AJC strove to protect the image of American

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<sup>166</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>167</sup> The American Jewish Committee, *The Pursuit of Equality: A Half Century with the American Jewish Committee* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1957), 30.



Jews as loyal citizens. In the first few decades after the creation of the Soviet Union, the AJC avoided an outright condemnation of communism, out of fear of alienating its support on the left, and a commitment to political freedom.<sup>168</sup> However, the rise of Hitler in Germany brought *Mein Kampf* and the Nuremberg Laws, which linked Jews with communism as a threat to the social order. Seeing the need to break the pernicious association with Jews, from this point forward, the AJC was committed to a firmly anti-communist stance.<sup>169</sup>

This history informed the AJC response to Mikhoels and Fefer's arrival in America. Like their broader critiques of the tour, AJC members worried that the very existence of the JCRWR "tends to reinforce the serious misconception which we have been trying to combat for years."<sup>170</sup> Though couched in diplomatic language, this statement betrays the frustration that the AJC felt over the implications of the JCRWR. By sponsoring the Soviet delegation, the Jewish Council only exacerbated the issues that the AJC had raised with it. The rising tide of antisemitic commentary on the matter only confirmed these fears. The Polo Grounds rally did not help matters either, as Waldman explained:

We did have an observer present, from whom we learned that the Daily Worker<sup>171</sup> was openly sold in the stands and that the meeting had not only a Russian but also a strongly Communist tinge...It is one thing for a number of distinguished American citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, to manifest their good will toward Russia and the Jews by joining in a demonstration such as that at the Polo Grounds; it is quite a different matter for a responsible Jewish organization like the American Jewish Committee, with a full realization of all the implications involved, to sponsor publicly a movement of such doubtful usefulness and with so many cross currents of high and low politics.<sup>172</sup>

Though acknowledging the right of independent citizens to celebrate the delegation and the tour, Waldman found it entirely inappropriate for the AJC to be involved in any official capacity. Not

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<sup>168</sup> Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 212.

<sup>169</sup> Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, 213.

<sup>170</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>171</sup> The official newspaper of the Communist Party of the United States.

<sup>172</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

only did the rally openly support communist symbols, publications, and sentiments, but it was devoid of any constructive purpose. Fighting the association of Jews with communism was difficult enough under ordinary circumstances; welcoming Jewish communists in an official delegation made the challenge immeasurably more difficult.

The AJC's fear of drawing attention to the perceived Jew-communist link was not limited to the Polo grounds rally. Every aspect of the tour raised some concern over the image it projected to the American populace. B. Z. Goldberg, Chairman of the Writers' Committee that sponsored the tour, set off suspicions even before the tour began. Goldberg was a "fellow traveler and a friend of the Communists in this country," and had piloted the communist-led strike at the newspaper where he worked.<sup>173</sup> The AJC was also concerned about the delegates themselves, and had a quite prescient understanding of the role of each man. An unsigned internal memo noted that Mikhoels gained fame for his work in the Moscow State Yiddish Theater. Though the theater received government funding, it had no particular communist program, and Mikhoels expressed no communist sentiments while working there. The memo elaborated, "I do not know whether he is officially a member of the Communist Party but somehow I do not believe that he should be considered as a real Communist representative. Itzik Feffer [*sic*], on the other hand, belonged to the most obnoxious of Jewish poets who attacked organized Jewry outside the Soviet Union continually as the petty bourgeoisie filth of capitalist society."<sup>174</sup> Mikhoels was seen as fairly innocuous, disruptive more in his Soviet citizenship than any personal characteristics. In contrast, Fefer was a true threat, a committed Communist, and an artist hostile to the Jewish diaspora. He was suspected of being "the OGPU part of the

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<sup>173</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39. Communist writers for *The Day* engaged in a strike in mid-June, 1941.

<sup>174</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

delegation,” a government operative sent to oversee the tour.<sup>175</sup> In fact, this was likely the case, as is confirmed by transcripts of government interviews with Fefer after his arrest in 1948.<sup>176</sup>

The AJC was also aware of the coverage of the tour in the press, specifically in Yiddish publications. In this coverage, Mikhoels and Fefer came across as evasive, refusing to talk about subjects besides the war, the unity of Jews, and the partnership of the two countries. Specifically, they avoided discussing Palestine or Jewish life and organizations in the Soviet Union. As an interview with the Yiddish newspaper *Morgen Zhurnal* reported, “Their repeated reply to all these questions is, while the house is burning one does not think of fixing windows and putting in frames; let’s save the house; let’s all help the joint effort against the Nazis.”<sup>177</sup> For the AJC this answer demonstrated an unwillingness to engage with the most important issues, or to speak freely and independently of scripted answers approved by the Soviet government. This attitude contributed to the AJC’s decision not to engage with the delegates, and the AJC was not alone. Indeed, no representatives of the Jewish labor right wing attended the Polo Grounds rally, and only one individual attended the official reception at the Soviet Consulate.<sup>178</sup> The Jewish Daily Forward, the preeminent Jewish socialist publication, also declined to send representatives to these events. This was in line with the decision of most Jewish socialists not to engage with the tour, which they objected to due to its message of support for communism and the Soviet Union.

These groups, like the AJC, were skeptical of the purpose of the tour. Most of all, they questioned the delegates’ constant calls for support in the fight against Hitler. American Jews had advocated this before the Soviet Union even joined the Allies in the war, so this refrain

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<sup>175</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>176</sup> See Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia : the Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1982), 80; Shimon Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR*, Luxembourg: Harwood Academic, 1995, 75.

<sup>177</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>178</sup> The one attendee was Sidney Hillman, a labor leader and one of the founders of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Archive papers 17/2

reeked of hypocrisy to the hostile organizations. The AJC and others were even aware of the explanation for the tour not accepted by historians until decades after the fact: “There is talk that this delegation finally did decide to come to the United States in order to offset the terrible reaction created among the Jews of America as a result of the execution of Ehrlich and Alter.”<sup>179</sup> All these factors contributed to the sense of animosity towards Mikhoels and Fefer felt by members of the AJC and other organizations. For them, the tour lacked purpose, and could even damage American Jewry. It was likely that it had no deeper aim than to repair the image of the Soviet Union following a public relations disaster.

As a large organization with national prominence, the AJC became a leader among critics of the tour. Sensing this position, other organizations sought counsel from AJC leadership in formulating their own policies. This can be seen in a letter to Waldman from Jerome J. Rothschild, President of the Philadelphia Anti-Defamation Council. After the events in New York, Mikhoels and Fefer moved on to other cities, including Philadelphia. Though gatherings in Philadelphia and elsewhere were nowhere near the scale of the Polo Grounds rally, they were still grand affairs and demanded the coordination of organizers for their execution. National organizations tended to take the lead in the planning process, as they were involved in proceedings in many cities. Though this arrangement was logical, it seemed to local groups that their territory was being overwhelmed by outsiders, with their concerns and contributions ignored in the rush. Rothschild aired this grievance to Waldman in his letter:

We should also like to repeat the proposal we have been urging for the past four years, namely that whenever possible local leadership be included in the groups formulating national policy and where time and other factors do not permit physical participation, that the national agencies inform local groups of policy decision before the local groups are jockeyed into the kind of position outlined in connection with the Reception to the Russian representatives.”<sup>180</sup>

<sup>179</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>180</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

Left out of national policy discussions, local organizations like the Anti-Defamation Council felt they were forced to support positions they did not share. The tension between national and local organizations only exacerbated the conflict over positions towards Mikhoels and Fefer.

While it is unclear which group of national organizations Rothschild has in mind, it is likely that he was referring to the Jewish Federation of North America, an umbrella organization for Jewish groups. The language he employed suggests that Rothschild viewed Waldman as a fellow outsider. This was reasonable given the AJC's resistance to the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Conference, and other attempts at presenting a united front of American Jewry. Thus, in addition to sharing a common opinion on the tour, the AJC and Anti-Defamation Council were also allied in their exclusion from the dominant Jewish coalition.

Rothschild began his letter by expressing confusion about the positions of the national organizations in preparing for the Philadelphia reception. He was under the impression that Jewish groups had decided to support the main section of Russian War Relief rather than the JCRWR.<sup>181</sup> Another questioned policy was the position of many organizations against communist and other leftist groups. The corps of national agencies was categorically opposed to allowing such organizations to participate in national activities and collaborations, such as the American Jewish Conference. Excluded groups included the International Workers Order and the Jewish Peoples Committee.<sup>182</sup> Finally, Rothschild took a similar position to the AJC, questioning why the reception should be sponsored by Jewish groups at all. To local agencies like the Anti-Defamation Council, the Philadelphia reception seemed to blatantly flout these established policies. While the dominant national consensus remained consistent in its opposition to

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<sup>181</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>182</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39, see page 29 above.

Communist-aligned groups, it fully embraced the JCRWR, as well as the role of Jewish leadership in the tour.

Local leaders were dismayed by this apparent shift in policy without their consultation. Echoing the concerns expressed by the AJC and in numerous critical news articles, Rothschild wrote, "A reception to representatives of Russia should be sponsored by persons acting solely as American citizens. To involve any religious group, least of all the Jews, in International politics, is in the highest degree undesirable."<sup>183</sup> This statement expressed both a desire to keep religion separate from politics, at the heart of the American ideal, and the implicit fears of fostering anti-Jewish sentiments through the association of Jews with volatile political issues. However, when visible Jewish personalities, such as the heads of national organizations, took a leading role in planning receptions, it was impossible to ignore the Jewish presence. This only strengthened the perceived connections between Jews and Soviets, and Jews and Communists.

When contained within the Jewish community, the repercussions of spreading this image of the communist Jew were limited, if undesirable. However, once the story of a Jewish-Soviet collaboration reached mainstream American society, its implications could not be contained. This indeed occurred in a half-page advertisement in the *New York Times* for the Polo Grounds rally.<sup>184</sup> For the most part the ad portrayed the rally as a pro-Soviet event, rather than one having any particularly Jewish character. Even the descriptions of Mikhoels and Fefer, while clearly identifying them as Jews, did not tie the delegates to any specific Jewish interests in the United States. However, the ad explicitly cited the sponsorship of the Writers' Committee and the JCRWR, listing them as contacts for ticket sales. Additionally, the ad included the membership list of the National Reception Committee, populated by leaders of many of the largest American

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<sup>183</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>184</sup> *New York Times*, June 28, 1943, 15. See Appendix 1

Jewish organizations. Given all these components, the ad proved beyond any doubt the official involvement of national Jewish organizations in the tour.

