

The Soviet Jewish Problem at the United Nations

THE EMERGING OUTSPOKENNESS of Soviet Jewry and the growing protest campaigns in the West continue to focus attention on the issue of Soviet antisemitism. An examination of the record of the United Nations in this area is therefore very much to the point. The questions to be considered are: How does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, rich in provisions of justice and equality, lend itself to the predicament of Soviet Jews, some 23 years after its adoption? How do member nations view the UN as a forum for focusing on Soviet antisemitism? How has the Kremlin treated accusations of Soviet antisemitism made in the UN?

In addressing these questions, certain political realities should be made clear: Despite the homilies of moralists, the UN is inherently a political body, and the drive for national power marks UN politics, as it does other arenas of international relations. The problem of Soviet Jewry is only one of many ideological and political contests between the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, at the UN. Superficially, the fate of Soviet Jewry appears on the agenda as a human rights question; however, above and beyond human rights considerations, this issue is deeply rooted in cold war politics.

It should also be stressed that, procedurally, the UN cannot function while lacking agreement by the superpowers. Its impact on Soviet antisemitism will be marginal (as with both Vietnam and the Middle East) as long as Moscow and Washington are at odds in this area. Moreover, the human rights provisions of the UN Charter, while relevant to Soviet Jewry, remain unenforced because of the tendency of states to guard jealously the domestic jurisdiction clause (contained in Article 2, Paragraph 7 of the Charter), and to object to foreign criticism of matters they regard as essentially within their own national prerogatives.

CHALLENGE OF SOVIET POLICY IN UN

Nonetheless, UN public diplomacy provides a convenient vehicle for challenging Soviet mistreatment of Jews. More nations are actively represented at the UN than at any other world diplomatic site, promoting a climate of immediate and continuous communication. Focusing on Soviet antisemitism threatens the Kremlin's image and forces it to defend itself against allegations of persecuting Jews. While traditional diplomacy ("quiet" diplomacy, as it is sometimes known) is marked by behind-the-scene negotiation, the UN

environment stresses open discussion and the value of world opinion. (In fact, the Preamble to the UN Charter takes the position that "We the peoples of the UN"—rather than of the sovereign nations—will promote human betterment.) The cutting of diplomatic ties between Israel and the Soviet Union, following the 1967 six-day war, which further tightened Soviet Jewry's isolation, enhances the UN's public exposure worth.

Public discussion is to the advantage of Soviet Jewry. According to Professor Thomas Hovet, Jr.:

By focusing the spotlight of public opinion on a situation it is felt that this public exposure can freeze a situation and prevent a chain of events that might lead to conflict. At the same time there is a feeling that public discussion of an issue provides an opportunity for states not directly involved in the situation to make their influence felt in resolving the issue. The focus of publicity on the actions of a particular state threatening the peace may place that state not in an offensive but rather in a defensive position in which it must justify and explain its action.¹

However, for all its strengths, the public spotlight does not necessarily resolve basic issues. Resolution ultimately arises from quiet diplomacy. In the human rights area, where UN enforcement is most unimpressive and nations tautly uphold domestic sovereignty, public diplomacy is especially weak. South Africa's snubbing its nose at the unending UN votes and resolutions condemning its policies in Southwest Africa is a classic case of the impotence of public diplomacy in this sphere.

Accordingly, the UN's usefulness in connection with Soviet antisemitism must be measured in perspective. It is no substitute for other forums—demonstrations, communications media, educational programs—in protesting Soviet injustice. To be sure, the UN has not always been used to challenge Soviet antisemitism. The five Black Years (*shwartse yoren*), 1948–1953, in which Stalin shut all Jewish theatres, schools, and publications, did not see the issue argued at the UN for two reasons:

The first, the inexperience of Jewish organizations with public diplomacy, and the resultant overall Jewish hesitancy to raise publicly charges of Soviet antisemitism was discussed by Ben Ami:

For generations the Jews maintained the dictum: "Do not provoke the gentiles." Taught by bitter experience, they were always afraid of making matters worse than they were. To raise an outcry, to protest, to stand up for their rights and lives, might make the gentiles all the angrier and provoke them into more violence and bloodshed. . . . "sha, sha, don't make a row," frightened Jews would say when they learned of the bitter lot of their brethren in another town or another country. Rather than resort to open protest, the Jews developed a technique of peaceful intercession. This in time became the art of "Jewish diplomacy." The Jewish mediator would rush around discreetly and try through supplication, bribery, and self-debasement to moderate the ruler's decree.

