



VANIK NOW SUPPORTS WAIVING AMENDMENT HE CO-AUTHORED

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Feb. 6 (JTA) -- Former Representative Charles Vanik has added his voice to those urging a waiver of the U.S.-Soviet trade restrictions that bear his name.

In a conversation Monday with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Vanik recommended that American businessmen "place their support behind" an 18-month waiver of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment.

The amendment is the most punitive of a number of U.S. laws linking the Soviet's emigration policy to their trade with U.S. businesses.

Vanik's recommendation, which he extended to the Jewish community, is further indication that long-time critics of the Soviet Union are ready to acknowledge big improvements in its emigration policy.

Last year, nearly 19,000 Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union, and 30,000 to 40,000 are expected to be let out this year. In 1986, by contrast, only 914 were allowed out.

On Thursday, the Board of Governors of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry passed a resolution saying the conference will continue its process of "looking toward a new policy in the near future if emigration -- and the climate in which it functions -- are sustained."

The resolution was confirmation of a Jan. 10 joint statement by the National Conference and 18 other Jewish organizations calling for a review of U.S.-Soviet trade policy.

On Sunday, the American Jewish Congress announced the results of a Jan. 22 meeting, in which their Governing Council voted to recommend to other organizations that they also agree to support a waiver of Jackson-Vanik.

"Because the conditions (in the Soviet Union) are demonstrably and dramatically improved, it is useful to demonstrate we are responsive," Philip Baum, associate executive director of the AJCongress, said Monday.

A decision to waive Jackson-Vanik would have to come from President Bush. Last month his administration said they would require a "strong consensus" of support among the public before they would consider such a waiver.

Business Backs Waiver

The business community is said to back a waiver, but consensus is not altogether apparent among Jewish organizations and other human rights groups.

Micah Naftalin, national director of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, told a news conference in Washington last week that "it is vital that we withhold playing the Jackson-Vanik card -- the most important remaining concession -- until Soviet promises are converted into actual performance."

If emigration reaches 30,000 to 35,000 this year, said Naftalin, he would agree to a repeal of the 1974 Stevenson Amendment, which puts a \$300 million ceiling on loans available to the Soviets from the Export-Import Bank for the purchase of American goods.

Naftalin said Jackson-Vanik should be waived only if emigration reaches the 60,000 per year level, according to the wishes of Vanik's co-signer, the late Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.). Jackson died in 1983.

Vanik disputed the 60,000 figure. Speaking with JTA from his office in Washington, Vanik said the amendment he co-wrote as the Democratic congressman from Ohio contained "no fixation about a number at all."

Rather, it sought policies that "would be indicative of a condition in which Soviet citizens who desired to leave can leave."

"Frankly, I am very much encouraged by the Soviet promises, at least those made by Mr. (Mikhail) Gorbachev that by April 1, there will be dramatic further changes coming in the codification of the law towards migration and religion," said Vanik, who left Congress in 1981 and is now a lawyer in private practice.

However Vanik, in a letter last week to World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman, said the amendment should not be repealed nor changed in substance.

He also said the initiative for promoting a waiver should come from the Jewish community, for whom he had high praise.

"What they fought for is now in reach by millions of others in the Soviet structure," said Vanik.

(JTA Washington correspondent David Friedman contributed to this report.)