For local Jewish leaders, the offense did not stop here. Ads like this one not only linked national organizations to the Soviet delegation, but also tied the hands of local organizations that may have planned to contest the community's support of the tour. As Rothschild lamented, "The decision of leaders of various national Jewish organizations to act on a Reception Committee so evidently stamped with Jewish sponsorship, has been used by representatives of the National Reception Committee to force local Jewish leadership in other cities than New York, into similar collaboration."<sup>185</sup> Rothschild's frustration was clear; national organizations had for too long ignored the concerns of local groups, exploiting the appearance of Jewish consensus to further their own agendas. This desire for inclusion was by all appearances perfectly reasonable. Rothschild merely wished to be informed of changes to policy made by national organizations, so that local organizations could contribute to the discussion, and determine what the changes meant for their own activities. Instead, the Anti-Defamation Council was forced to choose between betraying the unity of American Jewish organizations, and betraying its own positions and interests.

In spite of the disregard for local groups by national Jewish organizations, the Anti-Defamation Council and others were not content to play passive victims, as evidenced by the following letter. Rothschild was acutely aware of the consequences of this conflict:

One of the unfortunate by-products of such action has been the intensification, at least in Philadelphia and perhaps elsewhere, of the differences between various factions in Jewish life. In Philadelphia, for example, Rabbi Simon Greenberg and Clarence Pickett were persuaded to accept co-chairmanship of the Reception Committee and the opposition of established agencies in Philadelphia is used by the left-wingers as a "proof" of the lack of backbone and foresight by Philadelphia leadership.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>186</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

The divisions or “factions” in the Jewish community were no secret to those experiencing them first hand. Tensions between national and local groups only exacerbated those along ideological lines. By acting solely in their own interests, national organizations left smaller groups vulnerable to attack, thereby weakening their position in the community.

Rothschild’s letter is significant in that it emphasized the same concerns that the AJC expressed. More than this, however, it showed that there was a wide base of support for the AJC position outside the intense publicity of New York. The Council looked to the AJC as an ally and leader, and in this sense strengthened the ties of one specific segment of the Jewish community. Rothschild also sent a similar letter to Richard Gutstadt, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith (ADL).<sup>187</sup> The ADL was another leader of the skeptics camp during the tour. Though they had independent programs and areas of focus, the AJC and B’nai B’rith increasingly found themselves in agreement in the early years of the war, and the AJC collaborated with the ADL on wartime efforts.<sup>188</sup> These two organizations, as well as a number of local groups, formed an unofficial coalition to resist the implied duty to support the tour. While Mikhoels and Fefer, as well as their sponsors and supporters, extolled the virtues of unity among world Jewry, these groups built a different kind of unity in opposition.

*The JAC and World Jewry: The Case of the WJC*

One of the major organizations with which Mikhoels and Fefer interacted was the World Jewish Congress (WJC), and its American affiliate, the American Jewish Congress. Comprising representatives from Jewish organizations around the world, it strove to serve as a united Jewish voice in global affairs, without any overt political identification:

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<sup>187</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>188</sup> Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, 226



The World Jewish Congress is a body composed of representative Jewish organizations in sixty-one countries. The membership of the Congress in the various countries consists of people of the most varied views, and among them are many of the foremost spokesmen and social workers of the communities...The day to day work of the Congress is conducted by an Executive Committee which is international in membership. Dr. Stephen S. Wise is the President of the Congress.

Though it was based in New York, the WJC was recognized as a leading Jewish organization across world Jewry, receiving consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council in March 1947. The Soviet representative in the Council supported this status, showing the widespread appeal of the organization.<sup>189</sup>

The tour presented an opportunity for the WJC to establish contacts with Soviet Jewry as had never before been possible. The Soviet Union's isolationism had prevented the WJC from developing a presence in the country, but with Mikhoels and Fefer's arrival in the United States, the world's second largest Jewish population suddenly became more accessible than it had been in decades. Members of the WJC leadership interacted enthusiastically with the delegates. Wise, the founding president of the WJC, was intimately involved in the events of the tour. He and Nahum Goldmann, another WJC founder who would succeed him as president, served on the National Reception Committee for the delegates, making them responsible for the tour and its implications. Even before the delegates arrived in the United States, the WJC leadership understood the tour's significance. Goldmann wrote to Maksim Litvinov, Soviet Ambassador to the United States, requesting approval for a reciprocal delegation of American Jews to be sent to the Soviet Union, demonstrating his hope for a significant outcome of the tour.<sup>190</sup> Once Mikhoels and Fefer arrived, the central duty of the Reception Committee was planning the Polo Grounds rally, at which both Wise and Goldmann spoke alongside Mikhoels and Fefer. Their participation

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<sup>189</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress New York Office Records (1942-8). RG 67.014M. Reel 344, Series H334-6, File 12-13, 135.

<sup>190</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 382.

was not unanimously supported in the Jewish community—Goldmann spoke of “intimidations and warnings”<sup>191</sup> against them—the men were pleased at the opportunity to cultivate relations with the delegates. These events raised the WJC’s hopes for a lasting relationship with Soviet Jewry. Leon Kubowitzki, Secretary General of the WJC, expressed these sentiments in a 1947 letter to Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations Andrei Gromyko: “Since the visit of a delegation, composed of Messrs. Mikhoels and Feffer [*sic*], to the United States in 1942, cordial relations have existed between the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the World Jewish Congress. The two organizations collaborated in the tracing of refugees and the reuniting of scattered families.”<sup>192</sup> Wise and Goldmann, acting as spokesmen for the organization, broached these questions, hoping to set a precedent of the JAC acting as a liaison between the WJC and the Soviet government.<sup>193</sup>

*Negotiating Relief: Relations with the JDC*

Another organization involved in the tour was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The JDC was a nonpolitical group founded during World War I to bring material relief to Jews in distress. Its earliest activities were in Russia, Germany, and Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. Originally, it operated by directing funds to local Jewish organizations that could coordinate relief on the ground. After the war ended, the JDC began relief efforts of its own, shifting its model from “palliative” relief efforts to positive “reconstruction” efforts.<sup>194</sup> In the Soviet context, this materialized as the American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation (Agro-Joint), a resettlement program of Soviet Jews to agricultural

<sup>191</sup> These “intimidations and warnings” have not been substantiated in the available archival and secondary material. Redlich *Propaganda and Nationalism* 119.

<sup>192</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 135 .

<sup>193</sup> Redlich *War Holocaust and Stalinism* 76

<sup>194</sup> Zosa Szajkowski, “‘Reconstruction ‘ vs. ‘Palliative Relief’ in American Jewish Overseas Work (1919-1939),” *Jewish Social Studies* 32, no. 1 (1970): 16-17.

colonies in Ukraine and Crimea.<sup>195</sup> The project was conducted according to an agreement with the Soviet government, signed in 1924. A proposal to move 280,000 Jews into agricultural settlements was approved by Communist leaders Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, Nikolai Bukharin, and Alexander Tsyurupa, though Alexander Smirnov, Commissar of Agriculture opposed the plan out of fear of conflict among nationalities. The plan was not carried out, but Jewish migration to the region began on its own in 1922.<sup>196</sup> By 1937, sixteen million dollars had been spent settling more than one hundred thousand Jews onto one million acres of land.<sup>197</sup> The Agro-Joint leadership was removed in 1937, and replaced by NKVD operatives. This decision was motivated by suspicions of the American influence, which fed into fears of sabotage and corruption of the Soviet project. However, the colonies themselves were considered successful, in their ability to reform Jews into productive collective farmers, and the settlements were allowed to continue on until the German invasion.<sup>198</sup> At this time one-third of the settlers fell victim to the Nazis, and the remainder were deported to the Soviet interior.<sup>199</sup> Still, JDC members referred to Agro-Joint as a point of pride during the tour. Moreover, the relationships between Americans and Soviets that it necessitated presaged many of the considerations that would resurface during the tour.

The entirety of Agro-Joint required close cooperation with the Soviet government. It required the organizers of the project to enter into a contract with the Kremlin, which ensured close cooperation between the two groups for the duration of the project. Given the widespread hostility towards the Soviet Union that pervaded the American Public in the 1920s, this was not

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<sup>195</sup> See Jonathan Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>196</sup> Kostyrchenko. *Out of the Red Shadows*, 35.

<sup>197</sup> Allan L. Kagedan, “American Jews and the Soviet Experiment: The Agro-Joint Project, 1924-1937,” *Jewish Social Studies* 43, no. 2 (1981): 153.

<sup>198</sup> Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*, 198.

<sup>199</sup> Kagedan, “American Jews and the Soviet Experiment,” 155.

an easy position for the organization to maintain. The United State government had no diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and the vestiges of the Red Scare still lingered in society. The association of Jews with communism in the recent anti-Red campaign further complicated the JDC's position, so that much of American Jewry perceived its actions as a mark of disloyalty.<sup>200</sup> Zionist organizations that had come under attack by Soviet authorities targeted JDC efforts as traitorous for collaborating with a government that perpetuated anti-Jewish policies. This did not deter the JDC from its work, but did prompt the organization to shift the work of Agro-Joint to a less public model, through leadership with fewer public ties to the JDC.<sup>201</sup>

For the JDC, resettlement of Jews seemed the only viable approach to providing them with relief and support. In the first place, Jewish immigration to the United States was severely limited in a series of bills passed in 1924 and 1937. In the second place, for political reasons the JDC did not see Palestine as a viable option for immigration. Though the organization's leadership was non-Zionist, it opposed immigration to Palestine for more practical reasons: lack of a desire to immigrate among most Soviet Jews, the enormous expense associated with immigration, and the fact that the political situation was no more stable for Jews in Palestine than in the Soviet Union.<sup>202</sup> For these reasons, the JDC believed it most sensible to make do with conditions within the Soviet Union, rather than encouraging emigration out. As World War II unfolded, this perspective led the JDC to embrace a policy of relief rather than rescue.<sup>203</sup>

Given this history of cooperation with the Soviet Union, it comes as no surprise that JDC leadership was involved in the planning and operation of the Mikhoels-Fefer tour. As a

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<sup>200</sup> Kagedan, "American Jews and the Soviet Experiment," 153-4.

