

Presiding Officer: Which plays were included in the theater's repertoire?

Fefer: Classic Yiddish plays, including works by Sholem Aleichem; Shakespeare's *King Lear*; as well as contemporary works—Broderzon's *On the Eve of a Holiday* and my play, *The Sun Does Not Set*, about partisans. In that play I let some nationalistic mistakes slip in, contrasting Jews with Germans. Then there was Belenkovich's play *The Submarine Captain*. Also the play *Freylekhs* (Happy Tunes), which is a variety show of folk themes. This is a play depicting old rituals and customs, focusing on days gone by as the golden days of the past. Mikhoels was the theater's artistic director.

The newspaper *Eynikayt*, which published nationalistic materials. I personally published about one hundred and fifty columns there, targeted mostly at reactionary circles and warmongers.

The Yiddish Section of the Soviet Writers' Union, which organized evening programs at which nationalistic works were read and recited.

Presiding Officer: Defendant Fefer, are you familiar with the documents produced by the expert commission about the committee's nationalistic propaganda? That biblical images were exalted? That Jews should be treated as a separate class based on blood? All this was disguised with Soviet slogans, but in fact, proletarian internationalism was replaced with cosmopolitanism.

Fefer: There were no conversations about cosmopolitanism.

Presiding Officer: I am referring to the expert commission's conclusions.

Fefer: It would be wrong to say that its activity was replaced with nationalistic activity. The committee distributed a large number of worthy articles, but there were some nationalistic ones mixed in among them.

Presiding Officer: What testimony can you give in regard to this aspect of the committee's activity?

Fefer: I have already testified about that. I spoke about the Crimea, about making appeals to Jews all over the world without regard to class distinctions.

Member of the Collegium: Tell about your activity, about your articles, and about how you glorified nationalism.

Fefer: I have to say before the court that while there may have been times when my public activity was contaminated with nationalistic ideas, this affected my creative work least of all. My literary work is not besmirched in this way. There were individual cases of nationalistic errors. For example, the poem "I Am a Jew," cited here, and to that could be added another two or three poems that are nationalistic in tone.

Presiding Officer: Why do you consider these errors? You said earlier that you were raised in a spirit of nationalism, and especially after the 1930s the leit-motif of your work was the struggle against Jewish assimilation. This is not an error; this is a consistent line.

Fefer: I have given detailed testimony about this, touching on my public activity. As for my literary work, I was one of the first Yiddish poets to write about the Soviet Motherland, about the Red Army, about Donbass and Dneprostroy.²⁷

Presiding Officer: Is it possible to be a nationalist and write Soviet works?

Fefer: No, in poetry that cannot be done. A sage once said that poetry is the mirror of the soul. I wrote as my soul prompted me. I published around thirty books. My nationalistic tendencies came out in the following ways: I said that I love my people. Is there anyone who does not love his people? I wanted my people to have what all others had. And when I saw that everything was being closed down, everything was being eliminated, this pained me and made me rise up against Soviet power. This was what motivated my interest in the Crimea and Birobidzhan. It seemed to me that only Stalin could correct the historical injustice committed by the Roman kings.²⁸ It seemed to me that only the Soviet government could correct this injustice by giving the Jews back their nationhood. I had nothing against the Soviet system. I am the son of a poor schoolteacher. Soviet power made a human being out of me and a fairly well known poet as well.

Presiding Officer: In your poetry you make various ancient allusions, like "Samson's hair," "Bar Kochba's appeal," "the wise wrinkles of Rabbi Akiba," "the wisdom of the Biblical Isaiah," and "the thoughts of our splendid Solomon the Wise." Where is the culture of Soviet people to be found in all of this?

Fefer: There is much wisdom in the heritage of any people. I see no reason to repudiate Solomon. But I have said already that we drank our ideals from the goblet of Stalinism, and we confirmed that the Slavs were our friends. My poems were focused on the idea that we would still dance on Hitler's grave. Let me remind you of my talk at the rally in New York. In my speech I held up Pokryshkin²⁹ as an example of someone who represents all peoples. You can examine this speech. It was not as good as it could have been. I could have phrased it better, for he was not the only one who defended Moscow.

Presiding Officer: You still keep on spreading the exceptionally nationalistic idea that the Jews suffered more than anyone, don't you?

27. Donbass refers to the Donets Basin in the Ukraine, the site of important coal-mining operations. Dneprostroy refers to an enormous hydroelectric station near Dnepropetrovsk, in the Ukraine. These projects were routinely trumpeted as triumphs of socialist development.

28. The Roman emperors Vespasian and Titus commanded the troops who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and dispersed its Jewish inhabitants throughout the Roman world. This was the beginning of the Jewish diaspora.