¹ Thomas Hovet, Jr., "United Nations Diplomacy," in Maurice Waters, *The United Nations* (New York, 1967), p. 196.

A few years ago when Jewish leaders began asking themselves what to do about the problem of Soviet Jewry, many said "Sha sha." They claimed that ever loud protest and outcry would serve to anger the Soviet and harm the Jews in the Soviet Union.

Only when all attempts at discussions with the Soviet authorities failed and when the burden of eye-witness accounts continued to grow—only then did Jewish organizations, some slowly, others more rapidly, begin to raise their voices in behalf of the Jews of the Soviet Union.²

The second reason was the fear that denunciations would prove counter-productive. In his last years, Stalin was considered mad and unresponsive to foreign opinion on almost everything, including Soviet persecution of the Jews, and it was held that pressures from abroad would only further enrage him. By 1961 the UN began to appear as a safer forum for attacking Soviet anti-Jewish policy. The Communist party's "liberal" wing was then in power, and, as a result of its greater tolerance of pluralism, experts felt it opportune to raise the issue of Soviet Jewish rights.

Coincidentally and in response to a multinational outbreak of swastika daubings on Jewish and other property, the Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities surveyed antisemitic practices in the early 1960s. But since the sub-commission's central work is the preparation of human rights studies (rather than the enforcement of those rights), it could do little about specific antisemitic incidents.

Role of NGOs

However, this first UN investigation of antisemitism set a precedent for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)³—the 206 private national and international groups accredited to the UN at the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in consultative status with it—to draw attention to Soviet Jewry's predicament, a factor hardly endearing them to Soviet UN representatives. But there are limitations to the effectiveness of NGOs challenging a member nation, especially a paranoid super-power such as the USSR; understandably, their criticisms are more muted than those of member nations.

NGOs have cited Soviet antisemitism in the context of debates on conventions dealing with racial discrimination and religious intolerance. But at least one official UN study also carries damaging material on Moscow's suppression of Jewish rights. Critical material submitted by the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations (CBO; representing its constituents: B'nai B'rith, Board of Deputies of British Jews, and South African Jewish Board of Deputies) was incorporated in this document dealing with the right of everyone to leave any country including his own, and to return to his

² Ben Ami, *Between Hammer and Sickle* (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 295–96.

³ Sidney Liskofsky, "The U.N. Reviews Its NGO System," *Reports on the Foreign Scene*, American Jewish Committee, January 1970).

country. Significantly, this information remained in the study despite Soviet demands for its suppression.

Disclosures in 1967 that certain NGOs and their affiliates were recipients of Central Intelligence Agency grants sharpened Soviet hostility. In 1969 ECOSOC launched its first full investigation in 19 years of the NGOs. In this survey, certain Jewish NGOs were assailed by Arab states for alleged support of Israel. The Soviet Union, too, denounced those NGOs claiming mistreatment of Soviet Jews. One question in the over-all inquiry of NGOs, used by the USSR to harass Jewish NGOs, was, "Have you in the past 10 years criticized any government in which you have no constituency?" While other Jewish NGOs met the investigation's approval, the NGO investigatory committee refused to reach a final decision on the fate of the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations, one of the most outspoken critics of Soviet antisemitism.⁴

What impact has NGO participation had on the problem of Soviet anti-semitism? NGOs sharply differ in estimating the extent. According to the Consultative Council of Jewish Organization (CCJO; represents Alliance Israélite Universelle, Canadian Friends of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association), Jewish NGOs abuse their privileges by being too concerned with "defending their own particular interests." In its view, "We can never, under existing regulations, present our case in an intelligent and meaningful way. All we do is to provoke the Soviet representatives and provide them with the opportunity to denounce us and libel us."

By contrast, the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations holds that Soviet Jewry will be aided only by a vigorous UN campaign. And, since governments do not generally supply critical information, CBJO argues, NGOs must spell out violations of human rights: "To the extent that NGO sources are not included, these studies will remain in the realm of abstraction."⁵

While NGO criticism has successfully put the Soviet Union on the defensive, the intensity of UN dialogue vastly increased, once member nations entered the arena. Critics of Soviet antisemitism could be classified in three categories: Israel, United States, other nations.