<sup>201</sup> Kagedan, "American Jews and the Soviet Experiment," 155.

<sup>202</sup> Kagedan, "American Jews and the Soviet Experiment," 156.

<sup>203</sup> Leon A. Jick, "Review: *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939- 1945*," *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (1983): 1194.

culmination of this period of cooperation, the JDC donated \$500,000 to the Soviet Relief Fund in 1944.<sup>204</sup> James N. Rosenberg, Chairman of the JDC Board of Directors and Agro-Joint, was a member of the tour's National Reception Committee, and was involved in many of the negotiations with other Jewish groups that took place behind the scenes of the tour. He had visited the Soviet Union in 1926, on assignment for Agro-Joint, and investigated the possibility of settling European Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union after World War I. With approval from Moscow, Rosenberg arranged several meetings with Mikhoels and Fefer in New York, including a first engagement at his home in the New York suburbs,<sup>205</sup> and a private luncheon with the delegates for JDC leaders on July 14, 1943.<sup>206</sup>

Conversations between the JDC and the JAC delegates for the most part centered on two main themes. First, the two organizations clashed over the proper method of distributing JDC aid in the Soviet Union. The JDC was organized to provide aid specifically for Jews, and under this mandate it wished to provide monetary assistance to Jewish war evacuees in the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet Union resisted measures that highlighted Jewish particularity, or gave particular advantage to Jews, and so were not receptive to the suggestion of specifically Jewish aid. Working with Vyacheslav Molotov, then Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other diplomats, the JAC and JDC came to a compromise.<sup>207</sup> The JDC agreed to provide non-sectarian aid, so long as that aid was restricted to areas with high concentrations of Jewish war evacuees. Reflecting on the tour at the JAC plenum in April 1944, Mikhoels and Fefer noted that discussions with the JDC “were very successful and would doubtlessly result...in further

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<sup>204</sup> Kostyrchenko. *Out of the Red Shadows*, 35.

<sup>205</sup> Kostyrchenko. *Out of the Red Shadows*, 35.

<sup>206</sup> USHMM: Records of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee from the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), (1942-1948), Fond 8114, opis 1. RG-22.028M. 2011.17, Zakaz 3, Katyushka 211, Opis 1, Delo 828, 126.

<sup>207</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 76.

cooperation in the postwar years.”<sup>208</sup> Indeed, the JDC initiated its program by spending half a million dollars on assistance through the Red Cross.

The dynamics of these negotiations still remain murky. Writing in 1951, historian Solomon Schwarz took a particularly critical view of the JAC, portraying the organization as no more than a puppet for the aims of the Soviet government. According to Schwarz, upon their return, Mikhoels and Fefer “proudly told of their refusal to accept help from the American Jewish relief organizations so long as the latter insisted that their funds be spent solely in relieving the distress of Jews.” Moreover,

The announcement was made that the JAC had succeeded in persuading the Joint Distribution Committee to assist all evacuees “regardless of nationality.” The JAC thus not only persisted in its refusal to organize relief for the Jews of the Soviet Union, it also barred those outside the Soviet Union--for the most part American and British Jews--from coming to the relief of Soviet Jews unless all distressed Soviet citizens shared in the Jewish contributions.<sup>209</sup>

Schwarz’s cynical interpretation saw Mikhoels and Fefer gleefully outwitting the JDC to support the aims of the Kremlin. This assessment was no doubt influenced by the conditions under which the work was written. By 1951, the JAC had no longer existed for three years, its leadership arrested, and Mikhoels killed under questionable circumstances. By 1952 Fefer and most of the other leaders would be dead. It appeared at this time that the JAC was never free to operate independent of state control, and that its activities were strictly dictated by Kremlin. Thus, discussion with the JDC seemed in reality to be a demonstration of the Soviet government exerting its power through the JAC.

Writing two decades later, Yehoshua A. Gilboa presented a more cautious and nuanced interpretation of the negotiations. While not denying that Mikhoels and Fefer were following orders from the government, he ascribes to them no satisfaction in this process. Discussing

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<sup>208</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 83.

<sup>209</sup> Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet*, 204-5.

various possible schemes of aid distribution to Jewish versus non-sectarian recipients, Gilboa notes:

There is no knowing what Mikhoels and Feffer [*sic*] really thought of these suggestions, which sounded fair and reasonable enough; nevertheless they rejected them, presumably in accordance with their instructions. When Feffer [*sic*] reported on this matter to the JAC plenary session in Moscow, in April 1944, he incorrectly asserted that the “Joint” and other relief organizations “wanted to help only the Jewish population of the Soviet Union” whereas the JAC representatives “did not deem it possible to single out in this respect Soviet Jews from the fraternity of peoples making tremendous sacrifices along with us in the war.” However, this conflict appears to have been resolved, too, according to the information presented at that plenary session by Shakhno Epstein, the JAC secretary.<sup>210</sup>

It is clear that the Kremlin was eager to hear of the JDC’s intransigence, and refusal to help any non-Jewish Soviets. The delegates were sure to demonstrate their own loyalty to the Party line. Yet, as Epstein explained, an agreement with the two sides was reached, and the JDC ultimately proved willing to reach a settlement. From these accounts, it appears that only the Kremlin refused to compromise.

The other subject that pervaded discussions between the Mikhoels and Fefer and JDC leadership was the question of Jewish settlement in Crimea. This issue was of central importance to the Soviet authorities, who were suspicious of it from the start, and to the JDC leadership, for whom it hearkened back to Agro-Joint. Over the course of several meetings with the delegates, the JDC broached the subject of Jewish resettlement in Crimea, even going so far as to discuss the proposal with other Soviet diplomats.<sup>211</sup> The JDC leadership was pleased with the results of its meetings with the delegates, on both the issues of general aid and Crimean resettlement. They had high hopes for future collaboration, which were expressed in a letter to Mikhoels and Fefer from JDC Chairman Paul Baerwald, sent on the event of their departure from the United States in September 1943. Wishing to cement the personal relationship his organization had developed

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<sup>210</sup> Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry*, 71-2.

<sup>211</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 83.

with the delegates, which would doubtless be of use if the JDC hoped to carry out future work in the Soviet Union, Baerwald wrote:

It has been a most pleasant and lasting experience for me to make your acquaintance... and I hope in the future our relationship will continue and will prove fruitful. I know that in the past personal friendships between persons, though they lived far apart, have been able to produce beneficial results, and so I hope that from this new friendship also, particularly in a world which because of the new means of communication, has become one world, much good may eventuate.<sup>212</sup>

With these sentiments, Baerwald underscored one of the main aims of the tour, at least from the American side. The leaders of Jewish organizations understood that nothing could go so far as establishing friendship to ensure access to the Soviet Union. Aside from the convoluted aims of the Soviet government and the JAC, American Jews had a vested interest in the success of the tour, in terms of securing a productive relationship with the Soviet Union even after the two countries were no longer allies in war.

### *The Black Book Project*

Most of the agenda of the tour was intended to benefit the Soviet government, either directly or indirectly. However, Mikhoels and Fefer were able to use some of the time spent in the United States to pursue the exclusive aims of the JAC. One of the main projects in this regard was an effort to publish a book chronicling Nazi atrocities, called the Black Book. Competing accounts exist of the development of the publication, but it is likely that several different groups independently came up with the idea, and that the first official discussions took place shortly before the tour.<sup>213</sup> It appears that in 1942 Albert Einstein and B. Z. Goldberg brought the plan to the JAC, and Goldberg discussed the idea with Mikhoels and Fefer in the United States. The

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<sup>212</sup> USHMM: Records of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee from the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), (1942-1948), Fond 8114, opis 1. RG-22.028M. 2011.17, Zakaz 3, Katyushka 211, Opis 1, Delo 828, 202.

<sup>213</sup> Gilboa 72



participating organizations were to collect any relevant materials, which would be shared and published together in several languages. Within the JAC, Ilya Ehrenburg acted as the main champion of the project, independently collecting firsthand accounts from individuals in Nazi-occupied territories. The delegates telegraphed Solomon Lozovsky in Moscow, who used his political connections in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Committee to get official approval for negotiations on the project.<sup>214</sup>

An early point of conflict on the Black Book project arose over which organizations were to form its corps of leadership, which was determined during the tour. Along with the JAC, the WJC, under Maurice Perlzweig, and Va'ad Leumi, the main national Jewish institution in Palestine, were to be the main sponsors of the project. However, the JAC also wished to include the Writers' Committee, given Goldberg's contributions and the fact that it was the JAC's "most trusted representative abroad," which could be relied upon to "coordinate the preparation of the book and control its contents."<sup>215</sup> The WJC took issue with the inclusion of the Writers' Committee, and delayed announcement of the project because of this. For the WJC, it was inappropriate for the Writers' Committee to take on this role, as the group was not a "representative committee like [the] three original parties."<sup>216</sup> The exact thinking behind this rebuke is not clear, as the JAC was not, in fact, officially a representative organization. Though throughout its existence, the JAC struggled with the question of whether it was to be an official representative organization of Soviet Jews, it more often functioned as a propaganda organ or a cultural group. Its activities in fact greatly resembled those of the Writers' Committee, a group with stated interests in cooperating with the JAC. The WJC wrote in early 1944 that, as all discussions of the project were "based on a three party agreement," the inclusion of the Writers'

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<sup>214</sup> Kostyrchenko 66.

<sup>215</sup> Redlich, *War Holocaust and Stalinism*, 96-7.

<sup>216</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 26.

Committee would derail the plans.<sup>217</sup> However, it seems likely that the WJC merely did not want to dilute its influence over the project or, more importantly, as a close contact of the JAC. Still, the WJC stuck with the project, stating several months later that the Black Book project was a mark of “growing cooperation” between the two organizations.<sup>218</sup>

The Soviet government had mixed feelings about the Black Book project, and so encouraged the JAC to pursue a bifurcated policy. Within the USSR, the government minimized the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust, in line with its general hostility towards religion, widespread antisemitism, and desire to emphasize the unity of all Soviet people, not just Jews, as victims of the Nazis. On the other hand, outside the USSR, the Soviet government recognized the potential of the Black Book as a propaganda tool in its potential to mobilize support for the Soviet war effort to defeat the Nazis.<sup>219</sup> Ultimately, this governmental perspective would determine the fate of the project. An English version of the book was published in the United States in 1946, and in Palestine around the same time. A Russian version was approved and ready for publication in the USSR in 1947, but the authorities decided it was too dangerous, and withdrew approval. A Russian version was finally published in Jerusalem in 1980; the book was not published in Russia until 1991.

