

OPTIMISM DAMPENED OVER SOVIET JEWRY SITUATION AS RUSSIANS DENY REPORTS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 2 (JTA) -- Reports from Moscow Thursday dampened the optimism which arose here earlier in the week that large numbers of Soviet Jews will soon be allowed to leave for Israel and that the Soviet Union is moving toward a thaw in its relations with the Jewish State.

A Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying there were no arrangements for a larger number of exit permits to be granted and that no invitation has been sent to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to visit Moscow.

According to reports from Moscow Thursday, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov said, "We cannot guarantee an exact number of applications that can be presented and receive favorable outcomes," a reference to reports that 11,000-12,000 Soviet Jews would be permitted to leave in the next 9-12 months. "There will be no quotas," he said.

Peres told Israel Radio Thursday that he hadn't heard of any invitation. "There may be such intentions but so far I've received no invitation," he said. Soviet officials were also reported to have denied arrangements were being made for a mutual exchange of consular delegations with Israel.

Media reports Wednesday said a Soviet consular delegation would visit Israel shortly but that the Soviets have not agreed to a return visit by an Israeli delegation. Diplomatic quarters in Jerusalem stressed that the Soviets were made aware of Israel's insistence on mutuality and reciprocity when Israeli and Soviet representatives meet briefly at Helsinki last August.

But Soviet officials told Israel Radio this week that reciprocity did not apply to consular delegations because "the Soviet Union has far more nationals and property in Israel than there are Israelis or Israeli property in the Soviet Union."

Warns Against Exaggerations

Premier Yitzhak Shamir said Thursday that there were some encouraging signs of a thaw with Moscow. "But we shouldn't exaggerate. I really hope that we shall finally achieve a breakthrough and see many Jews leaving Russia, and especially coming to Israel," he said. He added, "If they don't come here, there is no importance to their departure."

Despite lack of verification of reports that a large-scale departure of Soviet Jews is imminent, the Absorption Ministry and Jewish Agency have begun to prepare for their arrival. The Transport Ministry is marshalling Israel's entire fleet of passenger aircraft to bring large numbers of Soviet Jews from Rumania.

Reports earlier in the week said the Soviets agreed that all Russian Jews holding Israeli visas would be allowed to fly directly to Israel via Rumania.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES A SIMMERING DISPUTE

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, April 2 (JTA) -- The disclosure this week that the Soviet Union agreed to ease the emigration of Soviet Jews and to allow a more liberal policy toward Jews within the Soviet Union -- a claim which the Soviets denied Thursday -- brought to the surface a long-simmering behind-the-scenes dispute between various Soviet Jewry groups in the United States, revealed in interviews by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency with leading American Soviet Jewry activists.

The essence of the dispute is over who has the mandate to speak for the Jewish community on the issue of Soviet Jews in meetings with Kremlin officials. Should agreements or "deals," as some view it, be made by American Soviet Jewry activists in talks in Moscow? How much of the purported agreements and promises by the Russians can be taken seriously?

These questions came to the fore after Morris Abram, chairman of both the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, returned from their trip to Moscow last week and reported this week that they had gained concessions from Soviet officials, whom Abram and Bronfman refused to name.

A day before their disclosure, on Monday, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, reported in The New York Times that the Soviets had agreed to establish a new transit procedure for future Jewish emigres that would eliminate the phenomenon of "neshira" ("dropping out") of Jews who come to the U.S. instead of Israel.

Schneier emphasized that he had negotiated the new procedure in Moscow and Bucharest in February, and that flights would proceed directly to Israel via an undisclosed city in Rumania. Schneier gave no number of Jews who would be permitted to leave.

Disclosures Not Really News

Essentially, there was nothing new about these disclosures. Feelers toward this end could be discerned in an interview that Abram gave JTA last December upon his return from Rumania, where he said he had "urged" Rumanian President Nicolae Ceausescu in a private meeting in Bucharest to convey to the Soviets the "lesson of the Rumanian experience" regarding its relationship with its Jewish community and Jewish emigration, and the effect that has had on its relations with the U.S., enabling the granting of Most-Favored-Nation trade status, which the USSR does not enjoy because of the imposition of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

Indeed, one of the important claims that Abram and Bronfman made this week was the recommendation of annual waivers of Jackson-

Vanik in exchange for stepped-up Jewish emigration, an issue hotly contested by other Soviet Jewry groups.