Role of Israel

Experience with UN bloc voting has given Israel a valid skepticism toward the organization's potential for fostering peace and security. Yet Israel is not powerful enough either in its own right or as a signatory to any major military treaty to remain oblivious to UN action. Thus, Israel puts together a motley coalition of allies in the recurring Middle East disputes before the

⁴ In 1970 the NGO investigatory committee and ECOSOC voted to retain the consultative status of CBJO as a nongovernmental organization.

⁵ Ronald I. Rubin, "Soviet Jewry and the United Nations: The Politics of Non-Governmental Organizations," *Jewish Social Studies*, July, 1967, p. 149, 151.

UN. What is more, Israel's invective against Soviet support of the Arabs further predisposes Moscow to dismiss its protests. After attacking us for helping "peace loving" Arabs (so the Russians must reason), how dare the Israelis hold forth on Soviet internal policies!

Yet Israel cannot treat lightly the plight of Soviet Jewry: personal, cultural, and historic ties bar indifference. And Jewish religious imperatives—crying out for oppressed brethren—rule out vacillation. For these reasons and more, the ordeal of the world's second largest concentration of Jews is a diplomatic priority for Israel.

As a rule, the UN treats human rights issues not from the perspective of resolving specific problems in particular nations, but with the purpose of setting forth general human rights principles. Israel has not missed opportunities to relate the fate of Soviet Jewry to such broader UN human rights concerns. Israel has raised the issue in connection with human rights conventions of religious discrimination and racial prejudice, as well as before the plenary of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Most recently (November 10, 1969), upon a signed request of the petitioners, Israel submitted directly to UN Secretary General U Thant an appeal from 18 Jewish families living in Soviet Georgia, which accused the Soviet Union of preventing their emigration from the Soviet Union and settlement in Israel.⁶ In the past, Israel refrained from taking such public initiative on behalf of Soviet Jews because it feared reprisals against Jews who had smuggled out such documents. In this instance, Israeli diplomats felt that the petitioners themselves had decided to overlook the prospect of reprisals.

When Israel first raised the issue of Soviet antisemitism, it was deliberately vague in accusing the Soviet Union. It deplored discrimination against "a certain large Jewish community," "a large section of the Jewish people," "a great and ancient Jewish community resident in one of the world's mightiest states." Subsequently, Israel decided to do away with diplomatic niceties and became more blunt, quoting excerpts from more egregious Soviet antisemitic publications, as well as condemnations by a number of Western Communist parties of Soviet anti-Jewish policy.

What charges has Israel leveled against the Soviet Union? It must be stressed that, while opposing Soviet antisemitism, Israel has never extended these criticisms to other aspects of Soviet life and Communist ideology. It has attacked emigration curbs on Jewish families torn apart by World War II; restrictions on the production of Jewish religious articles, prayer books, ritual foods (*matzot*), and Yiddish literature and culture; the closing of synagogues and Yiddish theatres and the prohibition of private instruction in Judaism and Jewish culture; the singling out of Jews as economic criminals (especially

⁶ Although Secretary General U Thant honored Israel's plea and circulated the document (A/7762) to every member nation of the UN, he refused to circulate other similar statements by Soviet Jews brought to his attention in 1970 by Israel Ambassador to the UN Yosef Tekoah.

in the early 1960s, when a disproportionate number of Jews were sentenced for alleged capitalist crimes); antisemitic references to Jews in the Soviet press; economic, political, social, and educational discrimination against Jews. Nevertheless, Israel has refused to exaggerate the suffering, never charging Moscow with physically persecuting Jews.

Israel also has appealed the plight of Soviet Jewry in the framework of UN human rights machinery. It has urged the appointment of a UN high commissioner for human rights who would receive public petitions on infringements, and conduct inquiries based on the information received. The appointment of a high commissioner was first recommended in the United States in December 1963 by Jacob Blaustein, and received wide support from international nongovernmental organizations concerned with human rights (AJYB, 1966 [Vol. 67], p. 469). Thus, Ambassador Joel Barromi argued in 1967:

Israel has more than once drawn attention to the thwarted aspirations of the second largest Jewish community. . . . Such a situation constituted an appropriate field of action for the High Commissioner, whose role would be to rekindle international awareness of human rights and give impetus to the process which would lead to constructive and voluntary international solutions. The establishment of a post of High Commissioner would assuage the bitterness of individuals and groups who felt that they had been forgotten and would provide a stimulus for those who wished to improve and liberalize laws, practices and policies.⁷