### *An Opposing Voice: The Forward*

The greatest source of opposition to the tour within the Jewish community came from socialists. Unlike the constituencies represented by the large Jewish organizations, the dominant group uniting American Jewish socialists was a newspaper--the *Jewish Daily Forward*.<sup>220</sup> The

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<sup>217</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 26.

<sup>218</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 26.

<sup>219</sup> Redlich, Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia, 66.

<sup>220</sup> Otherwise known by its Yiddish name, *Forverts*.

Yiddish publication was led by its editor, Abraham Cahan, the only English speaker among its founders, and an established American Jewish writer and journalist. From its establishment, the *Forward* walked a fine line between being a news organization and a social and political organization promoting the integration of Eastern European Jews into American society. A large portion of the publication's profits went to supporting socialist causes, including labor unions.<sup>221</sup> Similarly the *Forward* Association, the institution supporting the publication, was open to any member of a trade union or Socialist Party, with dues of one dollar per year.<sup>222</sup> However, Cahan was committed to ensuring that the publication retained its journalistic integrity, and did not slip too far into the realm of a political organization. Indeed, he spearheaded the efforts to drive the publication from being a "Socialist propaganda organ," to being "a newspaper first and only secondarily a political instrument."<sup>223</sup>

Cahan also engineered the *Forward* to have wide appeal, enforcing the use of colloquial Yiddish rather than elevated literary language. This approach received criticism from some, who felt that Cahan was "vulgarizing" Yiddish. Yet he embraced this charge, willing to see the language transformed in the interest of increasing its accessibility to a wider population. Indeed, Cahan and the *Forward* took a leading role in encouraging assimilation through language, and "far from working to keep alive a foreign language in America, is doing everything in its power to make their readers acquire the English language."<sup>224</sup> To this end, it published a series of fifty articles on the subject of learning English, which were reprinted and sold separately as a book.<sup>225</sup>

Cahan and the *Forward* also diverged from other Jewish leftists in their enthusiastic support of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Cahan saw in the New Deal the potential to implement a socialist

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<sup>221</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard, "America's Most Interesting Daily (1922)," in *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History* ed. Tony Michels (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 187.

<sup>222</sup> Villard, "America's Most Interesting Daily," 188.

<sup>223</sup> Villard, "America's Most Interesting Daily," 187.

<sup>224</sup> Villard, "America's Most Interesting Daily," 190.

<sup>225</sup> Villard, "America's Most Interesting Daily," 190.

program in the United States. While reprimanded by the Socialist Party for his public statements to this extent, Cahan was not alone in his support of Roosevelt. The *Forward's* support of the New Deal also spoke for such segments of American Jewish socialism as the Workmen's Circle, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and the Jewish Socialist *Verband*.<sup>226</sup>

### *The Impact of Organizations*

In the Jewish community, these organizations dictated opinions, priorities, and policies. Their leadership was drawn from the most prominent Jews of the day, whose names granted dignity wherever they were lent. The JAC and the Kremlin understood this dynamic, and hoped that by associating with these organizations and individuals, they could gain favor with the American Jewish public and the United States government. However, outside the confines of the Jewish community, these groups carried little weight. Even in the unlikely event that they managed to form a united front on any issue, it is unlikely that they could have meaningfully affected the course of politics, or the actions of President Roosevelt. One particularly cynical analysis, by Richard Breitman, assuages any doubts as to the reality of this political impotence:

From working in New York politics and running against [a] Jewish opponent...FDR knew that Jewish organizations were paper tigers politically. The elitist American Jewish Committee, which had some 350 members in the early 1930s, lacked a grassroots constituency. The supposedly mass-based American Jewish Congress was not a true membership organization, but a loose federation of primarily Eastern European fraternal and Zionist groups. These affiliates contributed little besides their names to the congress, which raised a pitiful \$98,000 in 1933. Like other ethnic and religious organizations of this era, Jewish groups had not yet built strong political infrastructures. The American Jewish Congress could sponsor protest rallies and parades, but lacked the funding, field staff, organizing skill, and community infrastructure to sustain a mass-based political campaign. Neither the congress nor the committee had formal lobbying or legislative branches, an office in the nation's capital, or political committees that endorsed or contributed to candidates. No leader had the power to sway Jewish voters, who

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<sup>226</sup> Daniel Soyer, "Making Peace with Capitalism? Jewish Socialism Enters the Mainstream, 1933-1944," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 217.

comprised only a few percent of the electorate. FDR expected continued support from liberal Jewish voters and donors, regardless of his response to demands from organized Jewry.

In the realm of national and international politics, then, the conflicts between organizations were futile, and the hopes of the Kremlin to cement a relationship with a politically influential group were doomed from the start. Within the Jewish community, however, these organizations were of utmost importance, and the tour promised to shape their work for years to come.

### **After the Tour**

The 1943 tour was the first and only experiment of its type. Mikhoels and Fefer returned to the Soviet Union in late 1943, and for the next few months shared their experiences abroad with Jewish and non-Jewish elements in the country. They presented a formal report on the tour to an enthusiastic audience at the Third JAC Presidium in April 1944. The JAC requested permission on several other occasions to send delegations abroad, and was denied each time. In addition to rising Soviet suspicions of the West, this was likely due to increasing hostility towards Soviet Jews from the end of the war, and a desire to minimize the particularism of the Jewish war experience, which would be strengthened through international solidarity. The JAC continued its activities, though reoriented itself towards domestic activity. Its work primarily focused on promoting the arts in the Jewish community, providing support and aid to refugees of the war, and reuniting families that had been separated. Throughout this period, the organizations with which the delegates had made contact continued their own operations. Periodically, their work intersected with the JAC, leading them to attempt to reestablish contact, and reignited the debates that had surrounded the tour. In 1948 Mikhoels visited Minsk to evaluate plays for a government prize. On the night of January 12, he was hit by a car and killed. Though at the time

circumstances surrounding the accident were unclear, it is now known that Stalin himself signed off on the assassination.<sup>227</sup> This set off the events of the decline of the JAC, culminating in the conviction and execution of many of the Committee's members for a number of charges related to subverting Soviet interests. Fefer was killed along with the others on August 12, 1952.

### *The AJC*

The divisions brought to light by Mikhoels and Fefer continued on even after the delegates left the United States. In one example, the AJC debated the merits of a signing a resolution in support of the Soviet effort to support European Jewry, and "expressing the admiration of the American Jewish Committee for the magnificent fight of the entire Russian people and our appreciation of Soviet policy toward the Jews."<sup>228</sup> Max Gottschalk, the AJC's foreign policy director, broached this subject with Rosenberg in October 1943, shortly after the delegation's departure. Rosenberg requested that the AJC put forth such a resolution at its October 24 Executive Committee meeting, in order to keep pace with the work of the Zionists, who had already made a similar public statement.<sup>229</sup> Rosenberg would only accept a resolution that had the endorsement of Judge Joseph Proskauer, the AJC President. In the past Proskauer had aligned himself against Rosenberg, and due to his position of influence had shifted the AJC in this ideological direction. Proskauer, like other AJC leaders, disapproved of Rosenberg's decision to act as honorary chairman of the JCRWR, as well as his Polo Grounds speech in this capacity. However, Rosenberg arranged a meeting between Proskauer and Mikhoels and Fefer, which may have changed the judge's opinion on the Soviet question.<sup>230</sup> According to Rosenberg,

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<sup>227</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 130.

<sup>228</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>229</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>230</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

there were two main reasons why a resolution in support of the Soviet Union was necessary: the Soviet Union was likely to be one of the only countries open to Jewish migrants after the war; and the Soviets would likely be influential in a peace conference at the close of the war, which had implications for the success of any international rights framework or other opportunities to support Jewish interests.<sup>231</sup> In order to reap these potential benefits, the AJC, as one of the most prominent American Jewish organizations, needed a good relationship with the Kremlin.

Proskauer made his support conditional on the agreement of Waldman and Gottschalk. On October 18 Waldman wrote to the judge, weighing in on the matter. Waldman discouraged Proskauer from expressing any public support for the Soviet Union, relying on many of the arguments in previous writings of the AJC. Though he did not dispute the advantages laid out by Rosenberg to be gained from a rapprochement with the Soviets, he denied the necessity of a resolution to access these benefits: “While there can be no doubt that it will be desirable for us to establish contact with the Russian Government for reasons indicated by Mr. Rosenberg, passing his resolution does not seem to me to be a necessary preliminary for such contact. I envisage proper relations between us and Soviet officials without our having made public statements.”<sup>232</sup> As he had over the course of the tour, Waldman shied away from any visible association of Jews with communist power. In addition to the familiar refrain of preventing the proliferation of the Judeo-Communist image, he raised the issue of the Soviet Union’s stance towards Judaism. Soviet policy had always taken a negative view of religion, which was expressed with particular fervor towards Jews. Given this state of affairs, “Many bodies of religious Jews [would] not readily welcome any whitewashing of Soviet religious policy, which would be implied in a pro-

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<sup>231</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>232</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

Russian resolution.”<sup>233</sup> Though Waldman insisted that he personally harbored no ill will towards the Soviet Union, and in fact was overcome with gratitude for the Soviet efforts in the war, from an official standpoint he could not condone any public support of the Soviet Union.

