

9 November 1984

## WITH CLEAN HANDS

THE LONG-HERALDED discussion on Soviet Jewry that the government was to hold last Sunday did not take place. The reason for postponement was the urgency of decision on the economy. Why could the government not have held a special session on another day of the week? Is the subject of Soviet Jewry not urgent enough to justify special attention?

To judge by the now traditional behaviour of Israeli governments there never has been a sense of public urgency in dealing with this question; and it seems that the insensitivity of the present government reflects a coalition of the insensitivities of both major parties.

Its members, individually troubled, seem yet collectively deaf to the urgent cry coming from Jews in the USSR, calling – they know not for what practical help, but at least for an answering volume of solidarity from the Jewish people.

That response has not come, not because a sense of solidarity is lacking, but because the Jewish people's only national representative body capable of mobilizing it throughout the world and giving it its maximum thrust – the Israeli government – has had “no time,” not only last Sunday but on months of Sundays before that.

NOT ONLY in the gradual shutting of the Soviet exit gates have the dangers of a new chapter of near-Stalinist oppression become apparent. The harassment of “refuseniks,” of teachers and students of clandestine Hebrew, indeed of anybody discovered to be harbouring Jewish national thoughts or sentiments, has become ever more cruel.

An incessant stream of plain anti-Semitic incitement, recalling the pogromist atmosphere of Tsarist Russia and rivaling some of the propaganda excesses of the Nazis, merges with an ever more intense campaign of hatred for Israel.

For those Jews who are its immediate specific victims, the Soviet Union is a society in which they are persecuted for their culture, deprived of the means of economic subsistence, bereft of the protection of the law and denied the hope of escape.

Several individuals, Shcharansky, Begun, Ida Nudel and others are treated with varying degrees of spine-chilling brutality – as an example to their fellow-Jews, each of whom must regard himself as a potential victim.

Yet, precisely at this moment there comes evidence of a strengthening of Jewish consciousness of more and more people, especially among the youth, exhibiting their Jewish identity.

Indeed from the depths of this Soviet repression has come the defiant call of free Jewish spirits: “We want to go to Israel, and we want to go not just to rejoin families, but because Israel is our homeland.”

This is not a new Zionist formulation and it will not surprise the Soviet authorities. Indeed the “revolutionary” notion that there is a Jewish nation, that it has a homeland and that a Jew born in the Soviet Union can see himself as a citizen of the Jewish State and is entitled to go and live in it, was the explicit claim made by the brave

young pioneers of the movement for emigration in the late Sixties and the early Seventies.

When Dov Sperling and Yasha Kazakov, two of the earliest of these pioneers, arrived in Israel, they expressed the fear that the whole of the Soviet Jewish community was in danger; they believed that there was even a threat of mass deportation to Siberia hanging over it. They begged for an abandonment of the Israeli policy of secret diplomacy and called instead for a loud, sustained world-wide campaign to keep a searchlight focused on the condition of Soviet Jewry and to voice incessantly the demand for freedom of emigration to Israel.

Whatever may then have been the reasons the Soviets' change of policy on immigration, the fact is that the increasingly large emigration of the following years was accompanied by a world-wide public discussion of the issue of Soviet Jewry and by organized activity on their behalf.

Now the Jews in the USSR, suffering greater disabilities and a system of oppression more severe than in 1970, threatened moreover with increased hardship, are asking for no less.

"Do Not Forget Us," is their persistent appeal. "Let your voice be heard to show that we are not alone," they say.

It is surely inconceivable that the Jewish people should fail to give them immediately and in full measure that minimum of encouragement, and of appreciation for the stand they are making against such terrible odds – not only for themselves but as an exposed outpost of our still embattled people.

Even that minimum of encouragement demands a maximum national effort. It should begin with the launching, by the government, of a world-wide information campaign.

Its first step should be a national demonstration in Israel, not by a handful of activists outside the Prime Minister's Office, not at some village, but by a mass rally in a city square, in Jerusalem, or in Kikar Malchei Yisrael in Tel Aviv. It should be addressed by the Prime Minister, or even by the President.

This will be the signal for similar significant demonstrations in Jewish centres throughout the world. In 1974 Yasser Arafat's appearance at the United Nations in New York was accompanied by an organized protest rally of 250,000 people outside the building.

There have been "marches on Washington" for causes no more exigent than that of Soviet Jewry. In London, in Paris, in every large centre where, at least on this issue, Jews are united, there will be a massive response if only the signal is given.

