

Screenplay for the film "1947 — Solomon Mikhoels. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze" written by Marina Zhukova, translated by AI, and preceded by a summary also written by AI.

Screenplay Summary:

The text traces the life and death of Solomon Mikhoels (1890–1948), the leading actor and director of the Soviet State Jewish Theatre (GOSET), a central figure of Soviet Jewish culture and a tragic symbol of Stalinist state antisemitism.

It opens with GOSET's last production, Freylekhs ("Joy"), directed by Mikhoels in 1947. Built around a traditional Jewish wedding ritual, the play carries a clear message: "Am Yisrael Chai" — the Jewish people is immortal. On a darkened stage, candles form a seven-branched candelabrum, then a voice orders, "Put out the candles! Blow away the sorrow!" and bright sunlight floods the scene. The show is both tragic and life-affirming and effectively marks the end of the State Jewish Theatre, then located where Moscow's Theatre on Malaya Bronnaya stands today.

By 1947, Mikhoels is 57 and hugely famous. During World War II, Nazis in occupied cities posted his portrait under the caption "This is what a Jew looks like", branding him a "bloody dog". Within Stalin's symbolic system, he is the "chief Jew", just as Mayakovsky is the chief poet and Gorky the chief writer.

In late 1941, Mikhoels becomes head of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC). Formally, it is a propaganda tool: the USSR wants to present itself as a defender of human rights, to distance itself from its recent pact with Hitler and, later, to tap international Jewish capital for postwar reconstruction. The JAC addresses "Jewish brothers of the whole world" on the radio, organizes a major tour of the US and Britain, and raises millions of dollars for Soviet aircraft and tanks. In the background, Stalin is also thinking about the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the future State of Israel, hoping to secure influence in the region and to infiltrate the Zionist movement.

Mikhoels, a man of immense personal warmth and energy, feels "covered in other people's fates". Constantly besieged by actors, petitioners, refugees, and strangers, he gives money, resolves petty crises, writes letters, listens. His family describes a deep sense of responsibility typical of an eldest child; he even half-jokingly feels accountable for "his entire people, not to mention the theatre." His compulsive habit of telephoning home to report every hour of his day will later expose the absurdity of the charge that he was a "bourgeois intelligence agent."

Meanwhile, state antisemitism is being constructed during the war and sharply intensified afterward. Internal party memoranda denounce the "predominance" of Jews in culture, draw up lists of Jewish directors and professors, and initiate dismissals and purges in theatres, conservatories, hospitals and film studios. Openly racist remarks are tolerated or echoed from above; Jewish professionals are pushed out of key posts. Stalin restrains public antisemitic rhetoric while the war lasts, but clearly intends to use it later as a mobilizing and controlling force.

The JAC gradually becomes suspect. It collects testimony on the Holocaust on Soviet territory, tries to publish the Black Book about Nazi crimes against Jews, and provides concrete assistance to Jewish survivors. It even proposes the creation of a Jewish Soviet Socialist Republic to "solve" the Jewish question in a "Bolshevik way". In practice, it begins to function like an independent body representing Jewish interests — precisely what the regime cannot tolerate.

Top officials such as Aleksandrov, Suslov and State Security Minister Abakumov produce denunciatory reports: they accuse the JAC of nationalism, of maintaining contacts with international Jewish organizations, and of supporting the idea of a Jewish state in the Middle East — even though Stalin himself publicly backs the establishment of Israel. The JAC archives are seized, the Black Book is blocked, and the Committee is described as “politically harmful and intolerable.”

In 1947, tension peaks. At a public event in Moscow’s Polytechnical Museum, Mikhoels alludes to Andrei Gromyko’s speech at the UN in favour of partitioning Palestine, effectively framing it as an answer to the age-old Jewish search for the Promised Land. At the same time, relatives of Stalin’s late wife are arrested and accused of gathering information about him and of links to Mikhoels.

In January 1948, Stalin gives the order to eliminate Mikhoels. A special operation by State Security is organized in Minsk. Later documents, written after Stalin’s death in 1953, reveal the details: Mikhoels is lured at night to the dacha of the Belarusian Minister of State Security, crushed by a truck, and his body dumped on a street to simulate a car accident. Stalin’s daughter Svetlana later recalls hearing him dictate the “automobile accident” version in real time. The officers involved are secretly decorated for the “successful execution of a special government assignment.”

The text ends with a quiet, symbolic scene: the great tenor Ivan Kozlovsky, a close friend, travels to the spot where Mikhoels’s body was found and, in accordance with an ancient Slavic custom, leaves a silver coin there — a private act of mourning and loyalty against the backdrop of an official lie.