Waldman was also suspicious of the motives behind the resolution. It was clear to him that it was the product of the Polish group or their allies, known to be opponents of the Soviet Union on most issues. When it was presented to Proskauer, the resolution already had a number of sponsors that betrayed this orientation. These included the leaders of Freedom House, among whom George Field, the Secretary, had known ties to the *Forward*, the preeminent socialist newspaper and cultural center for socialist Jews. As Waldman cautioned, “You know how bitterly antagonistic the Socialists are to the USSR. I would not be surprised that the *Forward* group were among the cooks who boiled this broth.”<sup>234</sup> Representatives of the *Forward* had been conspicuously absent from Polo Grounds and the other events of the tour, raising questions as to why they and other Socialists would pursue a resolution in support of the Soviet Union with such conviction. Above all, however, Waldman returned to the AJC’s conviction that Jewish organizations had no place in international politics:

Without attempting to analyse the statement itself, it even at first reading reflects distinct partisanship and is very vulnerable in a number of places. But even if it were a judicious document proving beyond doubt that Russia’s unilateral appropriation of Eastern Polish territory was actually what these gentlemen characterize it to be, I would advise the Judge, nevertheless, to keep out of it...Whatever be the merits on either side, I think it would be a serious faux pas for the President of the American Jewish Committee to become involved in it.<sup>235</sup>

Even after Mikhoels and Fefer had left the country, the issues that had animated the debate surrounding the tour continued to polarize the American Jewish community. Attitudes towards the Soviet Union ranged from friendly to suspicious, cautious to manipulative. Above all the

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<sup>233</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>234</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.

<sup>235</sup> YIVO: AJC Morris Waldman Files. 1918-1947, RG 347.1.29 (EXO-29), Box 39.



question of whether American Jewish organizations had any place in the debate whatsoever remained unsettled.

### *The WJC*

After the tour, and especially as the war came to a close, Wise, Goldmann, and others in the WJC Executive Committee worked to maintain connections with JAC. Much of the collaboration involved locating family members and acquaintances of American Jews displaced during the war. As was the case with most of the major Jewish organizations, the WJC did its share of jostling for influence with the JAC. Given the Committee's status as the only officially sanctioned Soviet Jewish organization, ties with the group could bring both the practical benefit of facilitating work in and about the Soviet Union, and prestige to the organization that became the favored connection to the JAC. The situation was not lost on the WJC, which saw itself as the primary international contact of the JAC. This can be seen in a 1944 memo from Samuel Caplan, Secretary of the American Jewish Congress, to Dr. Maurice Perlzweig, Director of the WJC Political Department. The memo discusses a "statement of greeting" that the JCRWR wished to send to the JAC, which Stephen Wise was asked to sign. Caplan explained, "We agreed that if such a greeting is to be sent at all it ought to be sent by Dr. Wise on behalf of the World Jewish Congress."<sup>236</sup> With this decision, the WJC, with the support of the American Jewish Congress, intended to exert its dominance in relations with the JAC. It was unwilling to allow the JCRWR to co-opt its leaders, using the likes of Wise to advance their own positions. In the pursuit of influence and standing in the Jewish community, there was no room for collaboration.

In general, the WJC was more eager than the JAC to foster their relationship, and regularly extended invitations to collaborate on various initiatives. For example, on December

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<sup>236</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 44.

13, 1943, shortly after the delegates returned to the Soviet Union, Goldmann and Arieh Tartakower, the Secretary General of the WJC, sent the following cable to Moscow: “Regarding your promise during our conference please inform...your committee with us possible [*sic*] for locating refugees your country on request relatives here. On receiving your consent will start cabling enquiries [*sic*].”<sup>237</sup> They received no reply. Similar inquiries made in 1944 and 1945 also went unanswered. The WJC’s hopes that the tour had established a reliable channel of communication between the WJC and the Soviet Union were, evidently, misplaced. Initially the JAC remained communicative, and appeared to share the Congress’ commitment to collaboration. For example, a 1944 letter from the JAC Presidium to the WJC ended with: “we hope that our militant collaboration in wartime will continue and develop in postwar years.”<sup>238</sup> However, it soon became apparent that this was an aberration: “In general it can be said that the contacts before the visit of the Delegation of the Anti-Fascist Committee were fairly frequent, but later on they became less frequent and in 1945 and 1946 were rather sporadic.”<sup>239</sup> This sporadic communication did not improve after 1946.

One of the main topics of these often one-sided conversations was the JAC’s participation in the International Emergency Conference of the WJC in 1944. The leaders of the WJC hoped that, as the recognized representative of Soviet Jewry, the JAC would bring a valuable perspective to the conference. However, in answer to the invitation to attend, Mikhoels and Shakhno Epstein, JAC Executive Secretary, wrote on behalf of the Committee, “Since in coming months all prominent members our committee will be engaged in regions liberated by

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<sup>237</sup> Due to the constraints of telegrams, the language of these sources is often disjointed and grammatically inconsistent. USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 126.

<sup>238</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 41.

<sup>239</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 124.

Red Army we regret cannot send delegation to conference [*sic*].”<sup>240</sup> This invitation was one of several, to a number of gatherings of world Jewry orchestrated by the WJC, at which a Soviet Jewish perspective would have been welcome. The JAC repeatedly refused such invitations, with similarly vague excuses, which elicited frustration from the WJC: “So far, our ouvertures [*sic*] at closer relations with the Committee have been unsuccessful.”<sup>241</sup>

The JAC likely wished to attend these conferences, and indeed submitted multiple requests to the government to do so. At various times, it submitted requests to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to send delegations to France, Austria, Poland, and Romania. However, after Mikhoels and Fefer’s American tour, the Kremlin refused to allow JAC members to leave the country. A request to send Polina Gelman to the First World Congress of Jewish Students in Prague was denied because the government was unsure of the purpose of the Congress; a proposal to attend a conference of Finnish Jews in Helsinki was rejected because Finnish Jews were not significant enough to warrant a delegation; and a request to Mikhail Suslov, head of the Orgburo’s Foreign Policy Department, to send a delegation to the International Yiddish Cultural Movement (IKUF) conference in New York was similarly denied.<sup>242</sup> In 1944 the JAC sought permission to attend the WJC Emergency Conference. But after conversations with the Central Committee the request was withdrawn because, as Epstein explained, all parties feared it would be too Zionist in orientation. This apprehension of Zionist sympathies soon pervaded JAC discussions of the WJC: “Criticism of the WJC started to appear in *Eynikayt*. It was accused of taking a “neutral” stand in the growing rift between East and West and of being under the influence of Zionists.”<sup>243</sup> So strong was this distrust that the WJC was an

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<sup>240</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 54.

<sup>241</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 124.

<sup>242</sup> Redlich War Holocaust and Stalinism, 79-80

<sup>243</sup> Redlich War Holocaust and Stalinism, 82

item on the agenda of the 1948 Presidium meeting. Thus, unable to implicate its censors, and itself suspicious of the WJC, the JAC was forced to cite “engagement in liberated regions” to excuse itself from international obligations, even years after the end of the war, when the bulk of this work would likely have been concluded.

The decision not to participate in WJC conferences was not made lightly. Indeed, the Soviet government played an active role in this aspect of JAC policy, beyond merely denying requests from afar. Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet representative to the United Nations, even became involved in regulating the Committee’s dealings with the WJC. A 1947 memo noted a call to the WJC from Gromyko’s secretary, who explained, “The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee will be unable to participate in the Plenary Conference of the World Jewish Congress, since Article 123 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. grants equality of rights to all citizens of the U.S.S.R. without any distinction.”<sup>244</sup> The WJC was not satisfied with this excuse, which would seem not to preclude the JAC from participating in its conference. Indeed, equality of rights was a value shared by both the Soviet Union and the Congress. Leon Kubowitzki, head of the WJC Rescue Department, articulated this sentiment in a response to Gromyko: “May I observe that it is precisely one of the purposes of the World Jewish Congress to enable those Jewish citizens who are privileged to enjoy equality of the rights in their countries to assist the less fortunate Jewish communities in their struggle for the same equality in their respective countries.”<sup>245</sup> To the WJC, there was a clear contradiction between the Soviet Union’s commitment to equal rights, and the JAC’s refusal to participate in international conferences. It is unclear to what extent the WJC was aware of the JAC’s lack of agency in these measures. The Congress may well have known of the heightened restrictions imposed by the Kremlin, and only addressed

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<sup>244</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 163.

<sup>245</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 164.

requests to the JAC as a formality. However, it is also possible that the Soviet government disguised its control over the JAC to foreign observers.

Whatever the position of the WJC, the logic of Gromyko's answer was in line with broader Soviet policies, particularly those dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust. While the Soviet Union did make strides in promoting the rights of Jews, until it began its campaign against Jews in the late 1940s, this progress was achieved in the context of the betterment of all citizens. The ultimate goal was equal protections for all, to minimize difference, rather than to protect Jews for the sake of protecting Jews. The Kremlin strove to shape the narrative of the Second World War as a tragedy for the Soviet people as a whole, not a specifically Jewish one. The process of creating a united national memory of Soviet suffering in many cases served to erase the Jewish experience: "The authorities fiercely resisted all attempts to carve out a particularistic Jewish space within the all-encompassing myth of the war. Jewish perception of the uniqueness of their wartime experience threatened to undermine the universality of suffering and the ethnonational hierarchy of heroism, the twin pillars of the ethos of war."<sup>246</sup> Jews could not be seen as having suffered more than any other Soviet citizens, lest their experience be mistakenly perceived as more heroic than any other.

At the start of the war, there was some official recognition of Jewish suffering, and documentation in the Soviet press of Nazi atrocities with Jewish victims. However, the Soviet victory in the Battle of Stalingrad caused a shift in the official narrative, as the major theater in the war began to shift west. The euphoria of victory prompted a surge of "patriotic nationalism," ushering in the perception of the war as "the Russian motherland under attack from German

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<sup>246</sup> Amir Weiner, "When Memory Counts: War, Genocide, and Postwar Soviet Jewry," in *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, ed. Amir Weiner (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2003), 179.

invaders.”<sup>247</sup> There was no room for a specifically Jewish identity in this framing of the Soviet experience. In the press, though reports of Nazi atrocities continued, even these accounts were “de-Judaized”—the tragedy was made universal rather than Jewish.<sup>248</sup> However, throughout this time, the JAC’s Yiddish newspaper, *Eynikayt*, continued to document the Jewishness of the victims of the Nazis.<sup>249</sup> Thus, while the dominant narrative was one of universal suffering, Jews still had access to the knowledge of the particularity of their experience. Yet this perspective was available only to Jewish audiences who read Yiddish publications; both Jews and non-Jews read the opposing narrative in the Russian-language press.