Another goal championed by Israel is a more potent role for NGOs. As already mentioned, certain NGOs drew Moscow's condemnation for referring to Soviet antisemitism. Commending NGOs, Ambassador Haim Cohen said in 1965:

. . . their reports might well be more objective than those made by governments, since they were made by private observers who had no interests at stake and were not actuated by considerations of prestige. The exceptions could not justify unfairness to the vast majority. Hence, the non-governmental organizations would be encouraged to submit reports which would assist the Commission to form an idea of the progress made in human rights; governments should be given an opportunity to comment if those reports implicated them.⁸

In 1968, Israel stepped up its attacks in an unprecedented move before the Security Council. Since human-rights problems are not debated in a vacuum, but in the politically charged atmosphere of the UN, Israel followed standard diplomatic procedure in introducing Soviet antisemitism into one of the perennial Security Council exchanges on the Middle East. The *New York Times* captured the drama:

Lord Caradon of Britain, this month's President of the Security Council, cut short an Israeli attack on "discrimination against the Jews" in the Soviet Union during a sharp debate today on Israeli rule in Jerusalem.

⁷ E/AC.7/S.R. 572. (This and similar notations refer to official UN documents.)

⁸ E/CN.4/S.R. 842.

Lord Caradon's action was provoked by Yakov A. Malik, chief Soviet delegate, who interrupted Yosef Tekoah, the chief Israeli representative. Mr. Tekoah was replying to a Soviet denunciation of Israeli treatment of Arabs in territories occupied during the Middle East war last year.

Mr. Tekoah had said there was a "strange anomaly in the Soviet attitude toward human rights." Then he added:

"The discrimination and disabilities imposed against the Jews of the Soviet Union are generally known. In Moscow alone—"

The sentence was interrupted and the Security Council's attention was arrested by the amplified rapping of Mr. Malik's knuckles on the microphone before his seat at the oval Council table.

Lord Caradon gave Mr. Malik the floor "on a point of order."

"We are discussing here Israeli aggression and those illegal activities carried out by Israel in Jerusalem," said Mr. Malik. He said Mr. Tekoah's comments were an attempt to "divert attention from what is being done by Israel to prevent a settlement in the Middle East."

Lord Caradon asked Mr. Tekoah to continue, but to confine his remarks "specifically" to the subject of the agenda, or the situation in Jerusalem since Israel took over the Jordanian sector of the city.

Mr. Tekoah tried twice again to resume his statement where he had left off. Each time, Lord Caradon cut in again, insisting that Mr. Tekoah abide by his ruling.

After the second exchange, Mr. Tekoah asked:

"How can the Security Council consider as of any interest or validity Soviet views on the unhindered continuation of Arab cultural, religious, or public life in Jerusalem if half a million Jewish citizens of Moscow are deprived of it?"

The rapping of Mr. Malik's knuckles was heard again, and he was given the floor.

Mr. Malik said that Israel had no right "to speak on behalf of the Jews of the whole world." He said that Jews in the Soviet Union "enjoy all rights which are enjoyed by all other citizens."

Mr. Tekoah, after a new exhortation from Lord Caradon to confine himself to "the subject on which we are called," completed a statement saying that Arabs in the occupied areas enjoyed full civil rights. He concluded:

"When the Soviet Government will grant similar rights to its Jewish citizens, we in the world at large shall be able to recognize its right to speak on behalf of human rights."⁹

Finally, Israeli accusations of Soviet antisemitism provoked responses from certain Arab nations, which fear appreciable Soviet Jewish emigration to Israel. While the Arabs do not necessarily endorse all Soviet human rights positions, they hardly pass up opportunities to take political swipes at Israel. They use the issue of Soviet Jewry to attack Israel's authority to represent world Jews, the alleged dual political allegiance of Jews, and alleged Israeli mistreatment of Arab nationals. Typical are the following statements:

Mrs. Ghorbal (U.A.R.). Furthermore, no one in the Committee spoke as the representative of Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism, and by the same token Israel was not entitled to speak for all the Jews in the world. Israel clearly sought to

⁹ *The New York Times*, May 7, 1968.

claim the double allegiance of Jews wherever they were, and to convince the world that all states were accountable to it for acts committed against Jews. It was even said that political Zionism wishes to perpetuate the racial distinction theory in order to use it to further its political aims. ¹⁰

Mrs. Afnan (Iraq). Some delegations have advised the Soviet Union to allow Russian Jews to leave the country, but their own immigration laws would not welcome them. They were offering the homes of a million Arab refugees.