29. Alexander Pokryshkin (1913–1985) was Stalin's favorite pilot. He was named Hero of the Soviet Union three times during the war.

Fefer: Yes, I feel that the suffering of the Jewish people has been exceptionally great.

Presiding Officer: Were the Jews really the only ones to suffer during the Great Patriotic War?

Fefer: Yes, you will not find another people that has suffered as much as the Jewish people. Six million Jews were destroyed out of a total of eighteen million—one-third. This was a great sacrifice. We had a right to our tears, and we fought against fascism.

Presiding Officer: But you did not simply weep over this. You used it as an anti-Soviet activity. The committee became a center for nationalistic struggle.

Member of the Collegium: During the investigation you evaluated your nationalist work more concretely. In volume 46, page 37, it says that the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee carried out nationalistic activity, had close contact with Zionists, and became a nationalistic center. Is this correct?

Fefer: Correct.

Presiding Officer: This is from the record of the expert commission.

Fefer: I do not feel that this contradicts my testimony.

Presiding Officer: Mikhoels said that under the cover of the committee you were supposed to unite the Jewish population of the USSR and connect more closely with Jews abroad in the struggle for your rights.

Fefer: He said that we needed to use the committee to bring Jews into closer touch with Jewish culture, rally Jews around the committee, and make contact with Americans in the struggle for the rights of Jews.

[The presiding officer of the court, alluding to testimony that Fefer gave during the preliminary investigation, asked him to describe Markish and Kvitko and touch on the latter's activity as director of the Yiddish Section of the Soviet Writers' Union.]

Presiding Officer: Are you familiar with Bezymensky's³⁰ testimony about the Yiddish Section's activity?

Fefer: This is not testimony; it is hysterical screaming. I do not consider it testimony. He does not testify to a single fact. His testimony is of the same inferior quality as his literary output. I attribute it to the fact that he got scared when he was called to the MGB. His testimony contains numerous contradictions. He simply did not know what was going on. Although he is a poet, he does not understand poetry.

30. Alexander Bezymensky (1898–1973) was a well-known poet and prominent supporter of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan. In 1930, Stalin liked his verse drama *The Shot*; it was a typical production novel containing a vivid dose of heroic optimism "while blaming wreckers and bureaucrats for temporary setbacks." See Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven, 1991), p. 545.

Presiding Officer: You do not agree with his testimony, but at the same time, the Yiddish Section of the Soviet Writers' Union carried out nationalistic activity until quite recently.

Fefer: I testified about this and presented a number of facts. Kvitko and a member of the Yiddish Section bureau were responsible for that.

[Next, the presiding officer of the court asked Fefer to describe Shmeliovich and reminded him that during the preliminary investigation Fefer had said that "Shmeliovich is one of the most aggressive members of the committee."]

Fefer: That is all correct. I meant mainly the Crimea question, for Shmeliovich drew up one of the drafts of the letter to the government. When this draft was shown to Lozovsky, he rejected it, saying that it was nationalistic.

When our message to Weizmann was published—congratulations upon the occasion of the founding of the State of Israel—Shmeliovich expressed dissatisfaction that it was published only in a Yiddish newspaper. He often expressed this kind of dissatisfaction.

Presiding Officer: Is the testimony you give on page 53 of volume 2 correct?

Fefer: I said that based on the words of Mikhoels. Mikhoels had told me that at the Botkin Hospital, known as Botchina, most of the staff were Jewish, thanks to Shmeliovich.

Presiding Officer: Later, on page 144 of volume 2, you testify that Shmeliovich did a great deal to plant anti-Soviet attitudes among Jews, that he harped on the topic of anti-Semitism in the USSR, and that he spoke insultingly about certain people in the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party. Is this testimony of yours correct?

Fefer: When I spoke of sowing anti-Soviet attitudes, I meant Shmeliovich's nationalistic attitude. He said that there was anti-Semitism among certain groups, among doctors as well. Shtern spoke about this, too.

Presiding Officer: Shmeliovich was a friend of Mikhoels. Is it true, as you assert, that he was Mikhoels's number one consultant on issues having to do with nationalistic work at the committee?

Fefer: I have already said that I hardly ever met with Shmeliovich, but I do know that Mikhoels frequently said, "I must consult with Boris Abramovich," and when the letter about the Crimea had to be drafted, he asked Shmeliovich to do it.

[The next session of the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court began at 12:25 P.M.]

Presiding Officer: So the issue of forming an army came up that long ago?

Fefer: The issue was not raised at the committee. We received a statement from Rogachevsky, who proposed forming a division that could be sent to Palestine to fight Arab domination.