

FACT AND OPINION

by SAMUEL SPIEGLER

. . . IN ALBUQUERQUE?

FOR a "dying language," as it has been called, Yiddish shows amazing vitality. Those who are preparing for its early interment would do well to journey to Albuquerque, New Mexico—of all places—and sojourn there briefly with the Jewish community of 700 families and the Yiddish Club of Albuquerque.

The club is in its seventh year. Last June it put on six performances (not counting a "post-season" showing for the delectation and amazement of delegates to a regional B'nai B'rith convention) of Peretz Hirshbein's *Grine Felder* and it is making plans to present Sholem Aleichem's *Dos Groise Gevins* next spring. By now, the company are a bunch of old pros, having taken their first bows in Aleichem's *Der Get* in 1966, followed by *Tevyeh* in the following year. All the performances have been given in the 50-seat Old Town Studio Theater, not only to the acclaim of Yiddish-speaking Albuquerqueans, but to rave reviews in the local newspaper, and all were sell-outs at \$2 a ticket.

It all started when Mrs. Maurice N. Rosenthal, a convert from Lutheranism to Judaism, ran across a copy of Uriel Weinreich's *College Yiddish* among her husband's books and decided to teach herself the language—which she did, becoming proficient in reading, writing

and speaking. Mr. Rosenthal, who had bought the *College Yiddish* out of nostalgia but never done anything about it, was engaged by his wife's enthusiasm, and they embarked together on the serious study of his *momma-loshen*.

After six months or so, the Rosenthals began to speak to other Jews about the idea of social gatherings with Yiddish as the medium of conversation. They enrolled one couple, then another and eventually there were ten members, representing three generations, who met to talk, play a few Yiddish records and read aloud articles from Yiddish papers. Thus, the Yiddish Club of Albuquerque was born in 1962.

As time went on, the program was expanded to include readings in Yiddish classics, development of a library and participation by guest speakers from New Mexico University, which has a number of faculty members who are fluent in Yiddish.

Today, Maurice Rosenthal—himself a third-generation American, whose parents (Bostonians) knew some Yiddish but spoke it rarely—is planning to conduct weekly Yiddish classes in his home for young Jews. He needs a reservoir from which to draw actors for the Club's theater, he explains. Six young Jews have agreed to attend the classes and four more have indicated interest.

Another projected idea is formation

of a Jewish People's Choir, a possibility stemming from the settlement in Albuquerque of Ben Yomen, who has been working in Yiddish culture for 50 years. He was arranger for the Artef Yiddish theater in New York and has formed Jewish people's choirs in New York, Philadelphia and Miami Beach.

Mr. Rosenthal said the club has had a significant impact on the linguistic practices of its 12 hardcore members and 50 peripheral participants. He reported that they speak Yiddish in private and in public and that Yiddish is a normal medium of telephone communication "and, most importantly, it is the language we use during Jewish holidays when we wish our celebrations to have the distinctly flavorsome quality of Jewishness."

He is so convinced that Yiddish has a future in America that he has written and published a 52-page illustrated *Guidelines for a Yiddish Club*. It includes information on how to start such a club, how to create a Yiddish theater, as well as listings of records, books, organizations, program materials, films, Yiddish schools, camps and resorts and related information.

HOMES FOR AGED URGED TO IMPROVE CARE OF MENTALLY IMPAIRED

ONE-THIRD of all residents of old age homes for Jews have moderately advanced mental impairment and an additional one-quarter severe mental impairment. Residents of such institutions are "now older as a group, better educated, more likely to be on public assistance, and with a shorter life expectancy than nine years ago."

Programs for such residents frequently are inadequate, according to a survey presented to the 37th General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Fed-

eration and Welfare Funds. A number of the homes "should offer their residents more convenient and comfortable surroundings," the study indicated. "Their programs should be more personalized and less formal." Programs for the mentally impaired, even those recognized as such, "are often not as good as they should be," according to the study. Homes do not always give attention to, or apparently recognize, "the larger proportion of their residents with some degree of mental or emotional disorder."