Screenplay:

1947 – Solomon Mikhoels

The last premiere of the State Jewish Theatre, GOSET, was a production called *Freylekhs*, which means *Joy*. The script of this production was written by GOSET’s artistic director, Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels.

The main idea of the play is expressed in three words: “*Am Yisrael chai!*” — “The Jewish people is immortal!”

The stage is plunged into darkness; to solemn, funeral music, a star appears on the horizon. At the same time, at opposite sides of the stage, seven burning candles appear. They slowly draw closer to one another and turn into a seven-branched candelabrum — a symbol of the victory of the weak over the strong, a symbol of the heroism of the Jewish people. Then, breaking through the music, a voice is heard: “Put out the candles! Blow away the sorrow!”

And the stage is flooded with bright sunlight. The framework of the production is the traditional Jewish wedding ritual. On this framework are embroidered the destinies of an entire generation. In songs and dances. The production is tragic and life-affirming. With this show, the life of the State Jewish Theatre essentially comes to an end. It stood where Moscow’s Theatre on Malaya Bronnaya is now.

In 1947, Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels is 57 years old. As a theatre figure and an actor, he enjoys incredible fame. And not only as an actor. During the war, in the occupied cities, his portraits were hung with the caption: “This is what a Jew looks like!” The fascist occupiers coined the slogan: “The hour is near when we will wipe from the face of the earth the bloody dog Mikhoels!” During the war, the head of the State Jewish Theatre, Solomon Mikhoels, leads the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) is created at the end of 1941. At that time, in the hardest period of the war, Mikhoels speaks at a large Jewish anti-fascist rally. His words are broadcast on the radio: “Jewish brothers of the whole world!” This event makes a strong impression on the intelligentsia, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The fact that someone openly addresses Jews, that the very word “Jew” is pronounced on the radio, is perceived by the intelligentsia as a “good sign”. In the USSR, anything that concerns Jews always means some sort of sign.

A good acquaintance of Mikhoels is the academician Pyotr Leonidovich Kapitsa. His wife Anna Alexeyevna recalls: “Before the Jewish anti-fascist rally, Mikhoels approached various people, asking them to speak. Not only Pyotr Leonidovich. He approached Alexei Nikolaevich Tolstoy and several others. Only Pyotr Leonidovich agreed to speak.”

In Moscow at that time, a person’s agreement to speak at a Jewish anti-fascist rally is perceived as a public admission of his own Jewishness. Mikhoels’s wife, Anastasia Pavlovna Pototskaya, recalls: “At the banquet celebrating Pyotr Leonidovich Kapitsa’s fiftieth birthday, Mikhoels raised a toast in which, among other things, he said: ‘I drink to you, Pyotr Leonidovich, as to a militant humanist! I will never forget your speech at the anti-fascist rally, I am infinitely in your debt. And although I put in no small effort to dispel the version that you are a Jew, and achieved that goal, I remain in your debt.’”

The JAC, created in 1941, is a purely foreign-policy show project. The USSR is the defender of human rights. Staline takes one more opportunity to dissociate himself from his recent friendship with Hitler, who is systematically exterminating the Jews. In 1943, after the turning point in the war, the JAC is given additional functions: it must obtain loans from international Jewish capital for post-war reconstruction in the USSR. In addition, and even after 1943 this interests Stalin more than anything else: in 1948, the British Mandate in Palestine will end. Stalin plans to establish his own control in the Middle East region. To do that, he needs penetration into the Zionist movement.

Zionism is not an insult, not an article of an indictment. Zionism is the idea of reuniting the Jewish nation on the territory of its own state. Stalin is one of the initiators of the creation of the State of Israel. Moreover, over a certain stretch of history, Stalin acts as the world’s chief Zionist.

Lavrenty Beria plays the most active role in setting up the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. A systematic exploitation of the national feelings of Soviet Jews begins. The war against fascism is an excellent time for this.

Stalin’s favourite scheme is launched: the chief poet — Mayakovsky, the chief writer — Gorky, the chief Jew — Mikhoels.

But Solomon Mikhoels is not made for the role of a “wedding general” (a decorative dignitary). He throws himself into the work of the Anti-Fascist Committee sincerely, as a devoted son of his people, with his entire irrepressible temperament. He used to say that he was “festooned with other

people's fates". And that was pure truth. It was like that before the war, during the war and after the war, right up to his death. He is always surrounded by people from early morning.

