

New Stage For Soviet Jews

In the coming period, "harassment" will probably be a more important issue for Soviet Jews than "emigration." That is, if the Soviet Union really abides by its tacit agreement to let up to 60,000 Jews go this year. And, for their own reasons the Soviet leaders may indeed open the gates appreciably. Anyway, the numbers of emigrants during this period may not reach the proportions one might expect. For one thing, the economic crisis in Israel and the pressures of imminent war are deterrents. Already, over a quarter of those leaving the Soviet Union want to go somewhere other than Israel.

Many of these emigrants will come to American cities. That is why a San Francisco consortium of the Jewish Family Services Agency, the Jewish Community Centers and the Jewish Vocational Service have put together a special and extensive package of services just for Soviet emigrants. But, wherever they go, and unless policies reverse, the Soviet Union will make a great show of allowing Jews to emigrate.



Raab

In that case, the policy of the Soviet government will shift towards putting internal pressures on Soviet Jews. Such harassment would also be a violation of the Jackson Amendment, but it would be more difficult to pin down. We already have some case examples.

Mikhail Leviev, aged 56, was a manager of a government store in Bukhara. He applied for a visa to emigrate to Israel in 1971. He was separated from his job, and the new manager reported that the shop was in good order. In 1972, as Leviev was making preparations to leave Moscow for Israel, he was arrested and charged with economic crimes involving bribery. On Dec. 8th he was sentenced to death!

Now, it's possible to say: "Well, maybe he was guilty." The way trials are held in the Soviet Union, it would be impossible to really find out. And it's even possible to say that, in the Soviet Union, the death sentence fits any crime. But the "coincidences" pile up. Dr. Mikhail Shtern was originally charged with "poisoning children" but that charge fell of its own absurdity and he is now being tried on another charge.

It is simply amazing how many Soviet Jews become dangerous criminals as soon as they apply for visas to emigrate!

Then there is the pattern of cases like that of Lev Gendin of Moscow. After learning about the Jackson Amendment, he decided to go to some smaller villages to tell Jews there about the new possibilities. In the course of that endeavor, he was arrested by five plainclothesmen, knocked around a bit, and tossed into jail for 15 days on a charge of petty hooliganism.

In jail, he was cursed as a "zhit," (roughly, "dirty Jew") by a young cellmate named Popov, the son of a senior KGB official, who later broke open Gendin's head with a shovel. When Gendin complained, the prison captain said: "Don't make propaganda." Gendin was then sentenced to another 10 days in jail.

Jewish paranoia? It is paranoia to feel you are being singled out for attack when mishaps occur to you in a random way, at a rate that it average for everyone else. But it is downright foolishness to feel that you are not being singled out for attack when mishaps occur to you in a special pattern and at a special rate. That is what is happening to Jews in the Soviet Union. The reasons? Just because these cases are so obviously designed for Jews, they may serve to put a damper on those who want to get out, or protest. Indeed, because the Jews have been so outspoken, these cases are designed to put a damper on dissent of any kind.

The organized Jewish community in San Francisco has caused a number of protests to be made about both Leviev and Shtern, from the kinds of sources which will bring pause to Soviet officials. In addition, the JCRC has asked all citizens to write, wire their Senators and Congressmen, about both Leviev and Shtern — pointing out that these cases deserve inquiry as violations of the spirit of the Jackson Amendment. Such a spotlight must be kept on, not just for the sake of emigration, but for the sake of the Jews who will remain in the Soviet Union.