power resides in the "few" rather than the many is not alien to Mapai. Perhaps there is room and need for some kind of "cells" even within Mapai.

To sum up: the Labor Zionist movement in this country can be revitalized and made meaningful to its members and to Jewish life only if it can become the agent of ideas and programs which are not duplicated by organizations more indigenously rooted in our environment. There are such ideas and programs, and they do have roots in Labor Zionist history. "Galut" is such an idea. An elite Jewish grouping stressing quality rather than quantity is another.

Would the Labor Zionist movement be willing to become the bearer and proponent of such ideas or programs? Could it if it wanted to?

Wayfarer in Prague

by Jack Goldfarb

IT WAS a typically misty spring morning in Vienna when I shuffled through the Franz Josef Bahnhof and boarded the Vindobona Express for Prague. I settled into my compartment with the *New York Herald Tribune* and, before I could get to Buchwald's column, the train was under way. In the compartment with me were three fellow travelers. Opposite sat a gaunt and nervous young man, a Czech who spoke good English. In the two other corners sat a buxom woman in her middle thirties and her "bouncy" eight-year-old daughter. They spoke only Czech. However, the little girl and I were soon in complete rapport through the vocabulary of caramels, grins, and pantomime.

With the train drawing ever closer to the Czech frontier, I tried to draw my conversation with the young man away from banalities about the weather and climate towards the subject of his way of life in Czechoslovakia. At first reluctantly, then with increasing trustfulness, he told of a hard struggle to be a breadwinner for his family. He also told of a self-imposed discipline to remain a "loyal" citizen, and that only because his wife and three children were left in Prague, had he been allowed to make a two-weeks visit to his sick uncle in Salzburg. The mother of the little girl recited a similar tale. Her husband and other child in Bratislava were the guarantees that she would return home.

When the train began to slow down for the border check at the last town in Austria, the young man stared ruefully out of the window at the tidy, square farmhouses. "You know, there is still time for me to get off," he said. But his dispirited tone told me he was planning no last-minute escape. He and I went to stand in the corridor and get a last glimpse of Austria. As he got up he hid a copy of a Czech newspaper which was printed abroad under his seat. The woman smiled and nodded knowingly. I said, "You take chances." He smiled a tightly-drawn smile and answered: "It is for my family. They'll enjoy this change in their reading diet."

The Austrian frontier authorities completed their inspection with alacrity. The train was moving again, but at a crawling pace as it neared the actual boundary. My young friend trembled with excitement as he waited to point out the line of demarcation to me. "There, there!" he whispered hoarsely, and I saw a trickle of water meandering through an ice-clogged stream. A few feet farther, on the other bank, was a long row of steel posts strung together by a network of barbed wires. I had decided to be as unbiased as possible about Czechoslovakia. I said to myself that this steel web was a precaution against foreign spies. Yet, the first sight I caught of Czechoslovakia was an uninviting piece of drapery.

A couple of hundred yards farther the train was braked at a hut, and a dozen police, customs

and immigration officers came aboard. The passengers were asked to enter their compartments until the formalities were completed. The young man became intensely quiet. The woman's eyes kept darting up towards the luggage racks. I lit a cigarette. Only the little girl kept chattering away, wholly unaffected by officialdom.

Two border policemen entered the compartment and asked for passports. The papers of the three Czechs were coldly scrutinized and handed back. When my green American book came into sight, I sensed a mild curiosity and a softening of manner. My visa was in order, and I received a polite "Djekuye!"

The customs inspectors followed afterwards and the contrast between natives and foreigners was even more surprising. The baggage of my fellow passengers was hauled down from the racks, spread over the seats and given a thorough going-over. Many questions were asked, and not a little perspiration, even on this early spring day, expended. It was one of the most careful checks I had ever seen. When it was my turn, I replied to all questions with a palms-outward gesture and an idiotic head-shake. However, this display of ignorance, once highly successfully in dealing with authorities who do not speak your language, is no longer effective, since so many do it. When the officer asked "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?", I had to admit "Ja."