The study recommended that such homes "should foster close, warm relationships among their residents" and seek to be "more personal and homey and less like nursing centers or impersonal mass shelters." The study noted that residents who maintain continuing ties with relatives and friends "make better adjustments than those isolated entirely from their former contacts."

The three-year project, "Treatment and Prevention of Mental Impairment of the Aged," was conducted from 1964 to 1967 by the CJF'WF with funds from the National Institute of Mental Health.

CENSUS FINDINGS ON JEWS

SOME findings of the U. S. Census Bureau's 1957 sample study on social and economic characteristics of major religious groups are:

96 percent of Jews live in urban areas
Jews have the highest median age—44.5 years, compared with 40.4 for the country as a whole

Where the husband was Jewish, 94.2 percent of the wives were Jewish

Where the wife was Jewish, 97.2 percent of the husbands were Jewish

Jewish women have the lowest number of children—1,598 per 1,000 women—compared with 2,210 for Roman Catholic women, and 2,206 for Protestant women.

ORGANIZATION OF THE POOR— JEWISH AND NEGRO

JEWISH-NEGRO "confrontations" have been much in the news of late—and even more, perhaps, in the projections and speculations of pundits and seers. To those who continue obdurately to seek opportunities for constructive resolutions of conflict, the outcome of at least one such recent confrontation affords encouragement.

In the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, Negroes and Jews clashed some time ago over the structure and composition of an anti-poverty organization for the area.

Crown Heights is one of the city's 24 designated poverty areas. It has about 225,000 residents, of whom 125,000 are Jews, many of them members of Hasidic sects. The Jewish residents include a substantial number in income categories defined as "poor" by the Community Development Agency, a unit in the city's Human Resources Administration, the central agency for all city anti-poverty programs. Elections were held in October, 1967 in three schools in the section to choose a planning committee which, in turn, was to organize a Community Corporation to represent Crown Heights residents in seeking funds for poverty projects. Jewish participation in the election was organized by the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council.

The JCC contested the election in part, charging intimidation and harassment of Jewish would-be voters. The JCC asserted that Negroes from outside the area had formed a human chain to bar voters at one school and that threats to life and property had been voiced against the white voters. The challenge was upheld by the CDA which ordered a new election. Twelve Jewish candidates for the 24 posts on the planning committee were elected in the undisputed

phase of the October 30 balloting. The second election was held last May and resulted in the choice of eight Negroes who, together with four Negroes chosen in uncontested parts of the October 30 election, make up the Negro representation for the section.

The planning committee at last report was functioning smoothly under a Chasidic Jew as chairman and a Negro director who has two associate directors, one Jewish the other Negro.

BLACK FEDERATIONS

HERE and there around the country, for better or for worse, Jewish community organizations are encouraging and assisting with the formation of Negro, or black, federation-like structures in their communities. Here and there, questions have been raised about this. The federation concept, as it has developed over the years to encompass Jewish community-wide participation and involvement in planning and providing a variety of social services, giving suitable expression to the Jewish community's identification with and concern for Israel and for Jewish communities in other parts of the world and playing an appropriate role in the pluralistic democratic system in our nation, has served admirably the purposes and aspirations of the Jewish group in America.

Does it follow that it is a sound or desirable prototype for organization of the Negro community, either from the point of view of Negroes as a group or from the point of view of the nation as a whole? From both points of view, the formalization through structured organization of a pluralism embracing race (or skin color) as well as religion, ethnicity, national origin and cultural-historical self-identification can be deemed to hold

dubious if not plainly dangerous potentialities. Our pluralism is an imperfect one in which most groups approach only approximately, at best, an optimal balance between integration into the whole society and the maintenance of a distinctive separateness. Paradox and contradiction are present in many of our social processes and institutions. Should we not consider carefully before adding to them?

MADRID'S FIRST NEW SYNAGOGUE IN 600 YEARS

THE consecration last December of the first synagogue built in Madrid since the 14th century was widely reported. Less observed was the renaissance of Spanish Jewry that has occurred during the past decade.