This phenomenon can be seen here on a smaller scale. The Kremlin could not allow Jews to participate in international conferences, as that would mean that Jews were entitled to some special privilege, beyond that granted to other citizens. Official international travel was generally restricted, and breaking this restriction for Jews would have, in the Kremlin’s view, elevated them unjustly above others. Because the Soviet Union “grants equality of rights to all citizens,” there was no need for special action, or conferences, to discuss amelioration of the status of Jews. Jews were equal Soviet citizens, and so needed no protection. This stripping Jews of their Jewish experience began to permeate discussion of the JAC, even influencing the self-perception of members. In another letter from the JAC to the WJC, the former described itself as an organization “whose entire activity is devoted to the effort of strengthening the friendship of the Soviet people with the peoples of other countries, irrespective of creed or race.”<sup>250</sup> The complete absence of Jewish character here is telling. It is possible that Jewishness was omitted for the benefit of any censors or other officials who happened to see the letter. Still, the fact that the

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<sup>247</sup> Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 122.

<sup>248</sup> Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 167.

<sup>249</sup> Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 193.

<sup>250</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 108.

official Jewish organization felt it necessary to muffle its Jewishness speaks to the general climate in postwar Soviet society.

These issues also came to a head in another line of conversation, largely restricted to communications among WJC members. One of the WJC's main objectives in its relations with the JAC was to secure the Soviet organization as an official affiliate.<sup>251</sup> The Congress was composed of constituent organizations from around the world, and in countries where there was only one major Jewish body, the group was most likely affiliated with the WJC.<sup>252</sup> Thus, the JAC's refusal to join left a conspicuous hole in the Congress's base: "Of the Jewish communities in the world, the Jews in Soviet Russia are the only ones of the bigger communities that are not affiliated with us. Our viewpoint to this problem is an exclusively Jewish one and has nothing to do with any political party convictions. As I stressed above, we aim at the activation and cooperation of all the creative forces of the Jewish people."<sup>253</sup> Though the WJC claimed to be apolitical, this was a difficult position to maintain, and even more so at this point in time. The war was coming to a close, presenting problems of rebuilding lives and relocating displaced Jews. On top of this, the Soviet Union appeared as a growing threat, and the question of Palestine had become impossible to ignore. Suspicions of the Soviet Union could have been mitigated by increased contact between Soviets and others, but it was the last point that proved most troubling for the JAC.

The Committee's concern with the WJC's Zionist impulses was, apparently, not unfounded. Indeed, the WJC identified the same issue as driving a wedge between the two groups that could ultimately prevent the JAC from affiliating with it. However, the WJC perceived a change in 1947 in Soviet attitudes towards Palestine, shortly to become the state of

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<sup>251</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 124.

<sup>252</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 134.

<sup>253</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 123.

Israel. In a letter discussing prospects for affiliation of the JAC, the WJC identified among “new considerations which may possibly lead to a rapprochement”:

the essential change of attitude of the Soviet government towards the Palestine problem, which touches the very roots of the Jewish historic question. This change of attitude may open a new road to closer cooperation with the Jewry in Russia and a greater interest on their part in the question of Palestine and in questions concerning world Jewry, at least to a certain extent, and it may finally lead to an agreement with Soviet Russia on emigration of Jews from Soviet Russia to Eretz-Israel...It would be a great event if--following up the new trend of Soviet Russia regarding Palestine--representatives of Jews from that country would meet with the delegates of the other Jewish communities, thus paving the way for the inclusion of Jews from Soviet Russia in the process of our national revival and renaissance.<sup>254</sup>

Another observer noted similarly, “My personal impression was that they certainly now would not attack a pro-Palestinian policy, but on the other hand when I for instance asked him about news from Palestine I understood that they were very afraid about what was happening in the neighboring countries of Palestine.”<sup>255</sup> These assessments are somewhat superficial, as they assumed that a stated change in position on a contentious issue translated to a meaningful shift in policy, or that comparatively simple political issues were at the root the JAC’s suspicion of Zionism. Stalin and the Soviet Union were strong supporters of the establishment of Israel, which may have contributed to the temporary toleration of the JAC. This attitude towards Israel remained in place even after Stalin ordered Mikhoels’ assassination. However, by October 1948, less than a year after the above letter was written and ten months after Mikhoels’ death, this had all changed. A visit to Moscow by Golda Meir, serving as Ambassador of Israel to the Soviet Union, proved in Stalin’s mind that Jewish allegiances could easily shift from the Soviet Union to Israel. Tens of thousands of Jews attended a Rosh Hashanah appearance by Meir at the Moscow Choral Synagogue that, in the Kremlin’s eyes, demonstrated her hold on Soviet Jews. Indeed this marked a “crucial turning point,” as “Stalin’s growing suspicions against Jewish

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<sup>254</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 124.

<sup>255</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 171.



nationalism and Zionism were being visibly and dramatically substantiated.”<sup>256</sup> Fearing the potential for divided loyalties, Stalin shifted his position to be more hostile towards Israel. Thus, while the WJC letter may have accurately reflected the conditions of the time, to assume that these conditions would remain constant did not take into account the political realities of Soviet isolationism and fears of Jewish nationalism.

In the midst of this complicated landscape, with competing pressures from the WJC and the Soviet government, the JAC had to negotiate its own dealings with the Congress. The contradiction involved in this process can be seen in the WJC’s discussions with Paul Novick, editor of the *Morgen Freiheit*, a major American Yiddish newspaper with communist ties. Novick spent more than three months in the Soviet Union as part of a European tour in 1946. During this visit, he “was in constant touch” with JAC leadership.<sup>257</sup> In a meeting with friends in London, Novick mentioned that he had heard from his JAC contacts that “the World Jewish Congress had never been in touch with them.”<sup>258</sup> When the WJC got word of this, its leaders were troubled. Leon Kubowitzki, head of the Rescue Department, immediately contacted Novick to clarify the issue, stating: “I need hardly tell you that we have been in frequent touch with the [JAC] since, and before, the visit of Messrs. Schlomo Mikhoels and Itzig Feffer [*sic*]... We had every reason to believe that this Committee was genuinely interested in our activities as expressed in many congratulatory messages we received at the occasion of a number of our meetings and conferences.”<sup>259</sup> The apparent spurn by the JAC was worrisome particularly to the Rescue Department, which was charged with ameliorating the situation of refugees and missing Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Much of its energy was concentrated on the Soviet

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<sup>256</sup> Redlich, *War Holocaust and Stalinism*, 135

<sup>257</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 104.

<sup>258</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 103.

<sup>259</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 104.

Union, given the volume of Nazi atrocities committed on Soviet soil and to Soviet citizens. To carry out this work, collaboration with the JAC, as the official Jewish organization of the Soviet Union, was fundamentally important. Novick affirmed his observations in a reply to Kubowitzki:

I did not hear of any communications, or rather propositions received from the World Jewish Congress. During my conferences with the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee the World Jewish Congress was often discussed and I assumed that if any proposition had been received I would have learned about it. I might add that you are fully correct in believing that the Committee is genuinely interested in your activities. I have learned this during my stay in the Soviet Union.<sup>260</sup>

This report had contradictory elements, as it appeared that the JAC was interested in the WJC, while simultaneously denying any contact with the organization. There is little question that the WJC contacted the JAC repeatedly between the return of Mikhoels and Fefer and Novick's subsequent visit. The archives of the WJC make this point clear, preserving a series of correspondences sent from various members of the Congress, occasionally eliciting a response, though more often not.<sup>261</sup> Why, then, did the JAC refuse to acknowledge this relationship in conversation with Novick, a man who purportedly had an established relationship with the Committee? It is likely that the reasons were similar to those that governed all of its relations with the WJC. The JAC had to mitigate its desire to be part of the international Jewish community, given the reality of the constant threat of censure by the Kremlin. Unable to keep any of its work away from government eyes, the Committee's Presidium was forced to act as cautiously as possible. Its members worked to minimize the appearance of ties with Jews outside the Soviet Union, even as they resigned themselves to the fact that any meaningful collaboration with world Jewry was unlikely ever to materialize. Concerns about the government only compounded the JAC's reservations about the WJC and its Zionist tendencies. This environment

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<sup>260</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 105.

<sup>261</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344.

produced some senseless contradictions, such as the denial of any existing correspondence with the WJC.

Another visitor to the Soviet Union corroborated Novick's observation that the JAC was well apprised of WJC business: "To my great astonishment I must say that the Antifascist Jewish Committee was tremendously well informed about the activity of the World Jewish Congress and obviously or indirectly received copies of the more important letters of the Congress to its sections dealing with the coming conference."<sup>262</sup>

### *The JDC and the Crimean Proposal*

Upon returning to the Soviet Union, the delegates reported their discussions of Crimean resettlement with Rosenberg to Solomon Lozovsky, deputy-chief of the Sovinformburo.<sup>263</sup> Lozovsky was supportive of the plan, though some members of the JAC presidium were less so. These discussions evolved into the "Crimean Proposal," which was presented in a letter to Stalin in February 1944 by Mikhoels, Fefer, and Shakhno Epstein. The letter detailed a plan for a Jewish republic in Crimea, which not only had widespread support among Soviet Jewry, but also from the JDC and other American Jewish organizations,<sup>264</sup> which during the tour had pledged to provide assistance. The JAC representatives requested that a government commission be assembled to explore the proposal.<sup>265</sup> However, the Soviet government became increasingly hostile to JDC aid programs, ultimately preventing their functioning. Indeed, "The JDC aid project to the Soviet Jews collapsed before it took off."<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> USHMM: The World Jewish Congress, RG 67.014M. Reel 344, 169-70.

<sup>263</sup> Kostyrchenko. *Out of the Red Shadows*, 35.

<sup>264</sup> Louis Levine of the Jewish Council of Russian War Relief and B. Z. Goldberg of the Writers' Committee were also involved in the plan. Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 47.

<sup>265</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 46.

<sup>266</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 83.

