

Toward the end of 1952, the net began to close around us more tightly. On the eve of December 5, the anniversary of the Soviet Constitution, the wives of three Jewish personalities were arrested. Knowing the predilection of the Communists for preholiday arrests, I paid an evening visit on one of my childhood friends and stayed with her until daybreak. On my return home, I saw the silhouette of my mother through the window. She made a sign to me, which, as it turned out, I misunderstood. I thought they had come for me, and I took off as fast as my legs could go, driven by a visceral fear and heedless of the absurdity of my action. I returned home a few hours later to find that my fears had been unwarranted; it was not yet my turn.

In connection with the dissolution of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, only Feffer's wife was taken, shortly after the arrest of her husband. What exactly were the MGB's motives for that, it is difficult to say. But Itzik Feffer's fate is most revealing. In 1950, his daughter, who was still free and only later was sent into exile, at the same time we were, was ordered to deliver a parcel for her father: a pin-striped suit, a checkered tie, and a few delicatessen items. When the news became known it was interpreted as a favorable sign, and caused a considerable stir among the wives whose husbands had been arrested. It meant that Feffer was alive at least, since no one but himself could have been so specific in requesting a particular suit, a particular tie, and the Jewish salami he had such a fondness for.

It was only a few years later, after my return from exile, that I learned the story behind this parcel. The information came from an entirely reliable informant

whose name I cannot reveal. In 1950, the famous American black singer Paul Robeson, whom Feffer had met in the United States on his wartime tour there, came to Moscow for a series of concerts. By that time, rumors had already begun reaching the West about the fate of Jewish writers in the Soviet Union, and Robeson was anxious to verify them. He asked his hosts to arrange a meeting with Feffer, who was then brought from prison to Robeson's hotel. It can be safely assumed that Feffer said nothing to his American friend about prison; he dutifully performed the role that the MGB had given to him. This did not, however, alter his fate: he, too, was shot, a victim of the postwar Stalinist purges.