

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

In the September 1966 *Slavic Review*, Professor Bernard D. Weinryb makes a moderate and generally constructive comment on my review of Salo Baron's *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets* (*Slavic Review*, December 1965). I welcome his careful attention to my work and the new data which he cites. However, I am disturbed by a couple of instances in which he seems to mistake my intentions and attributes to me views which I don't hold.

(1) Professor Weinryb seems to feel that in suggesting that recent Soviet Jewish policy is not anti-Semitic (in what I consider the proper sense of the term), I was rendering a moral judgment. This is exactly what I went out of my way not to do, first, because I believe that the application of moral standards to the behavior of states involves severe philosophical difficulties and, second, because a moral judgment wouldn't have been relevant to the point I was trying to make. In the third place, if I were to make a moral judgment on this matter, it would certainly not take the form that Professor Weinryb gives it. Anti-Semitism and moral turpitude are not coextensive: it is entirely possible for a policy or an act to be highly regrettable and even morally reprehensible without being anti-Semitic as I am using the term. An unsophisticated person might gather from what Professor Weinryb says that in his opinion anything and everything which is not anti-Semitism is perfectly all right. He and I, and you (dear reader), know that this isn't what he meant, but are all other readers of the *Slavic Review* equally perspicacious? I wonder.

(2) Professor Weinryb correctly observes that "the situation in Soviet Russia of the post-Stalin era differs in certain respects from what one is accustomed to associate with anti-Semitism." This, according to me, is precisely the point. What I am attempting is to introduce "anti-Semitism" as a quasi-technical term for the precise description of an important social phenomenon.

"Traditional" anti-Semitism, as a political policy practiced in western Europe during the Middle Ages and in tsarist Russia, Poland, Austria-Hungary, and Germany in more recent times, involved the imposition of civil and juridical disabilities on Jews as individuals, and sometimes the physical persecution of individuals as Jews. This is pretty clearly not what is happening now in the Soviet Union. Anti-Semitism also involved (at some times and in some places) the systematic fomenting of Jew-hatred among the non-Jewish population on a religious or cultural basis. There have been claims that this has occurred in the Soviet Union, but the evidence, at least for the recent period, is in my opinion far from conclusive. Most of the data cited by Professor Weinryb and other recent writers on the topic concerns the almost complete suppression by the Soviet government of Jewish (more properly, Yiddish) culture. My position would be—although there was no space to develop this in the review—that this is largely irrelevant to a rigorous definition of anti-Semitism, and I would support this position by the following line of reasoning. A policy which furthers the sociocultural assimilation of a given category of the population, and which accordingly does not provide for their sociocultural autonomy, can be considered hostile to that category only if it is held to constitute an "ethnic group" or a "nationality." Otherwise, for example, we would have to categorize a policy of racial integration in this country as anti-Negro. I would contend that Jews as a whole—and even Russian Jews as a whole—fail to

meet the criteria for an ethnic group or a nationality for any one of a number of reasons, although certain individual groups among them may meet these criteria. Some of these groups, in fact, like the Iranian-speaking Mountain Jews of Dagestan or the Tatar-speaking Karaim of the Crimea, are treated by the Soviet government as separate ethnic groups as far as their size permits. To begin with, Jews as a whole have never within recent times had political or territorial unity; some Soviet Jews apparently still speak Yiddish while others do not; most of the peculiar culture of the East European Jewish pale, I would contend, is the product of centuries of oppression and caste status—as is shown by its rather rapid disappearance in this country, and in general, where the caste status of Jews no longer applies.

We have no reliable information on how many Soviet Jews would care to preserve the remnants of the peculiar *shtetl* Jewish culture of Eastern Europe if given an opportunity. Judging by the eagerness with which the Jewish younger generation abandoned it during the 1920s, my guess would be that the number is not large.

One final point: Soviet census figures show that a considerable number of people in the last census designated Yiddish as their “native language.” I have recently been told that in Soviet usage this expression means “the language spoken in the home when they were children”—which, in the case of people of middle age or over, obviously need not coincide with any language now used by the individual. This point remains undocumented at the moment, but it fits well with the distinction drawn in the Soviet ethnographic and demographic literature between “native language” (*rodnoi iazyk*) and “vernacular language” (*razgovornyi iazyk*); the sources I have seen fail to explain this distinction. The citation of Soviet census figures on native language may easily confuse the American reader, if he is unaware of the special sense in which Soviet people use this term.

October 27, 1966

STEPHEN P. DUNN
Institute of International Studies
University of California, Berkeley

TO THE EDITOR:

Professor Weinryb's statement that “Soviet Jews are discouraged from having any contact with Western Jews” (“A Note on Anti-Semitism in Soviet Russia [Post-Stalin Period],” *Slavic Review*, September 1966, page 526) is a remarkable illustration of the Editor's comment in the same issue on a manuscript he had received: “What else, besides these rather drab sources, has this author been looking at in recent years?”

This summer I made my fourth visit to the USSR. Contact with Soviet Jews came both on their initiative and my own, and in two instances might be described as having come on the initiative of the authorities, as both the guide-interpreter assigned to my random group of tourists (British, French, American) and the Intourist man in charge of the Volga River tour I took (on which West Germans were the most numerous group) were Jewish, the former most distinctly so both by name and appearance.

In Kiev, as my wife and I were riding by bus to the University to look up an exchange researcher there who had just returned home after a year at Berkeley, a ruggedly handsome man in his mid-fifties asked, in Hebrew and in the hearing of the other passengers, whether my wife spoke that language. She replied, in Russian,