That is not all. Such public demonstrations, essential in themselves, must also serve as a catalyst for the many steps that can be taken in the political sphere, both through the U.S. and, no less important, through the countries of Europe, to bring home to the soviet leaders that it is in the Soviet interest to reopen the exit gates for Jews to leave, and to stop the persecution of those that remain.

It is to the planning of such a campaign that the government should address itself when it gets around to discussing Soviet Jewry.

THE MOST far-reaching and best organized campaign, however, will be a futile self-defeating exercise if the government does not first of all remove the shameful obstacle

which its predecessors erected, the weapon official Israel has placed in the hands of the Soviet leaders whereby, if they wish, they can provide justification for their shutting the gates against Jewish emigration.

If we believe in the power of information and of diplomatic action, it is not difficult to imagine that an occasion will arise when an American Secretary of State will appeal to the Soviets to reopen the exit gates for Jews to go to their homeland. It is not difficult then to imagine the kind of reply the Soviet leader will be in a position to give.

“You know well that in our discussions on the subject in the Seventies we made it clear repeatedly that we were allowing Jewish citizens to leave exclusively and explicitly for one destination: Israel. We did not agree to their proceeding to any other destination – whether the U.S. or elsewhere.

“How did you respond? You developed an elaborate plan for bringing these emigrants to the U.S. without their ever even sniffing the air of Israel. In time the proportion of drop-outs reached 80 per cent. Now you plead that we should reopen the gates – to resume the deception? To enable Israel to continue violating the arrangement to which we agreed?

“You plead that we should allow the Jews to go to their homeland, where a warm welcome awaits them. Is America their homeland? You ask us to recognize their right to be citizens of Israel, but you give them the status of refugees – meaning they *have* no welcoming homeland – and Israel collaborates in the bluff. You expect us to renew it?”

**IT IS CRUCIAL** that the Israeli government put an end to this monstrous situation, immoral, anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, which a previous government helped to create and maintain.

Whatever else happens, however slender the present hope of a change in Soviet policy, Israel can effectively and honestly fight the battle for Soviet Jewry only if its hands are clean.

It is crucial that it take and publish a decision immediately on the following lines:

- a) to call on the U.S. government to cease its practice of according refugee status to persons holding valid Israel visas;
- b) to take the necessary steps to prevent persons holding Israeli visas from misusing them to gain entry into Italy, on the false pretence that they are on their way to Israel (when in fact they are on their way to the U.S. Embassy in Rome to be reborn as refugees);
- c) to convey information on these decisions to the Soviet government; to reaffirm the right of every citizen and resident of Israel to leave the country whenever he likes.

*See Letter to the Editor and Katz's reply on following page*

## SOVIET JEWS

*To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, – Shmuel Katz, in his recent essay on Soviet Jewry, sets forth a scenario in which the Soviets defend their refusal to let Jews emigrate because they go to America instead of going to Israel. An equally persuasive scenario can be written which arrives at exactly the opposite conclusion, distasteful as that may be to some people.

Mr. Katz calls on the U.S. government to remove Soviet Jews from refugee status. Apart from the *hutzpa* involved in such a suggestion, what can that mean for other Jews who are oppressed in other countries? For the Jewish State to suggest that the U.S. shut the door to Jewish refugees is immoral and obscene.

If American Jews who are persuaded that all Soviet Jews should be forced to go to Israel are willing to make such representations to their government, that is their privilege. Of course they will have to bear the onus of being regarded as Jews who themselves don't go to Israel, but would like to send the Soviet Jews there as their surrogates. If other American Jews believe that refugee status for all oppressed Jews is too important to be endangered for any reason, it is likewise their right as American citizens to make their views known to their government. And we will.

PEGGY NORTON

Chicago

### **Shmuel Katz comments:**

Ms. Norton has misread my article. I did not “call on the U.S. government to remove Soviet Jews from refugee “status.” They had and have no refugee “status.” It is the U.S. government that *confers* refugee status on them; and I called and call on the U.S. government to stop *conferring* it on them.

Soviet Jews leave the USSR with perfectly good visas for Israel, precisely because Moscow, for all its sins, recognizes in effect their right of repatriation to their homeland, where relatives vouch for them.

Ms. Norton should know that on a number of occasions Soviet officials and diplomats have stated that they would not tolerate for long the switching of Jewish émigrés to the United States.

It is not irrelevant to add that the Zionist Movement and its struggle for Jewish independence aimed, through the creation of Israel, to put an end to the situation where Jews were tolerated or oppressed minorities, or refugees.