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STOP THE MIDDLEMEN

A SURVEY published last week by The Associated Press shows that a substantial emigration movement is in progress from Ireland, which has not been spared the economic and social malaise gripping Western Europe. Yet while more than 10,000 annually have been moving in recent years to Britain, a meager handful – 556 last year – have been given residence visas for the United States, the historic haven for Irish migrants.

The U.S. – despite a relatively generous immigration policy – obviously cannot accept unlimited numbers of newcomers; thus many severely distressed people throughout the world, who would be only too happy to go to the U.S. have not the slightest hope of getting there. Nobody has suggested, for example, bringing even a small fraction of the unfortunate people of Africa, many of them languishing in refugee camps, to the U.S.

This may be due to their not conforming to the U.S. definition of “refugee.” In an article in last Sunday’s *New York Times* Mr. Richard D. Lamm, the governor of Colorado, explains that “applicants must establish that they are currently being persecuted or would be subject to persecution if they returned to their homelands.” Once this has been established, priority is given to those refugees who are “in immediate danger of losing their lives or who have no alternative to resettlement in the United States.”

Evidently only one exception is made to these rules by the American government: For Jews who have left the Soviet Union with an official exit permit and have arrived safely in Vienna on their way to their homeland. It is indeed with the guarantee of their homeland, Israel, that the Soviet authorities allow them to leave. They hold valid visas for Israel; many of them were granted Israeli citizenship while still in the USSR. They are – when they reach Vienna – certainly not being persecuted and they are not going to be persecuted when they reach Israel. Very much to the contrary: they are treated in Israel as long-lost brothers.

Yet at this juncture the U.S. government steps in, proclaims them refugees and the gates, closed to so many suffering, deprived – and persecuted – refugees, are opened wide to them.

As everybody knows, the USSR does not allow its citizens to emigrate. The only exceptions it has made are for a handful of dissidents and for ethnic groups who can claim that they have no “homeland” of their own inside the USSR.

Some 15 years ago Moscow included Jews in this practice, and they are allowed to emigrate – on the express condition that they are going to Israel; they must, moreover, produce an affidavit from relatives there. Bringing them to the U.S., therefore, is a demonstrative act of defiance of the USSR. It is, moreover, a reverberating affront to Israel, a belittlement of Israeli sovereignty. Not least – it is an open invitation to Moscow to stop letting Jews leave the USSR.

For some years, Moscow, aside from a number of unofficial warnings, took no action. Finally it accepted the challenge. For several years now it has allowed only a trickle of Jewish emigration.

HOW DID the U.S. come to participate in an operation designed to keep Soviet Jews from going to Israel?

The drop-out began in comparative innocence a decade ago. A few individuals were allowed to go directly to the U.S. where they had relatives. The Israeli government or the Jewish Agency, or both, failed to realize the implications of creating a precedent, and allowed the volume of “dropouts” to continue.

At some stage one or more U.S. Jewish organizations not specially friendly to Israel, certainly not to Zionism, pounced on the idea of organizing the dropout. They persuaded Washington to help them act out the lie that Jews with a welcoming home to go to in Israel can be treated as homeless refugees.

In a letter of unmitigated cynicism, the president of Hias, the organization that runs the drop-out-to-America operation (*The Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 22, 1985), claimed that if Hias did not do it, there is a queue of organizations operating in Vienna willing to help the Soviet Jews get to the U.S. He fails to note that none of the organizations he names is Jewish, and at least one – the World Council of Churches – is notoriously pro-PLO and unfriendly to Israel. He also fails to reveal who first had the bright idea of diverting these Jews from Israel and who took the trouble to persuade the U.S. government to collaborate in the process.

WHATEVER other factors have moved the several partners in the operation, one result is manifestly desired by all of them – to reduce the number of Jews “making aliya.”

This charge includes the U.S. There is in the State Department tradition a distinct element of anti-Zionism, fortified by a strain of anti-Semitism. It runs like a red thread through U.S. policy since World War I. The doors opened today to Soviet Jews who are *not* refugees were largely closed to Hitler’s victims before and during the Holocaust. Even the regular quotas were left unfilled. President Harry Truman identified the anti-Semitic strain during the Zionist struggle for statehood. It surfaced vividly in 1981 when U.S. Jews opposed the supply of Awacs planes which would enable the Saudis to spy on Israel.

In these very days, the people of Israel, and her friends in the U.S. – who undoubtedly make up the bulk of the population – should be alive to the otherwise inexplicably harsh and humiliating official U.S. reaction in the Pollard affair; and no less to the subsequent clumsily artficed “raid,” with the cooperation of an invited NBC television crew, on a factory legally supplying military hardware to Israel.

It should, incidentally, not pass unnoticed in Washington that even organs of Israeli opinion usually most cautious, not to say timid, in their attitude to the U.S., like *Ha’aretz* and *The Jerusalem Post*, have been roused to give voice to the sense of public outrage at this latest surfacing of venom. *The post* pointed out, *inter alia*, that this was “not the way to treat an ally.”

Much more incisively should this be pointed out to the U.S. government over its unwarranted destructive intervention in the effort of the Jewish people to restore the Soviet branch to its homeland.

TO THE PEOPLE of Israel, however, – and to history – it is the government of Israel that is answerable for its own part in the farce to which the heroic exodus from the Soviet Union has been reduced.

The Likud government in its time never lifted a finger to put an end to this development. It silently allowed the sponsors and the defenders of the dropout to spread the monstrous conceit that Soviet émigrés had the right to freedom of choice – freedom, that is, to violate their pledge to the Soviets, freedom to violate their compact with Israel, freedom to undermine and ultimately to ruin the chances of the Jews left behind in the Soviet Union of ever getting out. The complaisant behaviour of the Israeli government was perhaps the prime factor in convincing the “dropouts” that they were doing nothing wrong.

That government failed to protest to Washington and to demand, even if only in the name of international morality – let alone treatment of an ally – an end to the “refugee” hoax. They pretended not to see – and ignored the many warnings – that Moscow was being provided with, and indeed forced to give, a perfectly rational justification for closing the exit gates. They continued to encourage the appeals to Moscow to “let my people go,” when they should have been calling on Washington – to “let go of my people.”

TO ITS credit, the present government has shown awareness of the American core of the problem. Moreover, Prime Minister Peres has now stated publicly that Soviet Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze had told him that Moscow would not agree to continue allowing out Jews who go off to the U.S. “The dropouts,” said Peres, “are doing irreparable damage to the cause of Soviet Jews.”

The planners, sponsors and collaborators in the process of transporting Soviet Jews from Vienna to the U.S., thus publicly exposed, have not the slightest remnant of a shadow of an excuse for pretending that they have not been engaged in an unholy undertaking which, over and above its significance for the State and the people of Israel, has constituted an ongoing act of sabotage against the movement to liberate the Jews of the Soviet Union.

It is surely incumbent now on the government to evolve an active policy designed to put an end to the operation of the Vienna middlemen, and to the inimical policy of the United States. Only thus can honest pressure on Moscow be revived – to reopen the gates to Zion.