The telephone is ringing constantly. He stands in front of the mirror, his cheeks soapy, shaving and talking on the phone. He has three appointments scheduled for the same hour. He is nervous, in a hurry, joking, and never complains. Different people need his help, his advice, sometimes just a kind word. There is even a little verse going around: "I saw Mikhoels and calmed down at once." At ten in the morning the rehearsal begins at the theatre. The theatre is five minutes from his house on Tverskoi Boulevard.

He doesn't have time to cross the threshold of his office at the theatre before the actors, designers, playwrights and simple petitioners who have been waiting for him throw themselves at him.

Pushing through everyone, an enraged wardrobe mistress rushes at him. "Solomon Mikhailovich!" she shouts. "Rosa is refusing this dress because she says it makes her look fat." Pouting and tear-stained, Rosa sits in a corner, doesn't respond to Mikhoels's greeting, and at the first words of the wardrobe mistress bursts into sobs and runs out of the office. No sooner is the situation with Rosa sorted out than it emerges that some little Сарочка has given birth to someone in Birobidzhan and urgently needs money. Mikhoels takes money from the theatre cash box against his future salary, and it is sent to Birobidzhan. Then he has to procure some sedatives for someone's mother-in-law, then listen to an actor unhappy in love.

Mikhoels's elder daughter, Natalia, writes: "It is very hard to say why he, with all his busyness, allowed these lives to pile onto him so unceremoniously. It wasn't the guilt-edged goodness of Father Frost. It wasn't just a lively curiosity about people's destinies. It was a sense of responsibility that is characteristic only of someone who was born an elder child."

Mikhoels was the Elder for his twin brother, the Elder for his friend and stage partner, the famous actor Benjamin Zuskin, light, supple, with a brilliant sense of humour. For Mikhoels, he was more than a friend. He was a brother who had to be defended, shielded from the roughness of life.

Mikhoels would die first. Benjamin Zuskin would be shot in 1952. Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels always felt himself to be the Elder in life. Once he confessed to his family: "It is very hard for me, and sometimes it seems to me that I alone bear responsibility for all of my people, not to mention the theatre." Letters come to him from all over the Soviet Union. Often the envelopes say simply: "Moscow, to Mikhoels." Mikhoels is keenly aware that this wording dangerously resembles another: "Moscow, to Stalin."

Despite being so busy, Mikhoels has a habit that doesn't fit well with his way of life. The family calls it his "telephone disease". As soon as a business meeting or rehearsal is over, Mikhoels calls home and reports in detail on the past hour. When in 1953 Mikhoels will be called "an agent of bourgeois intelligence," the tearful housekeeper Ksenia will say: "When did he ever have time to spy, if even I knew his every step?"

State antisemitism, which reached its peak in the last years of Stalin's life, does not begin after the war. Antisemitism as a direction of Stalin's policy is raised up directly during the war with fascism. Only, until the end of the war, Stalin does not let it break to the surface, does not throw pogrom slogans into the masses; he waits for the launch of a full-scale campaign.

Stalin takes antisemitism as state policy from Hitler. But in the course of a world war against fascism, it is awkward to preach it openly. Although it is obvious that Stalin is itching to do so.

During the war, Stalin begins to wind up antisemitism as a means of patriotic mobilization. In the darkest days of the Battle of Stalingrad, the question “On the selection and promotion of cadres in the arts” is discussed in the Kremlin. On 17 August 1942, while Stalingrad is under a hurricane bombardment, the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), Aleksandrov, sends a memorandum to Central Committee secretaries Malenkov, Shcherbakov and Andreev.

Aleksandrov, the head of the Central Committee’s department, is blunt in a Nazi way: in the sphere of culture “non-Russian people predominate,” in brackets — “mainly Jews.” As the first example, he takes the Bolshoi Theatre, which he calls “the pinnacle of Russian musical culture and operatic art of the USSR.”

The situation in this “pinnacle” is presented in tabular form: position, surname, party membership and nationality, that is, a certain, inadmissible, nearly criminal nationality.

Then follows a listing of the nationality of the heads and professors of the Moscow and Leningrad conservatories. Then the names and nationality of well-known musicians. Heading the list of world-famous names are David Oistrakh and Emil Gilels. In the autumn of 1942, purges on national grounds begin. Outstanding composers Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Kabalevsky, Shaporin, Myaskovsky speak out in defence of the persecuted.

On 18 September 1944, the composer Mokrousov, drunk, walks into the billiard room of the Union of Soviet Composers with the words: “When will we finally be rid of the kikes, and Russia will belong to the Russians!” He goes up to the composer Kruchinin, grabs him by the collar and says: “Tell me, are you a kike or a Russian?” Kruchinin, Russian by nationality, replies without hesitation: “I was and remain a kike.”