The Israeli representative had come to the Committee to complain of discrimination against Jews and said that one out of every ten Israelis was an Arab and that there was no discrimination against Arabs. Before Israel was established, out of ten Arabs only one was of the Jewish faith. In their own land, a majority of nine to one had been reduced to a minority of one to nine. And the Israeli representative had the cynicism to claim non-discrimination.¹¹

Role of United States

A basic objective of United States foreign policy is support of the UN "to ensure the survival and prosperity of our political and social values in an era of protracted international disequilibrium."¹² The mutuality between UN human rights provisions and most American beliefs is clear-cut. The American political commitment to diversity and peaceful change lends force to the international application of this notion.

Strategically, references by the United States to Soviet antisemitism serve a dual purpose in its relations with the Kremlin. They promote the liberalization of Soviet society by exposing Soviet citizens, particularly the emerging young elite, to the advantages of personal freedom and an international philosophy of "live and let live." Additionally, they "neutralize the ideological thrust of Communism."¹³ Through indirectly contrasting the freedom of American Jews to the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union, Washington shows that a free and open society "can yield more ultimate satisfactions than a totalitarian system."¹⁴ By refusing to overlook these human rights violations and by stressing the security dangers stemming from them, the United States, in effect, rejects what might appear as a detente, and puts international reconciliation on a far more realistic footing.

American compassion for Russia's Jews is no recent phenomenon. Czarist pogroms shook the American conscience before the cold war and Stalin's contrived suspicion of an "international Jewish conspiracy" became political facts.¹⁵ As for action on behalf of Soviet Jews, the State Department conceded the limitation of official governmental intervention. Its 1967 position paper, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, stated:

¹⁰ AC.3/S.R. 1168.

¹¹ AC.3/S.R. 1171.

¹² Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *The United Nations and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boston, 1967), p. 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ In this connection, see Alex Littmann, "A Nation Outraged: American Response to the Mistreatment of Jews in Russia 1880-1891" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, New York University, 1968, unpublished).

We have found from past experience that government-to-government approaches to Soviet officials at all levels are totally ineffective. Our approaches in the past have been brushed aside by claims that there is no antisemitism in the USSR and that, by raising the subject, we are attempting to interfere in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union for some "Cold War" purpose.

To be sure, the refusal of the United States to ratify, as of this writing, UN human rights conventions, despite presidential urgings, has not diminished American presidential support for more vigorous UN action. Since the early 1960s, when Soviet antisemitism was first confronted in the UN, the United States—second only to Israel—has pressed for the rights of Soviet Jews. At the outset, the United States, like Israel, was mild in voicing criticism in that it did not specifically name the Soviet Union.

Mrs. Means (U.S.A.). In countries where the Constitutions nominally guaranteed freedom of worship, religion, expression and thought, synagogues were stoned and desecrated without any attempt by the responsible authorities to apprehend the guilty and, together with other places of worship, were even closed. Jews were also discriminated against on the basis of nationality.¹⁶

However, like Israel, the United States has become increasingly outspoken in citing Soviet antisemitism. In its first references, the United States raised the situation of the Soviet Jews in the context of general human rights principles under discussion by different UN organs. Most recently, the United States representative to the Human Rights Commission sought a deliberate confrontation with the Soviet Union on the status of Soviet Jews. On November 25, 1969 Mrs. Rita E. Hauser, the American representative, made an independent statement on Soviet Jewry before the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, the first time the United States raised this issue not in the context of some general human rights discussion. In addition to citing over-all harassment of Soviet Jews, Mrs. Hauser read a letter from Mrs. Elizaveta Isaakovna Kapshitzer of Moscow, addressed to the UN General Assembly, which had been brought to her attention by the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry. In it, the writer accused the Soviet writer's union of ousting her son Vitold for asking to emigrate to Israel. He was later denied permission to leave the Soviet Union, and both he and his mother now were living on her pension, the equivalent of \$40 a month.

