

WHAT SOVIET JEWS WANT

When a few Soviet Jews decided to survey the opinions of Soviet Jewry, they immediately ran into a mind-shaking problem.

There is, of course, no way in the Soviet Union to privately duplicate material in the modern mode. Private persons cannot own mimeograph or photocopy machines. Such machines are mainly in official places, and under strict surveillance when made available to the public.

This was no surprise to anyone, but the fact is worth refreshing in our minds now and again. Strict control of idea-communication is the sacred heart of the totalitarian state. When Jews in the San Francisco area were recently asked whether "it is good for the Jews that the Constitution protects everyone's right to free speech, whether we like what they say or not," more than 9 out of every 10 agreed.

The survey of Soviet Jews, done by competent Soviet Jews, went through the arduous business of duplicating questionnaires with carbon paper. The Soviet authorities clamped down at some point, and seized all the material they could find. But the interviews proceeded, one set of findings was smuggled out.

The interviews were conducted only among those Soviet Jews who have *not* applied for emigration. However, it obviously only reached those who have *some* interest in identifying as Jewish. About 4 out of 5 interviewed said that they wanted their children to learn a "Jewish language" and to be listed on their passports as Jews. There is evidence that this population of Jews who have not applied for emigration, but who want to maintain some Jewish identification, is substantial in number.

Among *this* population, only about 1 out of 10 knows *any* Hebrew, but over half of those who do not know Hebrew would like to learn it. (About 1 out of 3 knows Yiddish, but there is not much yearning for it among those who don't know it.) About 4 out of 5 of these Soviet Jews say that they know Jewish history only superficially if at all, but 96 per cent of them say that they would buy a book on Jewish history if it would only appear in a bookstore.

You might be interested in comparing yourself with that particular Soviet Jewish population, on at least one question of Jewish knowledge. How many of the following people's names have *you* heard of: Moses, Sholom Aleichem, Herzl, Weizmann, Bialik, Shabtai Zvi, Martin Buber?

It might be assumed that at least 5 of those names are household words for every reader of this newspaper. But *over half* of those Soviet Jews recognized *fewer* than 5 of those names. Over a third of them recognized fewer than 4 names.

That population has obviously been influenced by the anti-religious bias of their society. Only 7 per cent say they believe in Judaism as a religion; although 53 per cent say that while they don't believe in it, they respect Judaism as a religion. And over half say they observe some of the Jewish holidays.

In other words, there is a substantial population, among those Soviet Jews who have *not* applied for emigration, who are anxious to identify as Jews, and to learn a Jewish history and culture of which they now feel deprived. All of this, of course, stimulates the desire to raise the slogan of cultural freedom as a goal for Soviet Jews; and to provide cultural materials for Soviet Jews. Both attempts have been made by American Jewry, indeed by San Francisco Jewry, without signal success.

Try again we must, although this effort cannot be allowed to substitute for efforts to increase the emigration rate. That emigration rate is still being held down severely by Soviet authorities, and the lifting of the grain embargo has removed one leverage point. And -- although 4 out of 5 of those Soviet Jews surveyed believe that a substantial number of Jews will remain as Jews in the Soviet Union -- the level of official anti-semitism continues to be ominous. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the official weekly of the Union of Soviet writers, has just accused Zionist organizations around the world of engaging in a "massive campaign to undermine the socialist foundations of Poland."