The writer Yuri Nagibin, in his last novella *Darkness at the End of the Tunnel*, writes about how all his life, from childhood, he lived with the awareness of being a Jew, how often, especially as a child, he suffered and fought for his equality and secretly dreamed of being Russian. At the end of his life, Yuri Nagibin learned that he did not have a drop of Jewish blood.

And so, having turned out to be Russian, he wrote these bitter words:

“What is happening to you, my people! You cling to your slavery and don’t want the truth about yourselves. Perhaps it is time to stop playing the fool that the Russian people were and remain the plaything of external forces. Everything in Russia was done by our own, Russian hands, with Russian consent; we ourselves sowed the grain, we ourselves soaped the ropes. Neither Lenin nor Stalin would have been our fate if we had not wanted it.

I want to go back to being a Jew. It is hard to be a Jew in Russia. But it is much harder to be a Russian.”

On 24 October 1942, the head of the Committee for Cinematography, Bolshakov, reports to Central Committee secretary Shcherbakov that he has rejected director Eisenstein’s proposal to approve actress Ranevskaya for the role of Princess Staritskaya in the film *Ivan the Terrible*. Bolshakov writes to the Central Committee secretary: “Ranevskaya’s Semitic features stand out very sharply, especially in close-ups.” Photographs from Ranevskaya’s screen tests, full-face and profile, are attached to the official letter.

From the very beginning of the war, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*Red Star*), General David Ortenberg, is forced to change his surname to a Russian one. The paper

appears under the signature of editor-in-chief O. Vadimov. In 1943, even that does not help: David Ortenberg is dismissed from the paper altogether.

On 22 May 1943, on the eve of the Battle of Kursk, the head of the Committee for the Arts, Khrapchenko, draws up a “List of leading workers in the field of the arts who are Jews by nationality.”

Fourteen directors of Moscow and Leningrad theatres are dismissed.

The director of the Central Oncological Institute and chief physician of the Botkin Clinical Hospital, Shimeliovich, writes to Central Committee secretary Malenkov: “The secretary of the party organization of the Central Oncological Institute, Doctor Martynova, informed me, the director of the institute, about the content and form of her conversation with the head of the Health Sector of the Central Committee, Doctor Petrov.”

During the conversation, he enumerated the party members and staff of the institute, clarifying “Jewess”, “Jew”, shouting that the institute had “a Jewish party organization.” The letter cited is dated 19 June 1944.

In 1938, the same Doctor Petrov held another post in the Central Committee apparatus. He was responsible organizer of the Department of Leading Party Bodies. On 27 November 1938, with Petrov’s participation, a report was prepared “On the clogging of the apparatus of the People’s Commissariat of Health of the USSR.” In this document, ethnic Jews are listed as politically unreliable people.

In May 1939, on the eve of the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of friendship with Nazi Germany, Stalin removes from his post the People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, an ethnic Jew, Maxim Litvinov, known for his anti-fascist speeches in the League of Nations, and appoints Molotov in his place.

Litvinov is on friendly terms with Mikhoels. Litvinov will die in disgrace three years after Mikhoels. Few people dare to come to his funeral in the Foreign Ministry building on Uritsky Square. The memorial service is delayed for three hours. It turns out that in the apartment of the deceased they cannot find his order (medal). Litvinov’s widow says indifferently: “How should I know where the order is. It probably fell behind a bookshelf.”

Finally, someone suggests that Mikhoels’s daughters lend their father’s order for Litvinov’s funeral. The organizers of the funeral agree. At the cemetery, in front of Litvinov’s coffin, they carry the order of the murdered Mikhoels. His daughters are told: “You’ll get it back at the Kremlin gate.”

Molotov recalls: “When Litvinov was removed and I came to Foreign Affairs, Stalin said to me: ‘Clear the Jews out of the commissariat.’” Before the signing of the pact with Germany, Molotov still manages to take as his deputy an old acquaintance, a Jew by nationality, Lozovsky. Lozovsky will be shot in 1952 in the course of the so-called struggle against cosmopolitanism. Molotov’s wife, Polina Zhemchuzhina, a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, will be arrested for collaboration with Mikhoels.

Shortly before her death, Krupskaya writes a letter to Stalin: “Dear Iosif Vissarionovich! I am writing to you about a question that troubles me. It seems to me that great-power chauvinism is starting to show its horns. Among the children, the abusive word ‘yid’ has appeared.”

The father of fascism, Benito Mussolini, said in October 1939: “Bolshevism in Russia has disappeared. In its place has arisen a Slavic type of fascism.”