Indicating their displeasure with this statement, the Soviet and Ukrainian delegates to the Third Committee interrupted Mrs. Hauser three times as she read Mrs. Kapshitzer's plea. According to Charles W. Yost, United States ambassador to the United Nations, the United States was pleased with the outcome of committee consideration of this case. He wrote to Congressman Jonathan B. Bingham on December 4, 1969, "The Soviets demonstrated exceptional sensitivity during the debate, and we feel that our

¹⁶ E/AC.7/S.R. 473.

efforts resulted in worthwhile publicity and a good measure of sympathy among other delegates, several of which also spoke out."

The substance of United States criticism does not differ much from Israel's. The United States has publicly acknowledged consulting with Israel on Soviet antisemitism.¹⁷ The United States took issue with Moscow's discrediting of all religions and then went on to cite specific hardships imposed on Jews. In UN conventions on eliminating racial discrimination and religious intolerance, the United States supported separate articles on antisemitism. It compared antisemitism with apartheid; it warned that antisemitism constitutes a present, as well as historic, danger; it challenged the notion (continually advanced by the Soviet Union) that antisemitism is peculiarly an outgrowth of Nazism.

The most interesting difference between Israeli and United States exchanges with Soviet diplomats is the personal framework occasionally marking the American presentation. The tenure of Morris B. Abram as United States Ambassador to the Human Rights Commission, while simultaneously serving as president of the American Jewish Committee, may account for this. Two examples are indicative:

In 1966 Ambassador Abram argued that no political system provides absolute guarantees against intolerance. He cited the return to respectability of Trofim Kichko (who had been silenced since the world-wide condemnation of his vicious *Judaism Without Embellishment* in the early 1960s) in the wake of the 1967 six-day war (AJYB, 1969 [Vol. 70], p. 391). According to Abram, the Kichko book contradicted a report of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic which maintained that there was no racial prejudice in that country. The report added that the Ukrainian criminal code provided for imprisonment for stirring up such discord, but that the law had no real function, since the younger generation was being educated in the spirit of understanding, and Socialism (Communism) was incompatible with racism.

Abram thereupon sent Boris S. Ivanov (the Soviet diplomat) a copy of the Kichko work,

... pointing out that Mr. Ivanov had inveighed against all forms of discrimination and had voted to include ethnic and national discrimination among the forms of discrimination to be covered by the draft convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.

After considerable delay, Mr. Ivanov had merely sent him a press release from the Soviet Embassy at Washington on "Jews in the Soviet Union" which disagreed with the author of the book on some points and stated that the work contained some slipshod formulations and that its make-up left much to be desired. He had then reiterated his questions to Mr. Ivanov, but had received

¹⁷ For instance, in a reply of December 10, 1969 to a letter from Congressman Jonathan B. Bingham, H. G. Torbert, Jr., acting assistant secretary of state for congressional relations noted: "The U.S. Delegation to the (Human Rights) Commission will, as in the past, consult with the Delegation of Israel, which is also a member of the Commission, in order to determine the best course of action to follow on this matter."

no reply. Finally, he had written again soliciting a reply and suggesting that it might be useful for a delegation to visit the USSR with the same opportunities to observe facts at first hand as members of the Sub-Commission had had at Atlanta. That letter had also remained unanswered.¹⁸

While this episode lacked personal bitterness, the dialogue between Ambassador Abram and his Soviet counterpart, Ambassador Yakub A. Ostrovski before the 1967 meeting of the Human Rights Commission was heavy with antisemitic aspersions. The incident, which may well be one of the most antisemitic in the history of the UN, called forth formal representation to the UN Mission of the Soviet Union by Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Abram was attacked by Ostrovski simply because he was a Jew. The Soviet diplomat said Abram was conducting himself as though he were at a meeting of the American Jewish Committee, and members of the Human Rights Commission merited more respect. Subsequently, he accused Abram of serving two masters: the United States government and "the Zionist organization over which he presided." The inability of the Soviet ambassador to restrain himself, despite rigorous professional training, illustrates perhaps more than anything else how unsettling Moscow finds critical references to its antisemitism.

Besides the formal use of UN organs for drawing attention to Soviet anti-Semitism, the UN also was increasingly considered as a forum for challenging Soviet policy by Americans concerned with this issue. A series of rallies were organized and advertisements placed by the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry for December 11, 1967, the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The following year, on Human Rights Day, the Conference submitted to the UN a petition with 250,000 signatures, protesting the violation of Soviet Jewry's human rights spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In November, 1969, 59 members of the House of Representatives urged the State Department to support Israel's request that the UN act on the plea of the 18 Jewish families from Soviet Georgia who sought permission to emigrate to Israel. Of course, these activities do not include the numerous protests held at the UN on other occasions particularly involving youth under the auspices of the New York Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (AJYB, 1969 [Vol. 70], pp. 113, 115).

