

On Dec. 18, 1756: “Live well, dearest friend, and do not tire of improving me, so shall you also not tire of loving me.”

On Aug. 4, 1757: “Do not think that I would have a single fable printed that did not enjoy your complete approval.”

On May 2, 1757: “Your ideas about ‘Rule Over Inclinations,’ ‘On Habit,’ ‘On Viewing Knowledge,’ are excellent, they have so persuaded me, that in my book I have not left a single word against them.”

The correspondence shows such a degree of familiarity, such an intensity of cooperation and warmth, that Jacobi’s

arguments are shown to be absurd.

What the operations of Conti and Voltaire were earlier against Leibniz, now there was the attempt by Jacobi and Kant against Lessing and Mendelssohn.

Did they succeed? Not really. This circle of friends had its continuation in Schiller and his aesthetics, his idea of the aesthetical education of man. After all, Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, who were educated by Moses Mendelssohn together with his own children, who therefore grew up in large part in the home of Mendelssohn, saw to it that the

The Yiddish Renaissance comes to America

The following are edited excerpts from remarks by Paul Kreingold and Kenneth Kronberg of the International Caucus of Labor Committees, in response to the Feb. 14, 1999 keynote address by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, on Moses Mendelssohn, at the ICLC’s Presidents’ Day Conference.

Kreingold: change, not assimilation

. . . [We’ve been] talking about the question of assimilation, of how Jews in eighteenth-century Germany were fighting Mendelssohn because they didn’t want to assimilate into society, etc., and this raised a very interesting question for me, about how America developed, and how any nation develops. Why would you want to assimilate into eighteenth-century German society? Why would Martin Luther King want to assimilate into 1950 American society? You don’t want to *assimilate*. What you want to do is, you want to *change* it, you want to lead it. And that’s what’s so interesting about the Mendelssohn project: these people weren’t a minority group who were assimilating; they were leaders who were leading the society somewhere else, in a good direction. And, the same thing with Martin Luther King. God forbid, he should assimilate into 1950s America! No, he made a revolution in America, which changed it. . . .

Kronberg: Ideas make history

I want to follow up what Helga was saying about Moses Mendelssohn, because I think that it’s a very good illustration of how ideas make history. . . .

The majority of the Jews in the nineteenth century, actually earlier, of course, lived in Poland, or what had been the Kingdom of Poland, which was this large area going all the way down to the Black Sea. They had gone

there in around 1350, when they were invited in by Casimir the Great, and what happened in the nineteenth century was, that the followers of Mendelssohn and the Mendelssohn tradition in the Jewish community in German, took on the task of going into Poland and Russia, eastern Europe, and bringing the message of the German Classical renaissance to these people, who were much more backward than were the Jews of Germany. In fact, if you really want to understand it, you have to know that the majority of the Jews in Eastern Europe, the rabbis, were Hasidim, like these crazy nut-cases from New York who wield this disproportionate influence in Israel, and so on. These feudal medievalists—cabbalists, actually—controlled the Jewish community of Poland and eastern Europe.

So, the efforts of these rabbis in the nineteenth century, and students of Mendelssohn, were joined in a movement which was known as the *Haskalah* movement, which is translated as “Enlightenment”—an unfortunate term for us, of course, because it tends to imply Voltaire and all these bad guys. But, this Jewish Enlightenment went into eastern Europe and started essentially secular education. The works of Mendelssohn were burned, and there were huge fights going on, but eventually, from the mid-nineteenth century toward the end of the nineteenth century, you had the process by which there was created something which we know today as the Yiddish Renaissance. . . .

There was an effort on the part of young writers, to convey these advanced concepts to what was essentially a backward peasant population, through the medium of the Yiddish language. Of whom the greatest exponents are people like Mendele Mocher Sefhorim, and I.L. Peretz, and of course, the person most people know, who is Sholem Aleichem. Now, it’s unfortunate that people’s familiarity with this Yiddish Renaissance, and someone like Sholem Aleichem, comes by way of the musical theater of Broadway, and *Fiddler on the Roof*, which bears the same relationship to the works of Sholem Aleichem, as *The Man of La Mancha* does to the works of Cervantes. This is a precise analogy, a conceptually drawn point, because what Sholem Aleichem was doing and what these writers were

Classics could emerge in Germany, poetry and music, the humanist system of education which Wilhelm von Humboldt was able to create, the highest summit of Western culture reached up to now.