In the autumn of 1939, the play *The Oath* by Markish, which had already been accepted for production, is banned in Mikhoels’s theatre. The play told the story of the fate of a Jewish family that had fled from Hitler’s Germany to Palestine.

In 1942, on 24 July, at Hitler’s headquarters near Vinnitsa, over dinner, Hitler recalls a conversation between Stalin and Ribbentrop after the signing of the pact. Stalin had then said to Ribbentrop that “he was only waiting for the moment when there would be enough of his own intelligentsia in the USSR to put an end once and for all to the dominance of the Jews, who for the time being he still needed.”

Mikhoels continues to work. The theatre is his natural environment. His literature teacher had predicted he would become a great actor. Another teacher promised him the fame of a great poet. Mikhoels is in fact extraordinarily gifted by nature.

He did very well at school and still found time to give private lessons in various subjects. Only at the age of thirteen did he begin studying Russian. He became fascinated with Lermontov. At fifteen, dissatisfied with an existing translation, he decided to translate Lermontov’s *Demon* into Hebrew. And he did so. According to reviews, it was brilliant. Mikhoels could not stand sloppiness in language. He loved the Russian language and taught it. His friend, director Yuri Zavadsky, recalls: “If some question of speech — stress, etymology, the multifaceted meaning of a word — puzzled you, with Mikhoels you received a detailed, enthralling answer. Mikhoels felt, understood, knew the Russian language in all its richness and beauty.”

He came out of a patriarchal Jewish family in which the acting profession was considered shameful. He decided to make a career as a lawyer.

Mikhoels entered the law faculty of St. Petersburg University. Then came the October Revolution, which made him doubt the necessity of a lawyer’s work. He decided to transfer to the mathematics faculty and could easily have done so. But instead he became a student of the newly created First Jewish Theatre Studio under the direction of Alexei Granovsky. Then the studio moved to Moscow. In 1919, the Moscow State Jewish Theatre, which played in Yiddish, appeared. At first the theatre was in a small mansion on Stankevich Street. There, too, was the actors’ dormitory. The walls and ceiling of the small auditorium were painted by none other than Marc Chagall. He also did the makeup and costume for Mikhoels for the premiere.

From recollections: “Right before Mikhoels’s entrance on stage, Chagall would grab his shoulder and jab at him with his brush as if at a mannequin, putting dots on the costume and painting on his cap little birds and piglets that no opera glasses could make out.”

The rise of the theatre was dazzling. The audience was both Jewish and Russian. Anna Alexeyevna, the wife of academician Pyotr Leonidovich Kapitsa, recalls:

“At the Jewish Theatre it was very funny. There were very few people who knew Yiddish, and everyone whispered to each other, explaining. The whole theatre was whispering.

Pyotr Leonidovich liked Solomon very much. It was impossible not to like Solomon. He had an extraordinary charm. He was very intelligent, genuine, somehow a wise person, and at the same time unbelievably witty and a wonderfully talented actor.”

In 1928, GOSET went on tour to Europe.

From reviews in the foreign press: "This theatre should play all over the world. It is not a Jewish theatre, but a truly world theatre." The theatre's success aroused resentment among the Soviet authorities. The director, Granovsky, did not return to the USSR. Mikhoels became head of GOSET.

In 1935, Mikhoels staged *King Lear*. He played Lear himself. At one of the early performances, the English director and Shakespeare expert Gordon Craig was present. The next day, the newspapers published an article by Craig: "I went to the performance with undisguised scepticism. I even asked Mikhoels to give me a seat from which I could leave. But I immediately understood that it was impossible to leave such a performance. Now it is clear to me why in England there is no real Shakespeare in the theatre. Because there is no actor like Mikhoels."

Once, during the rehearsals for *King Lear*, Mikhoels was walking home at night in winter. He caught himself reciting Lear's monologue aloud in Yiddish. At that moment he ran into three drunk youths who, shouting "Beat the yids!" began to beat him. His lungs were injured.

Gordon Craig sent Mikhoels an invitation to play the role of King Lear in Yiddish at the Shakespearean Globe Theatre. The invitation never reached Mikhoels. A reply was sent in his name that he was ill and could not come.

Then came the year 1937.

One evening, Mikhoels asked his elder daughter not to renounce him if they came to take him. Mikhoels by no means suspected his daughter. But at that time too many people were renouncing those closest to them. Solzhenitsyn writes of 1937: "It was precisely that year that flooded our souls with mass corruption." Stalin was openly, deliberately working towards this corruption of souls, and he succeeded.

Members of the Mikhoels family slept in snatches. They waited for them to come for him, and were afraid they wouldn't manage to say goodbye.

