

July 10, 1978

LEVERAGE

"With Bakke and Skokie and 242,  
It isn't easy to be a Jew."

That's the refrain going around New York these days. Many other items could have been added to the agenda -- but what rhymes with "Brezhnev"?

With such a multiple agenda in Jewish public affairs, the magic word becomes "leverage." We don't have the luxury of flailing around, just to exercise our emotions. In each case we have to find the point of leverage which will give us the biggest bang for the buck.

So, in the matter of Soviet oppression of Jews, delegations have been descending on Congressmen. The U.S. government is our basic point of leverage with respect to Soviet Jews. Soviet leaders don't give a hang about the anguished cries of American Jews. We have to influence the American government to take positions about which the Soviet Union does care.

But our leverage on the American public and public officials is greatest not when we just appeal with slogans to "save Jews"; but when we carefully point out that the oppression of Soviet Jews is part of an anti-American strategem. Andrei Sakharov, the Nobel prize winner who is still too hot to be dealt with by Soviet authorities in their customary fashion, has put the matter this way:

"The KGB brain trust (is) pursuing an even wider aim (than just trying to stem the flow of information). By arresting (dissidents) and sentencing some of them with a cruelty no one could fail to notice, the Soviet authorities were issuing a defiant challenge to the Western Helsinki signatories. They were confronting them

with the painful dilemma of either defending the Helsinki principles with uncompromising demands for the liberation of all those arrested -- or capitulating by backing off from the challenge and thus weakening their positions not only in human rights matters, but in all aspects of detente."

This was the message delivered by JCRC delegations which have recently gone to Washington, and have visited Congressmen at home here. And their leverage was further increased because these delegations represented the whole spectrum of organized Jewish life in San Francisco, Marin and the Peninsula.

And that is the Sakharovian message which should now be relayed to the President and to Congressmen by thousands of individual members of those organizations. Congressman Philip Burton, for one, feels that this is the kind of leverage which must be applied -- and, as always, he can be counted on to do his part.

By the way, the need for precise leverage rather than a flailing meat-axe, was pointed up by the Joan Baez visit to Sakharov last week. She helped. Stopping trade credits is leverage; stopping scientific exchange is leverage; but a total boycott on travel or cultural exchange might just help to isolate and dishearten the dissidents and refuseniks -- at this stage.

The "best point of leverage" is a measure which could well be applied to the other items on the Jewish public affairs agenda. It certainly applies to the U.S. position on the Middle East. It can even be applied to the fight against Nazism in this country. Some residents of Chicago's Marquette Park area said last week that they were sympathetic with some of the Nazi aims, but they could never join the Nazi Party itself. They said that they could never support a party whose name had been associated with a major war against the United States.

That seems to be a prevalent opinion among Americans, even those who have Nazi-like ideas. Most Americans who have Nazi-like ideas will not join the Nazi Party. They are all the more dangerous for that. We can't use all our anti-Nazi energy just fighting the easier target -- the swastika -- as gratifying as that may be. Our major leverage against Nazism is to build the kind of American society and law which will not allow non-swastika-bearing Nazis to gain political power.

There is a line in the Apocrypha which sums up effective social action: "Never seek gratification at the expense of reason."