Schneier made an even more important revelation on March 2 (see March 3 JTA Bulletin) when he told JTA that, based on meetings he held in Moscow in February with high Soviet officials, there would be a significant improvement in Jewish emigration and religious freedom.

At that time, Schneier, chief rabbi of the Park East Synagogue in Manhattan and a frequent visitor to the Soviet Union, met with Anatoly Dobrynin, Secretary of International Relations of the Communist Central Committee; Alexander Yakovlev, Communist Party secretary; Georgi Arbatov, a Central Committee official and head of the USA Institute; dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov; Konstantin Kharchev, chairman of the Council of Religious Affairs, who visited the U.S. in October at Schneier's invitation -- an unprecedented such visit; and even briefly with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Statements By The Participants

On Wednesday, Schneier responded to JTA's inquiry by reiterating that he had indeed been responsible for the negotiations, and that he had briefed Abram on them on his return from Moscow. Schneier gave, however, no number of Jews who would be permitted to leave, but said that "the first part is the clearing up of all refusniks."

Last Sunday, Abram told JTA that he and Bronfman had returned from Moscow in an "optimistic" mood regarding Soviet Jewry, but "it would not be productive at this time to go into details."

However, on Tuesday, a day after Schneier disclosed in the Times what he accomplished in the Soviet Union, Abram provided the media with details of his and Bronfman's talks in Moscow.

What was new this time were some apparent discrepancies in reported statements by Abram to various news mediums. The Washington Post on Tuesday quoted him as saying that he and Bronfman went to Moscow in official capacity "on behalf of major Jewish organizations in the United States and other Western countries." He said the same in a printed statement given to the JTA Tuesday. However, an Israel Radio report quoted him as saying that he was not in Moscow in any official capacity.

In addition, Abram said in his statement to the JTA that the Soviets had made specific agreements. But in his Radio Israel interview he said merely that Bronfman and he "have reason to believe that there will be direct flights... increase in immigration... and an expansion of Jewish rights within the Soviet Union."

Abram also expressed regret in his statement for "the premature publication of statements by other persons who were not involved in their discussions and who hold no representative office in the Jewish community." The "other persons" were not identified but it presumably referred to Schneier, who was interviewed in The New York Times on Monday.

Abram, in the statement to JTA, said his and Bronfman's aim, "was to get the 'Jewish problem' off the table so as to remove it as an issue of contention."

Reactions followed immediately.

The sticking point for various Soviet Jewry organizations were media reports that the Soviet Union would allow 11,000-12,000 Jews to leave in

the next 9-12 months, without any indication of how many would be allowed to leave annually after that. There are some 380,000 Jews who are seeking to leave the USSR, according to Soviet Jewry activists in the U.S. and Israel. Neither Abram, Bronfman nor Schneier gave any number of Jews who would be permitted to leave.

Glenn Richter, national coordinator of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, pointed out that even if the Soviets actually allowed 11,000-12,000 Jews to leave annually, "At this rate it would take 34-1/2 years for all of them to leave."

The SSSJ maintains that flexibility in Jackson-Vanik must be accompanied by specific conditions, including a "free process of emigration" that is "routine and institutionalized, free from harassment," with an annual figure of 60,000, "to which the Kremlin agreed during the 1974 Congressional debate on the Amendment." In addition, the SSSJ asks for release of Prisoners Of Conscience from labor camps to Israel, with a pledge of no more prisoners, and cessation of harassment of unofficial teachers of Hebrew and Judaism.

Pamela Cohen, president of the Union of Councils of Soviet Jews (UCSJ), was angry that Abram had claimed to represent them. "We did not know that Abram was in the Soviet Union," she said, "until we heard it from our sources there. We have had no input in this, nor have the people we're talking about."