When the war began, Mikhoels asked to be sent to the people's militia. He was told that "they would find another use for him."

He was appointed head of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. A figure of Jewish culture well known in the West, Mikhoels was to work to tune world public opinion in a pro-Soviet key.

Any activity of the JAC inside the country was out of the question. The Central Committee of the VKP(b) gave the JAC permission to publish a newspaper, *Unity*, in the Jewish language. Articles on the tragedy and heroism of Soviet Jews were sent abroad. Inside the country such information was subjected to strict censorship and carefully rationed. When, in May 1945, people would talk about the death camp at Auschwitz, not a sound would be heard about the Jews exterminated there.

For Mikhoels, work in the Anti-Fascist Committee was linked to concrete human destinies. Refugees who had miraculously survived from the occupied regions came to his home. Mikhoels took them in for the night, fed them. Information about concentration camps flowed into the JAC. The JAC searched for those missing in action.

People from partisan detachments came to Mikhoels's home. He spoke with them at home and right on the boulevard. One of the partisans had managed to take a group of Jewish orphans to liberated territory. He told Mikhoels about manifestations of antisemitism towards these unfortunate children

who had survived the Nazis. Mikhoels's daughter Natalia recalls: "Father only kept repeating: 'Talk, talk. You have a great advantage over me — you can talk, whereas I can only listen.'"

Mikhoels is a sober man, but on 18 February 1943, at the second plenum of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, it is stated directly that antisemitism is on the rise in the country. Member of the JAC, writer and publicist Ilya Ehrenburg, says: "For propaganda against fascism among Jews abroad there was no need to create a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee; the main task is to fight antisemitism here in our own country." But Mikhoels is moved to another front. He is sent to the USA and Britain to collect funds for the Red Army. He is given a specific task: to raise money for the construction of at least a thousand aircraft and 500 tanks. The task is completed. At huge rallies held by international Jewish organizations, 16 million dollars are raised; several million more are allocated by the Joint. Very soon, connections with precisely this charitable organization will be used as accusations against the members of the JAC. The fund of Churchill's wife gives 15 million. The money came from ordinary people: fifty cents, a dollar, ten dollars — whatever they could give. Marc Chagall remembers Mikhoels in the USA: "I have seen productions staged in squares, stadiums, circus arenas by the greatest directors of our time. But a spectacle like the anti-fascist rally in New York in 1943 could only have been staged by Mikhoels. To demand from the US government — not to ask, but to demand — the opening of a second front, even the President himself would not have permitted himself that."

Mikhoels visits Einstein. At the rallies, Mikhoels tirelessly repeats that there is no antisemitism in the USSR. Einstein, in his personal meeting with Mikhoels, does not engage in a discussion on this point. He simply says: "Antisemitism is the shadow of Jewishness."

In 1934, Ilya Ehrenburg had met Einstein. He recalls: "Einstein asked me whether there was antisemitism in the Soviet Union. I answered that there was not. 'Mr. Ehrenburg,' Einstein said to me, 'I do not believe you. Antisemitism is the shadow of any fascism.'"

After the United States, Mikhoels arrives in Britain. To receive his mission, an Honorary Committee is formed that includes Churchill's wife and trade union leaders. The British section of the World Jewish Congress organizes an evening for the guests from Moscow. After dinner the conversation begins. Mikhoels is asked about the situation of the Jews in the USSR. Mikhoels behaves confidently, answers as he is supposed to. From the recollections of Mikhoels's friend Steinberg, who was present at that reception: "Solomon Mikhoels was more than a tragic actor. Sitting with us at the table was a deeply tragic figure." Soon after his return to Moscow, on 21 February 1944, the leadership of the JAC, headed by Solomon Mikhoels, sends a letter to Molotov proposing that the question of creating a Jewish Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR be raised. The letter states: "The creation of a Jewish Soviet Republic would once and for all solve in a Bolshevik manner the problem of the position of the Jewish people."

At that time the JAC is supervised by the deputy head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee, Kondakov. Kondakov declares that the existence of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee is "superfluous." He then prepares a memorandum titled "On the nationalist line in the work of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee." Kondakov writes: "A Soviet Jew must be placed at the head of the committee." This is direct dissatisfaction with Mikhoels.

Kondakov is soon removed from supervising the JAC for theft. But his former boss, the head of Agitprop of the Central Committee, Aleksandrov, also proposes in the autumn of 1945 to shut down the JAC, arguing that, with the end of the war, it is no longer needed.