But the word "tourist" proved to be an open sesame, for, after pronouncing it, without the flick of a finger, my luggage was approved. I was embarrassed in front of my traveling companions. They had every right to be resentful, but instead they endorsed the inspector's action. The young man explained afterwards that this was only normal Czechoslovakian hospitality to foreigners. In fact, he added gratefully, if I weren't present his own baggage would have been examined much more thoroughly!

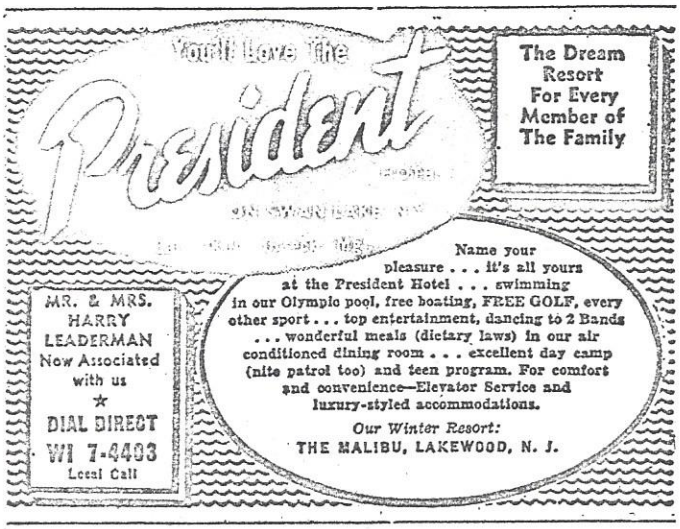
The customs-inspector returned to our compartment several times for what appeared to be merely social visits. He asked in friendly

fashion where I came from, and when I told him New York, he smiled strangely. I had the feeling he was trying to tell me something, something personal and important. Relatives in the states, perhaps? But he never did. Instead he told a few anecdotes. One about a rich Jew who was outwitted by two yokels. I missed the point of the story, but when he stopped talking, I managed a contorted expression which passed for a smile.

The five-hour ride from Vienna to Prague was coming to an end. We stood up to put on coats and assemble our luggage. I patted the little girl on the head and asked the young man to ask her if she was happy to be home. "Mm, mm," she shook her head up and down emphatically. To the same question the young man answered hazily, "It was all such a sweet dream." I said good-by to the three of them, shaking their firm and friendly hands.

WHEN my taxi pulled away from the railway station, I looked across the street for the statue of Woodrow Wilson, which friends had told me used to stand in the little park there. This green oasis, affectionately known to the Praguers as "U.S.A.", showed no traces of the statesman whose "Point Number Ten" of his famous "Fourteen" helped forge the Czechoslovak Republic. There was one statue in Prague, however, which dominated the entire city by its presence. Josef Stalin, in colossal size, and hailed as the "Liberator of Czechoslovakia," struck a majestic pose on a hilltop high on the left bank of the Moldau river.

The next morning being the Sabbath I set out early from my hotel in Wenceslas Square, and walked through the picturesque Stare Mesto toward the ancient Altneu Synagogue. From the focal, always-bustling Wenceslas Square it was scarcely a five-minute stroll to the tranquil, romantic Old Town, with its crooked, cobblestone streets, and its flamboyant gables, studded with spires. In the Old Town Square I stopped to look at the sprawling monument to Jan Hus, as chimes from one of



the venerable structures nearby intoned the hour.

An elderly man trudging by sent a curious glance in my direction. Intuition, corroborated by his black velour hat, told me this patriarchal-looking gentleman was on his way to Sabbath services. I caught up with him and asked him in German how I could get to the synagogue. He replied in a hybrid Yiddish with an invitation to join him.

We walked along through the cramped streets adorned by baroque facades, while my elderly guide explained that this was the site of the old Prague ghetto. There are historical records, he said, that tell of an 11th century Jewish settlement established at this commercially important elbow of the Moldau. We went along the shore of that placid, winding river, and I heard in my mind the strains of Smetana's tone-poem, which Imber's *Hatikvah* echoes.