Over 8,000 Jews now live in eight communities in Spain, the largest concentrations being in Barcelona, Madrid and Malaga. Ten years ago there were only 3,000 in all Spain. The Madrid community has grown the fastest, from 300 Jews in 1959 to over 2,500 today.

The new synagogue-center, the opening of which was marked by announcement of annulment of the 1492 law under which Jews were expelled from Spain, includes a main synagogue seating 550, an auditorium, lounge, classrooms, a smaller synagogue and recreation room.

Many of the Jews now in Madrid are descendants of those who fled to North Africa in the 15th century. They have moved here from former Spanish Morocco in the past ten years. Among them were a group of young business and professional men, under whose leadership a whole range of community services—including kindergarten, day school, vacation camp, two youth clubs and Talmud Torah classes—have been developed.

A RIGHT WING JEWISH JOURNAL

THE much-noted shift toward the right in political and social attitudes has—not surprisingly—involved some Jews, some of whom have discovered an affinity with the John Birch Society and some of whom voted for Wallace. They are a small part of the American Jewish community, but on the whole a prosperous part, and they have an organization and the organization has a house organ. The latter is called, inspiringly, *Ideas* and it is published by the Jewish Society of America. In its first issue, it describes itself as a “journal of conservative thought” and declares that its purpose is to “break the shackles of fear which have bound much of the Jewish community to the doctrinaire liberal philosophy which has failed so dismally to deal with the nation’s ills.”

In a restrained critical note on the new journal, a memorandum circulated by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations says that it “represents the paranoid views of a rag-tag band of segregationists, Birchitees and kooks. Putting a Jewish label on these ‘ideas’ doesn’t make them any less idiotic.”

JUDAICA COURSES IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

THE number of full-time college and university faculty in America teaching Jewish thought and history is more than 75, compared with fewer than ten before 1955, according to the National Foundation of Jewish Culture. Besides, there are some 200 scholars offering special courses in Judaica.

The Foundation is conducting a survey to gather information for a directory of programs of Jewish studies available at the college level. It also will try to formulate criteria and standards on which to base determinations of the

competence of scholars to teach Jewish studies in American colleges and universities.

Letters to the Editor

To conclude the running correspondence between Levin and authors—see September and December issues of the *Journal*. *Morris Levin to the Editor, November 5, 1968:*

“I certainly agree with Mr. Greene’s feeling that they could not have refined the material further, . . . because it might have violated confidentiality. . . .

“I regret that the NAJCW was not able to find time for the paper to be presented. . . . However, I want to caution that since the data was not fully available—I mean by this the refinements that I suggested—the discussion could go off on a tangent which may or may not be appropriate.

“ . . . I believe we are most willing to look at facts objectively. The facts, however, have ways of appearing quite different in different studies. For example, the facts in a survey conducted by Gerald Bubis of faculties of schools of social work indicate no bias toward Jewish Community Centers for either their sectarian purpose or because they serve middle-class clientele. The same survey taken by Sandy Kahn which in-

dicates that Center professionals feel that faculty do have negative views toward the Center is not supported by response of faculty to the questionnaire, so that there is a vast difference in perspective. On the other hand, as part of a study done by Harold Robbins, faculty people responded in the same significant percentage to a negative judgment made of Jewish Community Centers for both their sectarian purpose, the character of their middle class clientele, and the nature of some of the program services offered. By the same token, in the study done by Bernard Scotch, one-third of all social workers who have passed through the Chicago Jewish Community Centers, or who are still employed by the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago perceive that the faculty had a negative attitude toward their employment in JCC’s.

“I would assure Mr. Greene and his colleagues that we are most interested in looking at the situation objectively. I believe that I can speak for the National Association of Jewish Center Workers that it would be our hope to engage in continued and serious discussions with faculties of schools of social work toward this end.”

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. . . AND SO let us regard this little tempest as abated.

—Ed.