It is at this time, in September 1945, that a letter is sent to Stalin by former front-line soldiers, Jews living in Ukraine. They write:

“In the Central Committee of the CP(b) and in the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, a new course has been taken. This course has very much in common with the course previously emanating from Goebbels’s chancellery, whose worthy successors have proved to be the leaders of the party and government of Ukraine. From all central, district and city party and Soviet organizations, all Jews have been expelled. Those responsible for hiring a Jew are prosecuted. For admission to institutes, postgraduate courses and other scientific institutions, norms have been established for Jews. Many Jews — front-line soldiers or refugees — are not taken on to work, are deprived of housing and are not registered as party members. Jews who are native residents of Kiev are not allowed to return to their native city, where their families died at the hands of the fascists. In mixed families, Russian wives and husbands cannot bring in their Jewish spouses. Children are suffering particularly from this new course. Antisemitism has already penetrated pioneer groups and schools.” At this time, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine is Khrushchev.

Information on the growth of antisemitism appears in NKVD reports from Crimea, from the Altai region, from places of evacuation — Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, from Moscow.

In November 1946, on behalf of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Mikhoels writes a letter to Central Committee secretary Zhdanov requesting the publication of the so-called *Black Book*, reflecting the atrocities of the German fascists against the Jewish population during the war.

In the USA, the *Black Book* has already been published. It has been sent for publication in France, England, Italy, Mexico, Australia, Palestine, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The main, Russian edition of the *Black Book* has still not appeared. In February 1947, the head of the Propaganda Department, Aleksandrov, gives his conclusion on the question raised by Mikhoels: “The Propaganda Department has thoroughly familiarized itself with the content of the *Black Book*, which is a collection of diaries and letters of witnesses of the atrocities of the Hitlerites against the Jewish population in the occupied territories. The book contains serious political errors. The Propaganda Department considers the publication of the *Black Book* in the USSR inexpedient.” Earlier, in November 1946, a new document with yet another proposal to close the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee had reached the secretariat of the Central Committee. This time the author of the proposal is the future chief party ideologist and future Politburo member, Mikhail Suslov. He heads the External Policy Department of the Central Committee. The JAC is assigned to his purview. It is at this time that all the archival documentation of the JAC is, for the first time, seized and taken to Lubyanka for review.

On 12 October 1946, the then Minister of State Security, Abakumov, signs a top-secret special report No. 1550/A addressed to Stalin. The report is entitled: “On nationalist manifestations of certain workers of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.” Mikhoels heads that list. Those named are accused of supporting the creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East, of demanding that Jews be allowed to emigrate freely from the USSR, of seeking to establish official relations with international Jewish organizations.

The accusations are unoriginal. The free exit of anyone from the USSR is forbidden; the activity of any public organizations is strictly controlled. Only the first point of the accusation is original: the

fact is that the idea of creating a Jewish state in the Middle East is supported by Stalin himself. He simply does not envisage the participation of Soviet Jews in this.

As for the letter from the head of the External Policy Department, Suslov, it contains additional accusations. For example:

“Certain leaders, in 1945, persistently advanced the proposal to collect funds among the Jews for the construction of monuments to the Jewish population that perished from fascism.” Suslov continues: “The JAC is becoming an intermediary between the population and the party-Soviet organs, providing support to the Jewish population.” That is, the JAC is becoming an independent human-rights organization. Precisely for this reason, the document signed by Suslov contains an unambiguous conclusion: “The existence of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee is politically harmful and intolerable.” This is the main real accusation. Nationalism and, later, espionage are imputed as a cover.

Among the friends of Solomon Mikhoels are Kozlovsky, Kachalov, Ruben Simonov, Alexei Tolstoy, Sergei Obraztsov, Leonid Utyosov, Irakli Andronikov, Faina Ranevskaya, Alexander Tairov, Alisa Koonen, Dmitri Shostakovich, the famous surgeon Vishnevsky.

Kozlovsky, Mikhoels and Utyosov form the famous trio called “Kozmelyodia”. They perform at all parody shows at the Central House of Workers of the Arts. Mikhoels sings in Jewish (Yiddish), Utyosov in Russian, Kozlovsky in Ukrainian, then all together in Russian. Their last performance was in the spring of 1947.

At the end of December 1947, in the Polytechnical Museum, the jubilee of the patriarch of Jewish literature, Mendele Moykher-Sforim, is celebrated. Mikhoels delivers the opening speech. He recalls a fragment from his famous production *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*. Mikhoels says: “Benjamin, having set off in search of the Promised Land, meets a peasant and asks him: ‘Where is the road to the Promised Land?’ And just recently, from the rostrum of the United Nations, Comrade Gromyko gave us the answer to this question!” Mikhoels said this and fell silent. He stood utterly pale; he knew perfectly well what he had just said.

