The Passport System in the USSR
with special reference to the status of Jews*

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The Fifth Paragraph

In the first ranks we have fought
In October's stormy days
We fought for brotherhood of all peoples
For disappearance from all forms for ever
Of the damned paragraph: "Jew"
All our vigour, to the last,
To the State of Soviets we devote
But the fifth paragraph in the forms
Still does declare: "You are a Jew!"

I. Kalmeier

Introduction

On August 28, 1974 the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted two new regulations concerning "The Passport System of the USSR" and "Certain Instructions concerning Registration". The CPSU daily Pravda brought the above enactments to the knowledge of the general Soviet public for the first time at the end of December 1974, in the form of a brief report of joint deliberations and resolutions of the CC of the CPSU and the Soviet Government on the question of improvement of the passport system in the USSR and the meaning and objectives of the modified passport system.

Superficial reading of the new passport regulations and the above-mentioned reports in Pravda created in the Western and Israeli press an impression that those spheres had been liberalized. This, however, is a first-sight impression only. A closer reading would reveal that any concessions granted to the Soviet citizen came rather as an adjustment of legislation

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to reality, which—even in the Soviet Union—is stronger than any legislation, and has rendered many passport systems and registration regulations obsolete. On the other hand such concessions as have been made—mainly to the rural population—would not be applicable immediately and would come into effect only after a rather long period of time.

It follows that one cannot comprehend the “liberalization” of the passport system resulting from the new regulations without examination of the evolution of the whole Soviet passport system in the light of its historical background—the Tsarist passport system. This is so because, as Solzhenitsyn put it, many phenomena in the USSR have not changed since the Tsar’s days.4

It must be emphasized that the new regulations do not annul the duty of revealing the passport holder’s nationality, which—together with its effect upon the status of Jews in the USSR—is the main subject of this essay.

According to a reliable source, in the autumn of 1944 Stalin convened a conference on the Jewish question. Numerous participants—members of the Politbureau, members of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, first secretaries of party organizations in the republics and representatives of the People’s Commissariats of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Arms Industry and State Security (NKGB)—attended. The conference was not called in order to discuss the Jews’ cruel fate as the number one victim of the Nazis, but to suppress and remove them from all key posts in political, military, economic and social life. A special alertness towards the Jews and ways for implementation of the proposed policy were decided upon.5 Georgii Malenkov, Stalin’s faithful associate, was put in charge of the operation. This was followed by immediate anti-Jewish steps, which subsequently became more and more frequent and finally culminated in the murder—on Stalin’s orders—of the cream of Jewish writers and other creative artists.

One of the first measures was a directive called the “Malenkov Circular,” which prohibited nomination of Jews to responsible posts or their maintenance in such posts. Likewise, the Malenkov Circular established restrictions upon acceptance of Jews into institutions of higher learning and upon their employment in certain fields in such institutions. For reasons of prudence, Jews who were removed from office, not accepted for certain posts—or—in spite of excellent results in examinations—not accepted by institutions of higher learning, were told