

HOW TO CELEBRATE CHANNUKAH

A U.S. Senator told San Francisco Jews last Sunday that this country should hold up grain shipments to the Soviet Union on account of Anatoly Scharansky.

This suggestion was made during a local meeting with four Congressmen and two Senators to discuss national affairs of interest to Jews. The suggestion to use food as leverage on behalf of Soviet Jews was drastic, but so is the situation.

About 145 thousand Jews have emigrated from the Soviet Union in the last decade. They are now leaving at a rate of about a thousand a month. On the other hand, there are about 200 thousand Soviet Jews who have taken the first step, having requested and received invitations from Israeli families. But they are still in the Soviet Union, many afraid to take the next step. And there are about 3000 identifiable Refuseniks whose exit visas are being denied on a long-term basis.

There is, for example, Mark Pekker, a mathematician who first applied for an exit visa in October, 1975. Some Peninsulites met him in the Soviet Union, and are in touch with him whenever possible. Mark was fired from his job when he applied for a visa. When last heard from, he was on a hunger strike. Now we are told that his wife of several months, Olga, has been physically assaulted.

The first objective of the Soviet Jewry movement is to get Jews out. That means that the Soviet Jewry movement is not mixed up with any political schemes to

overthrow the Soviet system. There are such schemes, or visions. Some, like Solzhenitsyn, are partial to a return of the Christian theocracy. Others, like certain Ukrainian groups, call for the dismantling of the Soviet Union. That is their prerogative, as unlikely as it may be, but it is not the business of the Soviet Jewry movement. If the Soviet Jewry movement became involved in such ventures, even the limited flow of emigration from the Soviet Union could be terminated.

There is a second stance: Reform, which does not call for an overturn of the Soviet System, but only that it be modified towards greater freedom. Sakharov, for example, stands for greater freedom within the Soviet System, as do generally those called "intellectual dissidents." The Soviet Jewry movement is based on a third stance: neither revolution nor reform, but emigration for those who want to leave. So far, it is the only stance which has worked. However, there is a sharp rise of interest among Soviet Jews in Jewish cultural education. That will require greater freedom of information: books, seminars, classes in Jewish studies.

The strategy of the Soviet Union, as long as it wants to maintain some image of liberality, is based on the "Chilling Effect": chill the desire of Jews to apply for visas; chill the interest in Jewish studies; chill the supportive communication between Western Jewry and Soviet Jewry.

That is the purpose of the harassment of people like Olga and Mark Pekker, who was

Earl Raab  
page 3

also the founder of a Jewish studies club in Leningrad. One way to try to modify such harassment is to let the Soviets know that the world is watching. Pick up the phone now and call the Soviet Consulate here (922-6642), asking for information about how Olga and Mark Pekker are. And write Olga and Mark a general, non-political letter of sympathy. (Poste Restanter, Leningrad 199053, U.S.S.R.).

The Scharansky Case is, of course, the Soviet's major Chill offensive. In one form or another, Scharansky's case will be based on charges that he consorted with Westerners. If that is to be counted as treason, a massive chill could settle on those Jews considering application for visa; as well as on those Jews interested in receiving and studying Jewish materials.

The most serious leverage we have on the Soviet Union is that of official American opinion and policy, as it affects political and economic needs of the Soviet hierarchy. The Belgrade conference is about over. If the Soviets move on the Scharansky case, it will be soon. The main counter-force in this case must be the U.S. Congress. The JCRC has already been in touch with the Congressmen in Northern California, on behalf of the total organized Jewish community. This week - before Channukah is over, indeed a good event for any Channukah gathering - individual letters should go to California's Senators and to your Congressman. They should call for strong congressional action on the Scharansky Case. (There is leadership there who will know exactly what to propose). What better action for Channukah?

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