The most enchanting of the bridges across the Moldau is the Charles Bridge, leading from the Old Town towards Hradcany Castle, which, since the 14th century has been the residence of royalty and latter-day presidents. On this Charles Bridge, among the breath-taking array of ornamental statuary, is one especially unique: an image of Jesus on the cross with words in Hebrew—*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh. Adonai tsivayot*—forming a halo around the body. To one of Abraham's 20th century descendants, so accustomed to the differences between religions and to having the Hebrew origins of Jesus overlooked, this crucifix served as a symbol of the common ground between Christianity and Judaism.

A few blocks from the synagogue the old gentleman pointed out the 14th century cemetery which has more than 20,000 tombstones still preserved. The burial ground, now a national shrine, was closed for the Sabbath, but by peering over the wall I was able to see a broad plateau and endless hills covered with thickets of gravestones. From a distance, I could see the grave of Rabbi Judah Loew, the celebrated sage, and the graves of the thirty

scholars who lie buried around him.

MY companion suggested that we dally no longer for the synagogue services were well under way. At the end of a small, winding street loomed the old Byzantine structure, gloomy-looking with its narrow windows, and its weather-beaten tile roof. But somehow this high-gabled temple of sturdy stone, the oldest synagogue in Europe, had a hallowed air of perpetuity, a kind of obstinate durability that survived the great 16th century fire that razed the Ghetto, and withstood not only the medieval plagues and pogroms, but the 20th century horrors of Hitlerism.

We walked down a few steps and the melodious chant of the *maftir* welcomed us as we entered. The congregation, most of whom stared at the stranger in their midst, comprised about two *minyanim*. I took an unobtrusive seat in the rear but glances kept coming in my direction. When I put on a *talis* and *yomulka*, the looks softened into nods of greeting. The reverent atmosphere, overpowering in some houses of prayer, was far from all-subduing here. As the service continued some of the head-*shukling* worshippers hummed accompaniments and improvised their own roulades to the cantor's chants. Others had either galloped far ahead or were lagging behind in the readings, while the discord of secular conversation was clearly audible. This dissonance, so often encountered in *heimische* congregations, was allowed to swell into a sonorous chorale before the sexton pounded on the podium for an end to it.

Along the gray walls, inscribed with Talmudic precepts, were lined the well-worn benches and desks at which the members of the congregation sat. Two pot-bellied stoves, on both ends of the room, and attended by a *shabbos goya*, sizzled and fumed at their task of dispelling the chill and mustiness of the chamber. In the center of the room at the dais stood the flag of the Jewish community which Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia granted to his Jewish constituents in the year 1357. A symbol of their minority rights, the cherished banner shared honors in the synagogue with the bulky, mahogany chair numbered "1" at the right of the ark. This hallowed seat belonged to Rabbi Loew, and because he was such a pious, wonder-working saint, it was believed he had not really died, and his seat was preserved for his eventual return.

The good Rabbi, about whom so many legends have been related, has been best remembered for the story of the *golem*. By means of cabalistic devices, so the story goes, Rabbi Loew was able to bring to life a creature of clay called the Golem. The Golem faithfully served as a defender for the oppressed inhabitants of the Ghetto in those dark, medieval days. After accomplishing many prodigious feats, including frequent in-the-nick-of-time interventions, the breath of life was supposed to have been taken out of the creature by the Rabbi one night in the garret of the syna-

gogue. The lump of clay to which the Golem reverted was then covered with old prayer shawls and fragments of torn prayer books, and the attic was made a forbidden place to everyone. One sequel to the story says that Rabbi Loew's sexton went up into the garret and carried off the clod of clay in an effort to revivify the Golem; the attempt, however, proved unsuccessful. As I pondered these tales, my eyes strayed upward towards the prohibited attic. But I suppressed any thought of violating this 350-year-old interdiction, which would probably require using a stairway of the same antiquity.

NO MATTER how individualistic the worshippers had been during the services, they all ended up together with "*Ein kelohenu,*" chorusing it out loudly in a unified voice.