The point is that shortly before, the first permanent representative of the USSR to the UN, Andrei Gromyko, had declared from the rostrum: “If two peoples, the Jews and the Arabs, inhabiting Palestine, both having deep historical roots in that country, cannot live together within the framework of a single state, then nothing remains but to create in place of one state two states — an Arab and a Jewish one.” This means the creation of the State of Israel. And it means that in the Polytechnical Museum, Mikhoels has just made a call to go to Israel, that the USSR will be the first country to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. But for Soviet Jews the path to Israel will be closed.

The radio recording of Mikhoels’s speech is erased the next day, forty-eight hours before New Year’s 1948.

In that same December 1947, on Stalin’s orders, his relatives on the side of his wife Nadezhda Alliluyeva are arrested: her sister Anna Alliluyeva, the wife of Nadezhda’s brother, Evgenia Alliluyeva, and her daughter Kira. They are accused of gathering information about the head of the Soviet state in the interests of a foreign intelligence service. Their friends are arrested with them. They are charged with having ties to the head of the JAC, Mikhoels.

On 7 January 1948, Mikhoels leaves on a business trip to Minsk. Before leaving, he goes around to say goodbye to friends. Mikhoels often went on tour, for long periods, but he did not have the habit of saying goodbye. This time he calls and says goodbye to Pyotr Leonidovich Kapitsa. Kapitsa's wife Anna Alexeyevna recalls: "Mikhoels asked how Pyotr Leonidovich was, what he was doing. And we had some kind of impression we couldn't understand, we couldn't figure out why he had called. Only later did it occur to us that he knew something would happen to him, that he wanted somehow to convey his last state of mind. We had a very heavy impression after that conversation."

Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels was killed in Minsk on the night of 12 January 1948.

In her book *Only One Year*, Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva would write, after leaving the USSR: "It happened at my father's dacha. I came in while he was talking on the telephone with someone. They were reporting to him, and he was listening. Then he said: 'Well, an automobile accident.'

I remember that intonation very well — it was not a question but an assertion, an answer. He wasn't asking; he was suggesting it — an automobile accident. When he finished the conversation, he said to me: 'Mikhoels has been killed in a car accident.' Mikhoels had been murdered, and there was no accident. The 'car accident' was the official version proposed by my father. I knew only too well that my father saw "Zionism and conspiracies" everywhere."

From a memorandum of First Deputy Minister of State Security Ogoltsov to Lavrenty Beria, dated 18 March 1953, that is, after Stalin's death: "In November 1947, the then Minister of State Security Abakumov and I were summoned to the Kremlin to Comrade Stalin. At the end of the conversation, he gave Abakumov an instruction to carry out a special operation against Mikhoels and, for this purpose, to arrange an 'automobile accident'. On 6 January 1948, I left for Minsk with a group of comrades. We settled on the following variant: through our agents, invite Mikhoels late at night to visit some acquaintances, send him a car, bring him onto the grounds of the dacha of the Minister of State Security of Belorussia, Lieutenant General Comrade Tsanava, where he would be liquidated, and then take the body away and dump it on a quiet street." The operation was carried out successfully.

From the testimony of the former Minister of State Security of Belorussia, Lieutenant General Tsanava, dated 16 April 1953: "Deputy Minister of State Security of the USSR Ogoltsov informed me that he had come to Minsk to carry out a 'government decision' and an order from Stalin on the 'liquidation of Mikhoels'." From the explanatory note of one of the participants in the special operation, Colonel Shubnyakov, dated 18 March 1953: "The operation to liquidate Mikhoels was carried out at the dacha. He was killed — crushed by a truck. The body was taken out and dumped on one of the streets."

On 28 October 1948, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) adopts a resolution approving the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on awarding orders to generals and officers of the Ministry of State Security of the USSR "for the successful completion of a special government assignment." The protocol emphasizes "without publication in the press."

The participants in the murder of Mikhoels are decorated as follows: Tsanava receives the Order of the Red Banner. Kruglov, Lebedev and Shubnikov receive, for the murder of Mikhoels, the Order of the Patriotic War, First Class. Kosyrev and Povzun receive the Order of the Red Star. The Minister of State Security, Abakumov, and his deputy Ogoltsov will receive the Order of the Red Star in accordance with a separate order.

Ivan Kozlovsky will go to the place where the body of his friend, Solomon Mikhoels, had been dumped and, in accordance with an ancient Slavic custom, will leave there a silver coin.