

LANSKY

March 1991 1

the Yiddish Bk Centre continues to collect books
is responding to URGENT REQUESTS for Yiddish books from Jews
in the SOVIET UNION
(being 'delivered' through a network of "pakh-tregers" i.e.
volunteer book couriers)
redoubling efforts to strengthn Yiddish culture and to
RE-INTEGRATE IT INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE

They have

- RESCUED TEN OF THOUSANDS OF ADDITIONAL YIDDISH BOOKS
- EXPANDED BOOK COLLECTION OVERSEAS
Among recent finds: 2,000 long-lost volumes on POLISH JEWRY
FOUND/DISCOVERED IN MINT CONDITION IN A WAREHOUSE IN BUENOS AIRES
- Established Yiddish collections in more of the world's great
libraries
- CONTINUE THEIR SERIES OF 'Y I D D I S H B O O K S O N T A P E'
- Expanded educational programmes for adults
e.g. the first-ever WINTER PROGRAM IN YIDDISH CULTURE
held at the Brandeis-Bardin Institute in California
a weekend 15-17 March (Amherst) on PERETZ
a weekend conference last March on Yiddish translation
- opened a PERMANENT OFFICE IN ISRAEL
Israeli citizens wishing to order book from the National
Y Bk Centre can pay in shekels and fax their orders to the
Holyoke warehouse
- Played a crucial role at the international UNESCO Conference
on the future of Yiddish.

As to 1991 onwards:

1. AN EFFORT TO INVOLVE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR
ACTIVITIES. REACHING UNIVERSITY-LEVEL STUDENTS ('college
students' through fellowships and internships.
There will be a 'YIDDISH CHILDRENS CAMP' in July where
children will come with their parents to the annual Summer
Program.
2. SECOND MAJOR INITIATIVE: A LONG RANGE PLAN TO MAKE
Yiddish literature MORE ACCESSIBLE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS
by PUBLISHING REPRINTS with NOTES/NOTATIONS/REFERENCES, of
the most important Yiddish books. EXPLANATION:
Problems with Yiddish books for younger
American-born readers:
First: YIDDISH ORTHOGRAPHY was standardized very late
and the SPELLING used in many older Yiddish books
can be as difficult for a NOVICE reader to 'decipher'
as CHAUCER would be for a reader of modern English!

/Second

Second: as much as 20% of the vocabulary routinely encountered in Yiddish literature cannot be found in any of the existing Yiddish DICTIONARIES! EVEN WHEN THE WORDS CAN BE FOUND THEY OFTEN REPRESENT TEXTUAL, HISTORICAL, or ETHNOGRAPHIC REFERENCES WHOLLY UNFAMILIAR TO READERS WHO WERE NOT BORN IN EASTERN EUROPE.

Lansky says that when he was a student, these problems did not exist. Whenever he came across a word or phrase which he didn't understand, he would simply pick up the 'phone "..... and ask one of my older Jewish neighbours for help. Invariably, they not only supplied me with the correct definition, but took the occasion to enlighten me further with lively stories about life a-heim ..."

BUT SAD AS IT IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE, THE LAST OF THE IMMIGRANT GENERATION, WITH THEIR INEXHAUSTIBLE STORE OF JEWISH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE, ARE PASSING ON. WHO WILL TAKE THEIR PLACE? HOW WILL YOUNG STUDENTS BE ABLE TO READ YIDDISH BOOKS 10, 20 or 50 years hence, WHEN THEY NEED HELP AND THERE IS NO ONE LEFT TO CALL?

Lansky: "... We will call upon a group of particularly knowledgable older Jews to help us EXPLICATE selected Yiddish texts."

THAT KNOWLEDGE WILL THEN BE INCORPORATED INTO A SERIES OF ATTRACTIVE REPRINT EDITIONS OF MAJOR YIDDISH WORKS (similar to the paperback PENGUIN editions of major English classics). Each book will be re-set to conform to modern orthography, and will include a literary/historical introduction in English, extensive explanatory footnotes, and a full Yiddish/English glossary.

WHEN COMPLETED, THE RE-PRINTS WILL DO FOR YIDDISH LITERATURE WHAT RASHI DID FOR THE TORAH AND TALMUD A THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE: recording 'oral knowledge' to make time-bound written texts accessible to future generations.

LANSKY ADMITS THAT THESE PLANS ARE AMBITIOUS.
But, he says, they are the kind of bold,
practical initiatives that we have come to expect
from the National Yiddish Book Center.

In the ten years since they have begun to rescue Yiddish books,
they are keenly aware that we stand at a crucial crossroads
of Jewish history. There will be no second chance!

Unless we act -
unless we undertake solid practical projects
to preserve and re-energize Yiddish culture -
much of the warmth,
vibrancy,
substance and
"tam" ('taste')
which we have come to associate with Jewish life
may well be lost with our generation.

A sheynam dank!