With the services over, the congregation lingered about in the synagogue to talk. Many of them gathered around me to find out who I was, and shyly asked questions about my travels. In more private conversations with some of the men, I was surprised and saddened to discover that I would be cautioned against being too friendly with this one or that one. A miasmic fog of suspicion and distrust had cut them off from each other.

I was introduced to Grand Rabbi Sicher, a lean, elderly gentleman with sparkling eyes and a smartly-trimmed white goatee. Whenever he passed a witty remark, which was frequently, his cheeks flushed pink and he showed a charming smile. Several of the men pointed out ancient, faded spots on the walls. They said that these were bloodstains, grim vestiges of the medieval "Black Death" pogroms, left to serve as indelible reminders of the martyrdom of the Bohemian Jews.

But far more ghastly were the reminders of the Nazi massacres of our own time. These were the statistics that all of these Czech Jews knew so well. Before Hitler began his dismemberment of Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938, there had been 215,000 Jews in

all of the country and 32,000 in Prague alone. Today there were 12,500 survivors in the land, and a remnant of 4,000 in Prague. The blackest year in all Czechoslovakian history for Christian and Jew alike was 1942, the year of the assassination of the Reichsprotektor, Reinhard Heydrich, and the reprisals by his successor, Karl Herman Frank. In that year over 100,000 Jews were concentrated at Theresienstadt and sent to their death.

Ten years after Munich, Czechoslovakia entered another chapter of its history when it became a Communist state. In that same year the State of Israel was established. The exodus of anti-Communists and pro-Zionists from Czechoslovakia further reduced the Jewish population to its slim figures of today. Among the younger generation which stayed behind, assimilation and intermarriage, two "evidences" of ideological loyalty, became so widespread that there appears to be a very small legacy of Jewish consciousness left for the children of tomorrow.

And yet, as I left the Altneu Synagogue, and turned to gaze once more at this time-honored edifice, I had the conviction that the faith which has perpetuated this House of God until now would surely find a way to endure.

BOOKS

JEWISH LETTERS IN FRANCE

THE MOST illustrious Jews of France prior to World War II were largely detached from Jewish questions. Their assimilation is reflected in the phrase of one of them that "Jerusalem evokes in me only verses by Racine." The half-Jew Proust touched on Jewish questions, but it was clearly in the manner of an outsider. Henri Bergson, unquestionably France's leading philosopher in this century, prior to his death was ready to become a convert to Catholicism, toward which his philosophy had led him. If he did not take the final step, it was because he would not, in those early 1940's, deal another blow to Jewry. The biographer and novelist André Maurois supported the Vichy regime at the very beginning. Except for unavoidable passages in his autobiographical pieces, Maurois left Jewish subjects alone—sometimes, it seems, deliberately bypassing them where they almost surely belonged. Maurois' authorized biographers have gone to great lengths to explain his change of name from the Jewish "Herzog" to the French "Maurois." The fact remains that Maurois is—and wants to be—a 100% Frenchman for whom his Jewish heritage may be little more than a burden.

Another figure in French intellectual life was Julien Benda who, also an assimilated Jew, was yet respectful toward his Jewish heritage. Despite the honored place it held for him—and he moved yet closer to it after his experiences in World War II—he never specifically handled Jewish themes. Yet Benda never avoided them and frequently touched on them in passing. A comparatively minor writer of the older generation, Emmanuel Berl, has also shown a greater sympathy for his ancestral faith since World War II, though this has not prevented him from defending a former friend, Drieu de la Rochelle, who during the war had become the Julius Streicher of France. If Berl—it was he in whom Jerusalem evoked no more than lines from Racine—has on occasion commented on a Jewish issue, it was more as a Frenchman than as a Jew. Thus, among the important names of the older generation there was no one to concern himself, in the main, with Jewish themes or problems.

Despite the absence of outstanding figures, there have been Jews in the passing generation who were primarily interested in Jewish life. The poets André Spire and Edmond Fleg derived much

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