The aims of the Crimean Proposal were never realized, but this was not enough for the Kremlin. The plan featured prominently in the charges later levied against the JAC, and investigations into the supposed espionage and treason of its members. After Fefer was arrested in 1948, he was subjected to intense interrogations on the activities of the JAC, which in large part focused on the Crimean Proposal. Fefer was tortured into confirming a “Crimean conspiracy,” including claims that Rosenberg wanted to create an American military base in Crimea for use against the Soviet Union.<sup>267</sup> He later denied these claims in his trial, modifying his testimony to claim that Rosenberg had only spoken of American interests in the Black Sea, Balkan Peninsula, and Turkey. However, this modified statement too was obtained under duress.<sup>268</sup> Scrutiny over the Crimean Proposal was not restricted to JAC members; Lozovsky too came under fire for condoning the plan. The official was charged for engaging in anti-Soviet action, after admitting to consulting on the proposal. Given Stalin’s keen interest in the case, the charges were too great for Lozovsky to overcome; he was executed along with the other members of the JAC.

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<sup>267</sup> Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 147.

<sup>268</sup> Kostyrchenko. *Out of the Red Shadows*, 35.

## Conclusion

The Mikhoels-Fefer tour was the pinnacle of the JAC's existence. It allowed the Committee to establish a presence on the world stage, and to become a sought after contact for world Jewry. However, the delegates' return to the Soviet Union marked the beginning of the end for the JAC. Its members were never again permitted to leave the country, which stifled their ability to work on behalf of Soviet Jews. Still, the JAC continued its efforts to foster the Yiddish arts scene, collaborated with other Jewish organizations to get the *Black Book* published abroad, and served as the central point of contact for Jewish relief after the war. But even these activities could not last; Mikhoels' murder and the shuttering of the JAC in 1948 brought the era of Soviet tolerance of Jews to a close. The establishment of Israel in 1948 meant that Jews now had a state that could compete with the Soviet Union for their loyalties. This proved too much to bear for Soviet Jewry, already the subject of increased government suspicions in the years following the war. The Kremlin finally embraced an anti-Jewish stance with its campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans," epitomized by the Doctors' Plot in 1953. In this environment, with its identity as the face of Soviet Jewry, the JAC had to be destroyed. In addition to Fefer and Lozovsky, most of the Committee's leadership was arrested, tried, and executed in 1952. Only Lina Shtern, a scientist, escaped with a sentence of forced labor.

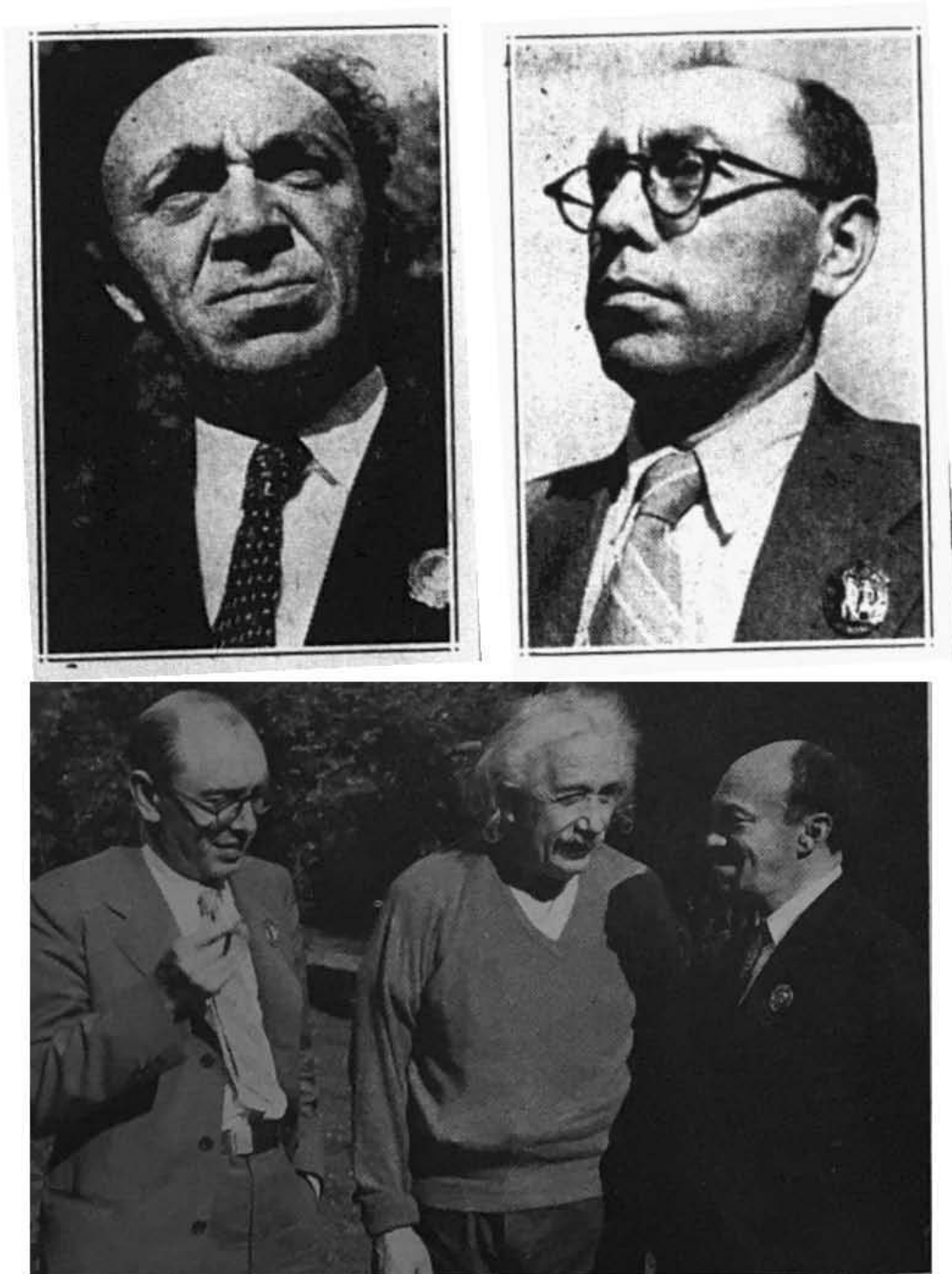
The tour introduced Mikhoels and Fefer to a world entirely different from the Soviet Union, though not without troubles of its own. When the delegates arrived in America, they found themselves in the midst of a landscape fraught with animosity and conflict. Though this was by no means their intention, Mikhoels and Fefer's presence exacerbated these tensions, giving the feuding sides ample issues to debate, and observers a point by which to orient their understanding. Reactions to the tour in the American Jewish press took many forms. A number

of publications offered little more than description and mild praise. But where journalists were more expansive in their writings, much can be gleaned from them about the climate of the American Jewish community. A wide range of opinions about the tour, the delegates, and the Soviet Union are present in the press. Some publications used the tour to highlight problems with American policies towards the Soviet Union. Others used it to further their own political agendas within the Jewish community. Still others saw the tour as an opportunity to reflect on the state of American Jewry. It is clear that there was no one reaction to the delegates in these accounts, just as there was no one representative publication, spokesperson, or political view for the community as a whole. This disjunction is also apparent in the records of American Jewish organizations. The internal politics of these groups was so consuming that one could almost forget the pressing issues of the rest of the world.

For all their talk of unity between American and Soviet Jews, Mikhoels and Fefer encountered an American Jewry characterized by internal tensions and factional conflict. While the delegates and their government sponsors were aware of opposing opinions in the American Jewish community, the full extent of the tensions that animated these differences were less clear to the public eye. This community could not hope to speak with a single voice, much less pledge unity to an entirely separate group, namely Soviet Jews. Thus, the tour's grand goals of political influence and permanent partnership to some extent were doomed from the start. Still, Mikhoels and Fefer were successful in raising funds for the war effort, and in building connections with certain segments of American Jewry. Moreover, the tour provided the concentration of media attention necessary to create a rich source for analysis of the tensions present in the American Jewish community. It is a wonder that the circumstances in the Soviet Union aligned to allow Mikhoels and Fefer to embark on their journey to the United States. But that moment of hope

also marked the beginning of the road to many ends—of the JAC, of Soviet-American friendship, of Soviet tolerance of Jews, and of the active membership of Soviet Jews in world Jewry.

**Appendix**



Top: Mikhoels and Fefer, *Jewish Review and Observer*, July 23, 1943, 1 (YIVO).  
Bottom: Fefer, Albert Einstein, and Mikhoels in Princeton. Cyrus Porter, *Jews have always fought for freedom*, New York: National Reception Committee to the Delegation from the U.S.S.R., 1943 (YIVO).



# דר. חיים זשיטלאווסקי און אייניקייט • מנשה אונגער

פארבאנד, האט דר. זשיטלאווסקי ארויסגעשיקט א דורף (אין יולי 1941) צו דער נאנצער אידישער פרעסע אונטערן נאמען: „א ווענדונג צו ארע אידישע קינדער דא אין לאנד.“

אין דעם דורף שרייבט דר. זשיטלאווסקי צווישן אנדערן:

„וואו אין דער וועלט זיינען מיר אנערקענט דערויבונג פאר אונדז אלע וויכטיקסטע מעגלעך קינדער? וואו ווערט פאר אונדז אויסגעמיטלט אן איינען אידישן קינד? וואו איז אנטשעמיטיות א שטאטלעכער פארברעכן? וואו זיינען פאר אונדז ארע וועלן אפן צו ארע פויגלע און נייסטווע פראפעסיעס פון לאנד? אין ערנען ניט אין דער וועלט האט מען ניט קיין אידישע נלייכערעכטיקונג אין אונדז נאך און אין אונדז פאלט זיי אין סאנעטוריאנער אין דעם ברוטישן דייטשדאמנענדיגן צו נייטפארן מירן מיט זיך אונטערשטעלן אויף סא וועטנאנדס זייט מיטן גאנצן הארץ, מיט א נאנצן וויילן, ניט מיט הויז צעשטארטענעם וויילן, דא דאסער קינדער וועלן פאר אלע קינדער פון דעם אידישן פאלק — ארע אן אן אויסנאם — דער האונד פון אונדזער פרעסע וועלן צו איינציילן און אונדזער פרעסע פארברעכן אין דעם לעבן פון דעם אידישן פאלק טאג דעכטן ניט געראטן וועלן (ס'קען ליפנהאן)!“

**איר קעמפט ניט איינען**

אין דעם בראדערסט, וואס דער אידישער שרייבער-האפטיגסט האט דורכגעפירט דעם נאנטן אקטאבער 1941 אלס ענטפער אויפן דורף פון באוועגטן אידישן, האט דר. זשיטלאווסקי צווישן אנדערן געוואלט:

„מיר זיינען מיר געווען פון איינער דורף נאך הייהר אין איינער האפט קעגן דער סאטע נעפער העכסטער טיפ פון אונדזער צייט, מיר הייהרן איינער אויסגעשטעלטע האנט און מיר פאר זיכערן אויף אן מיר זיינען מיט אייך אינעם האפט פון אירע ערנעכע פיינדיגטע-ברודערע יענטישן קעגן דעם טונג פון ציוויליזאציע. מיר וועלן גאן אין וואס איז אונדזער מאכט, אז אונדזער הייהר זאל זיין א שנעלע און א טיפטיקע מיר וועלן אין יעדן אידן איינע פראגען דעם נעראנט, אז דער נעכט פון דער שעה איז איינזייטיג פון אירע אידן, פון אירע פענער און פרויען, פאר איין נרויסן צויען: צו מאכן א סוף פון היטלער'ס.“

**אונדזער הייהר פאר דער דויטער ארמיי**

(איינצוג פון דר. זשיטלאווסקי'ס א רעדע, געהאלטן צום ערשטן יארטאג פון דעם „אידישן דאט פאר הייהר סאוועטידוואנער“, פארעפנט לעכט אין „פאר סאוועטן-פארבאנד, נומער 5, דעצעמבער, 1942.)