Moses Mendelssohn is a universal example of how representatives of a repressed minority can shake off their chains and become the Socrates of their time. If we consider the current culture that surrounds us, embodied in Hollywood, then it is clear that we are already in a New Dark Age. But the situation looked rather dark at the time of Lessing and

Mendelssohn, when Voltaire, Euler, and Maupertuis, and other Enlighteners, dominated intellectual life in Germany.

I believe we have a better chance today than these thinkers did then. We have more wells from which we can drink. Not only are the Greek Classics, the Italian Renaissance, and Leibniz open to us, but we can also reach back to Lessing and Mendelssohn, and also to Schiller, Humboldt, Beethoven, and many others in this tradition.

In this sense I close with the appeal to you, to become among the Socrates of the twenty-first century.

doing, was precisely what Cervantes was doing, to a population living in a backward, inquisitorial circumstance, using humor to try to liberate the population and bring a more advanced viewpoint to it. One of these people, Mendele Mocher Sephorim, actually wrote a book which was a Jewish version of *Don Quixote*. So, these people were well versed, if you know their works, in the works of the European Classical renaissance.

Sholem Aleichem was the greatest example of this Yiddish Renaissance. At the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in the situation of the pogroms, you had a mass emigration of Jews out of Poland, out of the Tsarist empire, out of the Pale of Settlement, to the United States. And Sholem Aleichem came with them and immigrated to the United States.

So that you understand something about this writer, about the Yiddish Renaissance, I'll tell you a story out of one of the books. He wrote a book called *Mottel, Peisi the Cantor's Son*, and also one called *Mottel in America*, which was the story of a family that comes to the United States. . . . The family is travelling with a student, who's probably in his mid-twenties, who's one of the *maskilim*, one of these exponents of the Mendelssohn tradition, one of these reformers, and he's their translator, because they don't speak any of the languages of the countries that they have to pass through to get to America from Europe. But, of course, treated in a very loving way, because Sholem Aleichem is the representative of the viewpoint of Mendelssohn's own personality, with this sort of gentle but polemical attitude toward people, he portrays these *maskilim* as people who really didn't know very much, but were supposedly well educated.

So, this guy gets to a border, and they meet a border-crossing guard, and he has to explain to the guard that this family is going across the border because we are on our way to America. But he can't speak the language really, he can only blurt out a couple of words. So he figures out what word to blurt out to the border guard to get the idea across. The first thing he blurts out is, "Columbus!," and the border guard doesn't know what he's talking about.

So, he scratches his head, and finally he blurts out, "Mathematics!" And, again, the border guard doesn't understand, so he comes up with the right thing to say. He says, "Alexander von Humboldt!" And that's how he expresses, these eastern European Jews coming out of the shtetl, what it means to come to America: "Columbus! Mathematics! Alexander von Humboldt!". . .

Now, when Sholem Aleichem came to the United States, he lived in New York, and there were 26 Yiddish newspapers in New York City at the turn of the century. You talk about a culture and a cultural tradition: When Sholem Aleichem died, 600,000 people—which was the largest demonstration ever held in New York City up to that point, and it may be historically to this point—marched down Fifth Avenue in the funeral cortège. . . .

Now, the children of those immigrants, of course, are Lyn's [Lyndon LaRouche's] generation. They are the people who fought in the Second World War, they're the people who came back, that's the generation which was the generation of adults in the 1950s, and those are the people who participated so heavily—that Jewish population, the children of those immigrants—were the people who participated so heavily in making the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. Because anyone who lived through that knows, that the Civil Rights Movement had this enormous, disproportionate presence of Jewish Americans. It was a movement of blacks and Jews. And, that's because of the tradition which they were carrying, which was a tradition which strangely enough came through this Yiddish Renaissance, conduiting what? The German Classical culture of Mendelssohn and Lessing and Schiller! . . .

Had it not been for the Holocaust, this Jewish population, as it existed in Europe, would still exist, and the insanity of what is going on in Israel could never have happened. It just wouldn't have happened, it wouldn't have been plausible. . . .

It's also the reason why there's such an enormously disproportionate number of Jews amongst the membership and leadership of this organization. It's the same process.