

*Presiding Officer:* Who told you that?

*Markish:* Epshteyn did. He was the executive secretary of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.

*Presiding Officer:* You mean that you were invited to join the committee not because you were a nationalist, but, first of all, to make up for what had happened and, second, so that you wouldn't struggle against the committee?

*Markish:* Yes, they brought me onto the committee for their own security, thinking that once I was on the committee, I would not be able to speak out against them.

*Presiding Officer:* Further on, you testify about this rally (vol. 15, p. 150). "The participants who participated in this rally uttered many anti-fascist slogans, but nonetheless their speeches were as nationalistic as at the first rally and concealed far-reaching plans." What did you mean by this?

*Markish:* I personally did not attend the first rally. But when I gave this testimony in prison, what I was implying and what I understood was that since there were religious figures who spoke at the second rally, they were linked with reactionary circles in America and Canada, and they were an integral part of the movement. There was no need to fabricate anything; nationalistic activity had already been going on there for a year and a half, and they were casting off all restraints. I had already seen several issues of *Eynikayt*. I had already seen the signs I am telling about now.

[During the testimony, the issue of relations between Markish and Mikhoels arose. Markish gave Mikhoels extremely low marks as a theater director, as a political activist, and as a person. But during the questioning, it came out that Markish's attitude toward Mikhoels was to a significant degree the result of Mikhoels having refused to produce plays by Markish. According to Markish, everything Mikhoels did was steeped in nationalism; this attitude of Mikhoels left its mark on the artistic face of the theater that he had directed.]

*Markish:* In 1937 things at the theater had reached a point where Mikhoels was told, "We will close down the theater because you have saturated it with such half-mystical things that it is shameful for a Moscow theater, a theater that stands alongside the Moscow Art Theater and the Vakhtangov Theater, to serve the public such indecent fodder."

*Presiding Officer:* So in 1937 the theater's activity took on an acutely nationalistic character?

*Markish:* It was already just decaying because too much attention was being paid to things that were already a part of the past. In 1937, Kaganovich paid a visit to the theater. Afterward, he summoned Mikhoels and asked him, "Why are you discrediting the Jewish people?" And then he said to him, "Come see me." I remember this very well because Kaganovich said to

Mikhoels, "And when you come see me, bring Markish with you." I prepared anxiously for this visit, but Mikhoels didn't go to see Kaganovich, and several days later he left on tour with the theater.

*Presiding Officer:* From this it is possible to conclude that Mikhoels was directing the theater more and more toward nationalism.

*Markish:* Mikhoels was a great actor. Although I do not know his place within international artistic circles, he was famous in the Yiddish theater. He regarded *The Travels of Benjamin III* as the theater's greatest prize, and the entire dubious legacy left by Granovsky.<sup>62</sup> And really, what did Granovsky have to do with the people? He was a person of alien sensibilities who did not want to see how the people were being liberated from that filth and were surging ahead. Mikhoels had no interest in presenting works that would propagandize socialist society. By 1937 the theater had fallen so low that no amount of patience made the situation tolerable. Mikhoels thought that no one would lay a finger on him because that would look like anti-Semitism and opposition to the party's national policy. Mikhoels was ideologically alien to me, and I to him.

*Presiding Officer:* Nonetheless, he headed the committee. How did he allow you to join the committee and even become a member of the presidium?

*Markish:* He was two-faced. He could be seductive in conversations with people. When he was named chairman of the Anti-Fascist Committee, I said that [having him as chairman] would be like having a jester on the throne. But once the government found it necessary to appoint him to lead such an important project during the war, then it had to be that way. Then I started having the feeling that Mikhoels was pretending to be an important person. And this was really true. Lozovsky presented him to everyone as someone important, a major figure, and I started having doubts. Perhaps I had been wrong to think he was a bad person.

*Presiding Officer:* How can this be? You described Mikhoels as a nationalist, and at the same time you were writing poetry in which you described him in different terms (reads out the verse), portraying him as a "messiah" who had suffered for his people. This does not correspond to reality. You sang paeans of praise to him, so how can you now tell the court that you didn't like him?<sup>63</sup>

*Markish:* There is laughter in the hall. It seems Lozovsky is laughing. I have to say, Citizen Chairman of the Court, that there is nothing funny here. Lozovsky got along exceptionally well with Mikhoels, and this made me think that perhaps I was wrong. This was how I understood it—that if the

62. Alexander Granovsky (Abram Azarkh) (1890–1937) was the founder and first director of the State Jewish Theater. He defected in January 1929 during the group's visit to Western Europe.

