

S. Mikhoels, Famous Actor and Noted Public Figure, Dies

Soviet People Mourn Death of Great Artist

By B. PLAVNIK

SOVIET people have been plunged into grief by the death of Solomon Mikhoels, the distinguished actor and director of the Moscow State Jewish Theater and noted citizen endowed with a brilliant mind, a fiery temperament, and profound faith in the Communist ideal and the people.

Mikhoels was born in 1890 in a poor Jewish family. Brought up like thousands of other young Jewish intellectuals of his time on the noble aspirations of the great Russian revolutionaries and democrats, he embraced the great Socialist ideals of the early 20th century associating them with the finest traditions of the freedom-loving Jewish people.

In 1919, after the October Revolution had laid the foundations for the development of the national art of the peoples formerly oppressed by the tsarist government, Mikhoels, then a student of the law department of the Petrograd University, forsook Latin for dramaturgy and his law books for the footlights. He gave up the study of Roman law to realize the right of his people to create a national culture, and joined the Jewish Theater Studio which was organized at that time in Petrograd. After a time the studio moved to Moscow where it formed the kernel of what is now the Moscow State Jewish Theater, the best Jewish theater in the world and one of the leading playhouses in the Soviet Union.

Mikhoels was one of the finest actors in the Soviet theater. His art combined profound penetration into the inner meaning of the role with an amazing expressiveness of gesture and movement. In the 30 years of his theatrical career he created a large gallery of characters all of which are marked by the striking personality of a great artist.

He endowed each of the many roles he played with a feeling of free citizenship, of great love for his people, for the common man. We who had the good fortune to see him on the stage will never forget the righteous wrath of the exploited man throwing himself into the fight for his freedom Mikhoels showed us in D. Bergelson's "The Deaf Man." Nor shall we forget his Julius in Daniel's play of that name in which Mikhoels demonstrated the loyalty of the Jewish revolutionary youth to the cause of the proletarian revolution. Long shall we remember the image of the Soviet patriot Ovadis in P. Markish's play about the Jew who found a new homeland in the USSR. And, finally, Tevye in Sholom-Aleichem's "Tevye the Milkman," Tevye, the rebel, through whom Mikhoels showed the optimistic wisdom, the courageous pride and immortality of the Jewish people. But Mikhoels did not confine himself to Jewish roles. His King Lear was indeed one of the best he ever created.

Great though he was as an actor, Mikhoels did not allow himself to become absorbed in his art to the exclusion of all else. He always maintained live, close contact with the Soviet people, whom he served loyally and conscientiously, rising to a position of prominence in the public life of his country.

When the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was formed, Mikhoels became its chairman, working indefatigably for many years to rally all the forces of the Jewish progressive democratic masses to resist the fascist



cutthroats. Mikhoels threw himself with all the fervor of his passionate nature into this work. He went to the United States as the envoy of the Soviet Jews and there did much to build up a united front of Soviet Jews and the democratic masses of American Jewry. In his stirring speeches during the war he called for vengeance in the name of the six million Jews destroyed by the Hitlerite bandits. And when the war ended, he did not cease to urge the need to rally all forces for the struggle to root out the remnants of fascism.

All that Mikhoels did he did brilliantly. He was a truly great actor, a splendid director, a fine public speaker, a good publicist and a talented pedagogue who trained a generation of capable actors for the Jewish theaters in the USSR.

His public activities were numerous. Besides his duties as chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, he was a member of the art council of the Committee on Arts and the Committee on Stalin Prizes for art and literature, a member of the Board of the All-Russian Theatrical Society and of the Central Committee of the Art Workers' Union, to mention but a few of the spheres in which he worked.

Mikhoels loved the Soviet people with all the passion of his great heart, and the people loved him. Tens of thousands of Moscovites flocked to the Jewish Theater, where the body lay in state, to pay their last respects to one they revered and admired. This endless procession was evidence of his tremendous popularity.

In an article dedicated to the memory of Mikhoels, Ilya Ehrenburg, the well-known Soviet author, writes: "It is said that the memory of an actor is not eternal, that it dies together with the people who saw him act. But the memory of Mikhoels will be as long-lived and triumphant as the destiny of the nation. We mourn the death of a great artist, a fine human being, a son of his people!"