She was equally incensed by talk of waiving the Jackson-Vanik Amendment: "Why are we discussing Jackson-Vanik when there is no movement on the part of the Soviets?" she asked. "One of the reasons that the UCSJ came out in 1979 against Jackson-Vanik was that we knew that the apparatus was closing. I was in Odessa in 1979 and I saw them closing down the OVIR offices from five to two days a week."

Regarding the number of refusniks, Cohen said that "the minimum number that we can talk about is 50,000 for whom you can use the word refusniks. The 11,000 may be long-term refusniks." Schneier, in talking about the numbers, said it refers to the list of refusniks given by Secretary of State George Shultz to Gorbachev at his summit conference with President Reagan in Reykjavik last year.

Cohen also said the Union was also tremendously upset by the proposal to eliminate the option to choose one's country of destination, which has been enabled at the Vienna and Rome transit camps. "One should be absolutely free to choose where he will go," Cohen said. Besides, "If we are dealing with direct flights to Israel, at some point politically in the Mideast negotiations and Mideast powerplay, Soviet client states will put pressure on the Soviet government to clamp down on them, and if this arises, if that time coincides with a period of repression and anti-Semitism, like the first two years under the Gorbachev regime, we have closed the escape outlet to the U.S."

"We have to start fighting for the hearts and minds of American Jewry," Cohen stressed. "They must understand that this issue is very complicated."

Richter also pointed out that other conditions must be considered, which Abram and Bronfman apparently did not: "The Kremlin did not promise to keep the Gulag free of Jewish prisoners, nor to raise Hebrew teaching to the official status of so many other ethnic languages in the USSR. The private teaching of language is a modification announced by the Soviets several

months ago. Permission to import Jewish books would be an extension of the display of thousands of different Jewish titles at Moscow book fairs going back to 1977."

Richter also said that another consideration is that "Anti-Jewish attacks in the Soviet media and books must end. There was no promise that the stench of official anti-Semitism in the electronic and printed mediums would cease."

Issue Of Who Speaks For Soviet Jews

Asked who speaks for Soviet Jews, Lynn Singer, a past president of the UCSJ and executive director of the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry, a member organization of the UCSJ, said emphatically that "Soviet Jews should speak for themselves. But in light of the fact that they are not able to talk in one voice to the West directly, the Union of Councils is probably more tuned in to the needs of Soviet Jews than anyone else. But we have not been appointed or anointed, nor has anyone else. That job belongs to the Mashiah, and since the world has done an excellent job of dividing Jews, then the spokesman for Jews has not yet arrived."

"I think that the presumptuousness of the self-appointed would-be Jewish leaders is frightening," said Singer, adding that "the 40-member councils of the UCSJ were not consulted by the NCSJ" although the UCSJ had asked to talk to them many times.

Schneider, asked who speaks for Soviet Jews, responded: "I think that the issue of Soviet Jews is of such great concern for every Jewish leader and the Jewish community all over the world that you certainly have many people committed to the cause. We have leaders who have a great sense of commitment to raise the plight of Soviet Jewry."

Schneider also said that he believes that in the case of Soviet Jews whose families are in the U.S. and who wish to be united with them here, that arrangements could be made by the families in the U.S. applying with the U.S. government for refugee status for them. Most particularly, in the case of cancer patients whose families are in the U.S., he spoke of "preferential visas" for sick people issued by the U.S. "Sick people would be able to apply for entry to the U.S. based on compassion," Schneider believes.

The routing through Rumania to Israel, said Schneider, "was just a general principle that was approved. All the questions raised are legitimate questions that have to be addressed. But first, there has to be a resolution of all the Jewish community." Schneider cautioned on the need for all Jews and Soviet Jewry activists to close ranks and move together in a united front. He told JTA that he refused to cast any aspersions on any Jewish leader or to engage in divisiveness. "I would urge that Jews join ranks and let's move forward," he said. "It is a historic time, and there are many opportunities. Let's face it," he said, "changes are taking place in the Soviet Union. This is no time to have friction within. We have to sit down together and talk this over."