„אין אויגוסט 1941 האט די סאוועטישע אירקשיאפט ארויסגעלאזן א דורף צו ארע אידן פון

עפנטלעכט ארטיקלען וועלן דעם דאזיקן ענין. דאס קערנהל, וואס דר. זשיטלאווסקי האט פארוויס אויפן אידישן באדן אין אמעריקע, האט געבראכט פרוכט. די קרוין פון זיין אומערמיר'דיגער ארבעט איז די דעלעגאציע פון סאוועטישן אידישן, וואס איז איצט אנגעקומען — פראג פעכאר שלמה מיכאלס און דער פאעט איציק פעפער.

היידער האט דר. זשיטלאווסקי ניט-דערקענט צו זען די דעלעגאציע, אבער אומעטום וואו די דעלעגאציע וועלן אויפטרעטן, אין ארע ווינטער לעך פון לאנד, וואו דאס מעכטיקע ווארט פון די דעלעגאציע וועלן איינזייטיג וועט דערהערט ווערן, וועט שוועבן דער נייסט פון דר. חיים זשיטלאווסקי, וועלכער האט דער ערשטער גע- יוארפן דעם האונד: איינזייטיג צווישן נאנצן אידישן פאלק אין דער אינטיקער סאוועטישער צייט.

מיר ברענגען דא אויסצוגן פון דר. זשיטלאווסקי'ס וויכטיקע רעדעס און ארטיקלען וועלן דער אידישע איינזייטיג.

**דר. זשיטלאווסקי'ס ווענדונג צו ארע אידישע קינדער דא אין לאנד**

זי נאר עס איז אנגעקומען דער דורף פון איר דייטן אנטוויקלונגס-מאכטעס אין סאוועטן

דר. חיים זשיטלאווסקי, דער באגרינדער פון סאוועטן פון אידישע שרייבער, קינסטלער און וויסנשאפטלער אין אמעריקע, האט דער ערשטער דערפילט די נויטווענדקייט פון שאפן איינזייטיג אין דער אינטיקער שרעקלעכער צייט, צווישן דעם נאנצן אידישן פאלק און כפרט צווישן די צוויי גרעסטע אידישע קיבוצים — דער אידישער קיבוץ אין אמעריקע מיט דעם אידישן קיבוץ אין סאוועטן-פארבאנד — פאר א שנעלן נעהון איר בער די נעמעס שונאים פון דער מענטשהייט — דעם היטלער'ס און פאשיזם.

די דאזיקע אידישע פון איינזייטיג האט נע- טליעט אין הארץ פון דר. זשיטלאווסקי פאר די לעצטע פאר יאר און די ברענענדיקע פונקטן זיינען פארוואנדלט געווארן אין פלאקענדיקן פאקטן, ביז עס האט אינגאנצן פארעטראם דאס הארץ פון דעם נרויסן דענקער.

דר. זשיטלאווסקי איז געשטארבן אונטערן קאמף אויפן פראנט, זי א פשוטער סאלדאט. ער האט אויסגעוויקלט זיין נשמה אין קארנאלי, בעת ער איז געפארן אויף א טור איבערן נאנצן לאנד, צו קאלטן לעקציעס פאר די אמעריקאנער איר דיישע פאלקס-מאסן וועלן דער נויטווענדקייט פון איינזייטיג צווישן אידישן פאלק.

דר. זשיטלאווסקי האט די אידישע פון איינ- קייט אויסגעדרוקט דורך ווארט און שריפט-ער- האט געהאלטן צענדליקער רעפערעטן און פאר-

## אידישע דעלעגאציע מיט פרוי נאָראַ זשיטלאווסקי



דו שארדט טאג, ש. מיכאלס, פרוי נאָראַ זשיטלאווסקי, איציק פעפער, ג. באגרינדער, ר. וואלעסאוו, איטשע נאָרבערג, א. גראַספּעל, יאָנע סען, ביים קהל-בנים אין סאוועטישן קאנסטראַט



ORDER OF OBSERVATION

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

ELECT WIN THE WAR CANDIDATES

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

John Madden, Chairman of the Federal Committee to Elect Win the War Candidates has issued the following appeal to the members of the International Workers Order:

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

The forces opposing the present leadership, led by the United States Executive Committee of the American Labor Party in Brooklyn and the Bronx and led by a committee of 120 outstanding trade union leaders the support of every registered American Labor Party voter who wishes to see his party stand behind a consistent program of support in our President and in our policies.

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

The Women's Club of Lodge #217 is accomplishing an excellent task. On their own initiative the women decided to make up winter-proof bags with help and support from the people of the neighborhood.

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

HERE AND THERE Lodge #217 is also participating in their own initiative. They are helping to build a new Jewish Children's Center on the West Side. This is the first time an English speaking lodge is taking responsibility for holding a schedule.

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

The Jewish-American Section in Chicago has ordered a special meeting. This is "Yeast" for a start in their campaign to spread the basic building blocks on anti-Semitism. Los Angeles held one on 1,000 Union St. Pittsburgh one on 1,000 Union St. Chicago one on 1,000 Union St.

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

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אונדערע ליבע געסעס

דער באקאנטער וועג און אהויבו מארזן פינפטלעך 7 אויגוסט

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דער אדרו באגעגנום זיך מארזן מיט די מאנעמיש-אוידישע שריחים

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From left to right: B.Z. Goldberg, Mikhoels, Fefer, Goldberg's wife and son, at the grave of Sholem Aleichem. Cyrus Porter, Jews have always fought for freedom, New York: National Reception Committee to the Delegation from the U.S.S.R., 1943 (YIVO).

# בילדער פון דעם היסטארישן מיטינג אין פאלא גראונדס

דער בילדער פון דעם 47 טויזנט מיטגלידער רעדעס-און-דעמאנסטראציע, דעם 13. יולי, פאר די ארישע שווערן פון אמאנא-פארמא, שלמה מיטלעס און לויטנאנט-גנרעל אריש פאנער



אריש פאנער, דער פארשטאנדענדיגער פון אמאנא-פארמא



בילדער פון דעם היסטארישן מיטינג אין פאלא גראונדס



שלמה מיטלעס, דער פארשטאנדענדיגער פון אמאנא-פארמא

אריש פאנער, דער פארשטאנדענדיגער פון אמאנא-פארמא



אריש פאנער, דער פארשטאנדענדיגער פון אמאנא-פארמא

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**Frucht-Produkt**

די פרייטע פון דער פרייטע...  
 די פרייטע פון דער פרייטע...  
 די פרייטע פון דער פרייטע...

## מעשה'לעד וועגן מאס פער

געענע געשליסענע און הארד מאס פארמא, מיטגלידער פון פער

די פרייטע פון דער פרייטע...  
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 די פרייטע פון דער פרייטע...

## ארווארט אין דעם איינשטויטענדיגן און שווערן

אריש פאנער, דער פארשטאנדענדיגער פון אמאנא-פארמא

די פרייטע פון דער פרייטע...  
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Coverage of the Polo Grounds Rally in Morgen Freiheit, July 13, 1943 (YIVO).



Mikhoels and Fefer meet Paul Robeson (top) and New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia (bottom).  
Cyrus Porter, Jews have always fought for freedom, New York: National Reception Committee  
to the Delegation from the U.S.S.R., 1943 (YIVO).

# *Russia's Fighting People Sent Them To You!*

Four weeks ago, two Soviet citizens boarded a plane for the United States. They left a country in the midst of a cruel war, fighting against the Nazi menace to humanity. Today, they are here — 8,000 miles from their homeland. They are here because they — and the embattled Russian people who sent them as their official cultural ambassadors — want to bring you a living token of the spirit of unity which fuses the peoples of our two countries in their common fight against fascism.

## WELCOME THE OFFICIAL DELEGATION FROM THE U.S.S.R.

at the  
**POLO GROUNDS**  
8th Avenue and 157th St.

**JULY 8th**  
at 7 P. M.



*People's Artist of the U. S. S. R.*

**SOLOMON MICHOELS**  
*Chairman, Jewish Anti-Fascist  
Committee*

**ITZIK FEFFER**  
*Outstanding Jewish Poet  
of the U.S.S.R.*

**LEADERS OF AMERICA—DISTINGUISHED ARTISTS—Will Address the Meeting**



**PROFESSOR ALBERT EINSTEIN**  
*Honorary Chairman*

*National Reception Committee to the Soviet Delegation*

### Honorary Co-Chairmen

- |                            |                        |                             |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Isidore Asch               | George S. Kaufman      | Paul Muni                   |
| Eddie Cantor               | Rebeccah Kohut         | Max Reinhardt               |
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| Lian Faushtmayer           | Albert D. Lester       | Dr. Joseph A. Rosen         |
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| Herman Hoffman             | Georgi Pitagorsky      | Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver    |
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