63. Following Mikhoels's death, Markish wrote a long poem praising him. Several stanzas were published in *Eynikayt*, January 17, 1948, p. 4.

government sent someone abroad, then that person must be deserving of such treatment. Who sent Mikhoels to America? Lozovsky, a member of the government. In our country, people who are sent abroad are regarded as worthy individuals. This is a very important point.

*Presiding Officer:* Yes, it really is important.

*Markish:* I was not very interested in what went on behind the scenes at the committee. I attended only two presidium sessions. But when Mikhoels died and I read the splendid obituaries in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, I began to reconsider.

*Presiding Officer:* That does not fit with your characterization of him. You described him as a nationalist.

*Markish:* I began to think that perhaps I thought Mikhoels was a bad person simply because we were on bad terms with each other.

*Presiding Officer:* He was not progressive. He was a nationalist who dragged the theater and the arts down into the swamp of Zionism. At the very least, you should have remained silent instead of writing such verses about him.

*Markish:* What could I do when Fadeyev himself said that people like Mikhoels are born once in a hundred years? During his funeral, all of the theater companies with whom he had been on bad terms came to honor his memory and praised him to the skies. I began to think about how Russians were coming and exalting his name, and here I was, the only person saying anything bad about him. Perhaps I was wrong and would have had a different kind of relationship with him if we hadn't had professional differences.

*Presiding Officer:* And you explain your poems by saying that you were going along with the situation that arose during his funeral?

*Markish:* The government held such a magnificent funeral for him that it made me think that perhaps I really had made a mistake. After all, I also have regrettable qualities. I'm a person, too, and maybe I misunderstood him.

*Presiding Officer:* What makes you think that Mikhoels was murdered?

*Markish:* The day after he died, the situation was vague and confusing, while someone at the committee said that Mikhoels had been murdered. A person can be murdered in a car accident, after all. For two days the thought that he had been a victim did not leave me. Then people said that he had been drunk, but then it came out that he was not drunk. In the days following his death the reasons for his death were not clearly established. He knew Trofimenko, the commander of the Belorussian Military District. Their wives were friendly, but the Trofimenkos didn't know the details surrounding his death. A situation in which even people close to him didn't know how he had died gave me a feeling of uncertainty. I kept thinking that maybe I was wrong, and I wrote that poem in a rush of all those feelings. But I didn't publish the poem. I just did a rough outline.

*Presiding Officer:* Instead of paying no heed to rumors, you made use of them, and you portrayed his death as a murder, placing him side by side with the victims of anti-Semitic reprisals (reads the verse).

*Markish:* When rumors started circulating about his death, it was well known that there were fascists operating in Belorussia, sent there on a mission by Mikolajczyk's people.<sup>64</sup> It was possible that some fascist had killed him. This was one of the more widely disseminated versions of how he died.

*Presiding Officer:* Let's get back to the trip. How did you find out that Fefer and Mikhoels had gone to America?

*Markish:* Fefer called me on the phone a day or two before they left. He asked me to give him some poem or other and added that finally he was due for some bliss; that meant a visit to America. This grated on me when I heard it. But because this trip came right after a malicious speech against me by the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and although the Central Committee looked favorably on me . . .

*Presiding Officer* (interrupting Markish): What do you mean exactly, "looked favorably on you?"

*Markish:* I mean that my works were published, and at *Pravda* I was one of the staff writers. In 1942, when my book was set in press prior to publication, a courier came from the Kremlin and asked that the press plates be handed over. And finally, as I've already said, that book was nominated for the Stalin Prize. By the party Central Committee, not by the Writers' Union. It seems to me that all of this gives me the right to say that the Central Committee was well disposed toward me. But I was removed from the editorial board of the radio.

*Presiding Officer:* But you didn't ask Fefer, did you? You didn't say to him, What is so wonderful about going to America? How are we to understand this?

*Markish:* No, I didn't say that to him, because I wasn't in the habit of having that informal a conversation with him. I am not saying that I would have gone, although I now have the right to confirm that I wouldn't have gone to America. There was a big battle going on with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. I thought, It means the Central Committee is unhappy with me *again*. Being removed from the editorial staff list made me feel that way. And here was the victor on the phone telling me he was going to paradise. I told my wife and children about it. The war is going on, and he retreats to paradise. But if I had said anything to him, that would have given him more

64. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk (1901-1966) was a onetime leader of the Polish government-in-exile. Roosevelt admired him, but Stalin prevented him from assuming a position of power in Poland after the war. There was never any evidence that Mikolajczyk or any people around him were connected to the death of Mikhoels or to underground activity against the Soviet government.