Prof. Martin Gilbert of Oxford University, the biographer of Winston Churchill and an author of many books on Soviet Jews, as well as advisory board member of the UCSJ and strong activist for Soviet Jews in England, told the JTA in an exclusive telephone interview from London that "At this time of change and controversy, one must never lose sight of the true dimensions of the Soviet Jewry problem, not only the 12,000 known refuseniks, but the 382,000 Jews who have already

indicated their desire to leave, and whose number grows every day.

"No deal or arrangement with the Soviet authorities is worthy of the Jewish people in the free world, which does not establish without conditions the right of any Jew to leave Russia who might wish to do so, now or in the future. Even those refused on so-called 'secrecy grounds' must be allowed without exception to leave within a five- or at most ten-year period after the ending of their official work. The cry 'Let my people go' must mean 'all my people,' or it means nothing."

WIESEL ENCOURAGED BY REPORTS FROM USSR ABOUT EMIGRATION BUT CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET INSENSITIVITY TO INDIVIDUAL CASES OF REFUSENIKS By Judith Colp

WASHINGTON, April 2 (JTA) -- Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel said Thursday that he is "encouraged" by recent reports that the Soviet government appears to be easing their restrictions against Jews, but remains "profoundly concerned" about their "insensitivity" to individual cases of refuseniks.

"The issue is not whether (the Soviet Union) is more sensitive to Jewish issues or fears; the primary concern is that Jews should be allowed to leave," Wiesel told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

He noted that although reports have stated that as many as 11,000 Jews will be allowed to emigrate, this is still much less than the some 51,000 who were allowed to leave in 1979.

Wiesel made his comments during a visit to Alexander Slepak, the son of Soviet refusenik Vladimir and Maria Slepak who has been fasting since last Friday at the U.S. Capitol to dramatize the plight of his parents. Wiesel was on his way to receive the Profiles in Courage Award from the local John F. Kennedy Lodge of B'nai B'rith at the Adas Israel Congregation here.

"Slepak is a test case. If we want to believe (Soviet leader Mikhail) Gorbachev's sincerity, and we want to believe it, he must show his good will to Slepak, one of the leaders of the movement," Wiesel said.

Wiesel refused to comment on reports that Soviet Jews will go to Israel from Rumania, instead of going to Vienna where they would have the option of going to the United States. "I want to study the issue," he said.

Slepak, a resident of Israel who is a medical school student in Philadelphia, said he believes Soviet Jews should be allowed to choose between the U.S. and Israel. Appearing alert as he remained on his vigil, Slepak said he speaks regularly to his father who is also fasting. He said the "Soviet government didn't make any steps towards hinting at his possible release."

Vladimir Slepak, one of the founders of the Helsinki Watch Group, first applied for emigration with his wife in 1971, but was refused on the grounds that he had access to state secrets. An electronics engineer, he is former chief of the Moscow Television Research Institute.

The Slepaks were exiled to Siberia for five years in 1978 after they hung a sign on their balcony demanding that they be allowed to emigrate. Alexander Slepak was permitted to go to Israel ten years ago. Slepak said most of the recent Soviet concessions towards Jews have been in "cultural" areas such as releasing Hebrew teachers from prison and not in emigration.

U.S. REPORT ON SOUTH AFRICA SAYS ISRAEL HAS BEEN SELLING WEAPONS AND PROVIDING TECHNICAL AID TO SOUTH AFRICA 'ON A REGULAR BASIS'

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 2 (JTA) --The Reagan Administration officially informed Congress Thursday that Israel has been selling weapons and providing technical assistance to South Africa "on a regular basis" despite the United Nations Security Council embargo on arms to that country imposed in 1977.

The Administration, in its long expected report on countries violating the embargo, also said that it "believes" companies in Israel, France and Italy, have continued to maintain and upgrade arms systems supplied to South Africa before the 1977 embargo.

The report identifying countries breaking the embargo was required as part of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act adopted by Congress in 1986. It was scheduled to be delivered to Congress April 1, but for unexplained reasons the State Department was not able to get it in to the hands of Senators and House members, until a day later.

