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PRESIDENT STREET,
JOHANNESBURG.

The Biro-Bidjan Scheme.

From Mr. J. Borwein (Johannesburg).
To the Editor of the Zionist Record.

Sir,—Having published in your issue of the 24th July the letter of Mr. Isadore Alter of Benoni, roundly condemning the Biro-Bidjan plan, I hope you will not refuse me the space for a reply.

What apparently worries your correspondent is the fear of a "Jewish Republic" in Biro-Bidjan. He does not seem to realise that what in the case of Palestine is the prime motive of all work, is in the Soviet Union no more than a comparatively unimportant "by-product" of the whole system of the State. The Jewish Colonisation movement is meant to be nothing more nor less than one of the most important means of readjusting the social economic basis of the Jewish masses. Jewish National Autonomous Regions, of which there are already five in existence, with Jewish schools, Jewish law courts, Jewish village and district Soviets, Jewish newspapers, etc., are only a logical outcome of the settlers in the given districts forming a Jewish majority. When the Jewish settlers in Biro-Bidjan will form the strongest national group in the district, the Soviet Government will, no doubt, declare it an Autonomous Jewish Republic incorporated in the U.S.S.R. But, as I have already said, this is of no great practical importance.

The "illogicalness" of the scheme seems to strike your correspondent rather forcibly. He says it is an out-of-the-way place, the climate is unbearable, marshes and ferns abound, and so on. Would Mr. Alter rather have transferred the venue to somebody's back garden instead of in "such an out-of-the-way place"? Has your correspondent not heard of any other soil there than marshes and other flora than ferns? Well, let me inform him that both the soil and vegetation are infinitely richer there than in the promised national homeland in Palestine. Thirty thousand of a native population is rather little, I admit. But, honestly speaking isn't this rather an advantage? Could your correspondent kindly inform me on what he based his remarks about "the boastful claim of the Jewish Colonisation Fund that 10,000 Jews are to-day settled in Biro-Bidjan on land?" Actually there are now about 5,000 Jews in Biro-Bidjan, and not 2,500 as stated by Mr. Isadore Alter.

Millions of roubles have been wasted on it. What a terrible calamity! The vast sum of £4,000,000 was spent, of which £1,000,000 was provided by the State, between 1923 and 1930 on the settling of a paltry 49,000 Jewish families on the land! Mr. Alter asks why does not the American "Joint" assist the colonisation in Biro-Bidjan. Because its money comes mainly from middle-class bourgeoisie, who are afraid to assist in what will ultimately materialise in that nightmare of their class, a new Soviet Socialist Republic. And their fear of that ghost is much greater than their desire to help their "poorer brethren."

"In Soviet Russia there cannot be found a few hundred among the hundreds of thousands who are on the verge of starvation, to go to Biro-Bidjan." That is your statement. The actual fact is that since the beginning of this year about 1,800 new settlers have arrived from the Jewish townships, and there are more on the way. The permission and even invitation of Jewish workers from abroad to come to Biro-Bidjan is another cause of worry for you? A Jew in the Soviet Union, who is only willing and able to work, can find work easily wherever he likes, so great is the shortage of labour of all kinds. The Jewish settlement work being based only on practical economics and not on nationalistic sentiment, there is thus very little urge for them to undertake the long journey to Biro-Bidjan. One would expect that under such circumstances any logically-thinking man would be pleased to hear of steps being undertaken to enable at least some of the Jewish unemployed workers outside the Soviet Union to obtain work in Biro-Bidjan. But apparently to some people the unpleasant prospect of Jews from abroad helping in the carrying out of a plan of the Soviet Government far outweighs the pleasure they, as Jews, are bound to feel at the chance the Jews of Russia, and with them some of the Jew abroad are now offered.

Yours, etc.,

J. Borwein.

Arrival of New Cantor.

Cantor B. Konwiser, who has been specially engaged in Europe by the Beth Hamedrash Hagodel to conduct the services during the forthcoming High Festivals at the new place of worship in Saratoga Avenue, arrived in Johannesburg last week and was greeted by representatives of the congregation.

The Cantor is now busily engaged in gathering local musical talent for the purpose of organising a fine choir.