The State Department released Thursday a three-page summary of the longer more detailed report which is classified.

Findings Are Not Surprising

The findings, at least in the summary, is not surprising. Israel, in anticipation of the report, announced March 18 that it has banned all new sales to South Africa, although it would honor existing contracts.

State Department spokesman Charles Redman noted Thursday that the Administration has discussed the arms embargo with the countries listed over the years.

He noted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act requires the Administration to identify countries breaking the embargo and allows the President to "consider as a possible sanction whether the U.S. should terminate military assistance to such countries." The President's action would have to be approved by a joint resolution of Congress, he added.

Israel is the only country mentioned that receives military aid from the U.S., \$1.8 billion in grants. There is no likelihood that aid to Israel would be eliminated or even cut. But the issue could further fuel the tension between the U.S. and Israel ignited by the Pollard spy case and the Iran affair.

The report stresses that most of the major weapons systems that South Africa has were installed prior to 1977. Most of the weapons it now imports are small, which the report notes makes it "difficult to detect."

No Details Given In Public Report

The public report does not go into details about the weapons and covers the violations by countries in three paragraphs, the largest of which deals with Israel.

"Prior to the Israeli government's decision on March 18 not to sign new military contracts and to let existing contracts expire, Israel appears to have sold military systems and subsystems and provided technical assistance on a regular basis," the report said. "Although Israel does not require end-use certificates and some cut-outs may have

been used, we believe that the government was fully aware of most or all of the trade."

The report adds that "there is no evidence" that Israel supplied South Africa with U.S. manufactured or licensed weapons. But it adds that "in the absence of inspection of Israeli-made or licensed weapons in South African hands" the U.S. does not know whether South Africa has Israeli weapons that were made using U.S. technology.

The report notes that the Security Council embargo made it mandatory not to supply weapons to South Africa, but only "called upon" countries to terminate contracts for maintaining weapons under existing contracts. This "limited exception" "does not authorize deliveries of arms under preexisting contracts," the report said.

In addition to France, Italy and Israel, the report also points out that "companies in (West) Germany, England, the Netherlands" have on occasion exported articles covered by the embargo without government permission or have engaged in sales to South Africa in the gray area between civilian and military applications.

JEWISH WAR VETERANS MONUMENT VANDALIZED, FORMER JWV POST LEADER BEATEN BY ANTI-SEMITIC ASSAILANTS

DELRAY BEACH, Fla. April 2 (JTA) -- A monument to Jewish war veterans, vandalized here in January, was rededicated last Sunday, three days after Murray Hymowitz, past commander of Jewish War Veterans Post 266, was badly beaten by anti-Semitic assailants.

The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office said it had no leads yet on the assault or the vandalism, according to Kipp Friedman, a reporter for the Broward Jewish World. Hymowitz, 74, who stands 5-foot-5 inches and weighs 160 pounds, described his assailants as three white men in their mid-20's, two of whom held him while the third pummeled him after he left a meeting of his veterans post at a shopping plaza in nearby Kings Point.

They shouted anti-Semitic epithets while beating him and fled when an unidentified passerby approached. According to Louis Shure, Palm Beach County regional director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, there has been a 68 percent increase in anti-Semitic attacks on Jews and Jewish property in Florida in the last year. "Murray's beating is by far the worst," Shure said.

In the absence of clues, local police could find no connection between the attack on Hymowitz and the vandals who toppled the six-foot-high grey granite monument, crowned by a Star of David, in the Veterans Park here three months ago. Repairs cost \$1,600.

But the monument was a source of local controversy from the start because it honored only Jewish war veterans and because it was sponsored by a JWV post outside the Delray Beach city limits.

When it was dedicated anew, at ceremonies attended by 400 veterans, including Hymowitz, local politicians and clergy, the monument bore an additional inscription honoring all veterans of all wars. But Joe Reilly, commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars O'Neal Priest Post 4141 in Delray Beach, which dedicated its own, much larger monument at the same site 40 years ago, was still resentful.