Other Countries

Aside from the United States and Israel, other members of the UN took note of Soviet antisemitism only occasionally. Contrasted with ritualistic attacks on South African apartheid, the fate of Soviet Jewry seems of scant import. For smaller nations, motivated by humanitarian zeal, the UN offers

¹⁸ E/CN.4/Sub.a/S.R. 434.

an accepted public forum for challenging human rights violations. Privately, these powers probably would not dare call attention to internal Soviet racism.

Thus far, some 15 UN members, including Israel and the United States, have addressed themselves to the issue of Soviet antisemitism. Moral rather than political considerations apparently motivate those countries which speak out from time to time. The absence of consistent condemnation of Soviet antisemitism by the most ardent anti-Communist bloc in the UN, the Latin American countries—perhaps for fear of indirectly taking sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict—bears out this conclusion. Nations raising the problem included Australia, Austria, Canada, Dahomey, Denmark, Dominican Republic, France, Great Britain, Italy, Madagascar, New Zealand, Sierre Leone, and Uruguay. What is most disappointing here is that the transcripts of UN human rights exchanges on antisemitism, relating to conventions subsequently adopted by the Human Rights Commission, show many overlooked opportunities for condemning Soviet policy. Invariably antisemitism was linked to Nazi atrocities in World War II, and current Soviet injustice was not mentioned.

References to Soviet antisemitism were both subtle and direct, with the former tack dominating. Two examples of the subdued approach, in the context of the Kichko book, follow:

Mr. Juvigny (France). Turning more specifically to the objectional publication mentioned by Mr. Abram, he said that if world public opinion had had to rely solely on Government sources of information, the publication in question would perhaps never have been known abroad. It could even be conjectured that no mean role had been played by world public opinion, aroused by articles in the press in influencing the authorities of the country concerned to suppress the publication in question.¹⁹

Mr. Ermacora (Austria). In conclusion, his delegation believed that the commitments entered into on an equal footing by all States parties to the convention would be meaningless if the States concerned permitted the publication of pamphlets and books of the kind the observer from Israel had mentioned at a previous meeting.²⁰

A general reference to Soviet antisemitism:

Mrs. Ramaholimihaso (Madagascar) said that she had listened with great interest to the statement made at the previous meeting by the representative of Israel, and, like him, welcomed the fact that, increasingly, ethnic minorities had freedom to preserve their cultures and traditions. She hoped there would be further progress in that direction.²¹

By contrast, the following Australian statement was far more pointed. The date (1962) is worth noting because intensive Israeli and United States condemnations had not yet begun. Significantly, the Australian accusation

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ E/CN.4/S.R. 808.

²¹ AC.3/S.R. 1392.

stemmed in part from pressure brought by the Jewish community on the Foreign Office.²²

Mr. White (Australia). I feel that I must also mention specifically the fact that the Jewish communities throughout the world have expressed concern at the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union. Representatives on the Committee will already be aware, from material reaching them in the press and in other ways, of the grounds stated for this concern—for example, criticism in the press and radio, and even by some Soviet officials, against the Jews. Official restriction of Jewish religious observance—a recent example being the ban on public baking of unleavened bread for the 1962 Passover; and official action against individual Jews, such as the fact that out of the death sentences for economic offenses imposed lately in the Soviet Union, an unduly high proportion has been passed on Jews.²³

SOVIET POSITION

Self-righteously, the Soviet Union sees the UN's human rights forum as a channel for berating Western shortcomings, while never admitting any of its own. Ethnic harmony, religious tolerance, and national understanding are held forth by Moscow's diplomats as the image of Soviet diversity. The West, by contrast, is derided for discrimination and minority abuses. This stance is at variance with the human rights position of the United States, which concedes past and present imperfections, particularly in race relations.

Even if the Soviet Union had not so reassuringly hailed its human rights record, Moscow's hostility to strengthening the implementation machinery of the UN would pit it against further international protection of Soviet Jewry. Suspicious of NGOs, opposed to a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, whom it threatened to boycott, and vigilant of its domestic jurisdiction rights, the Soviet Union is in no frame of mind to bow to passing criticism by member nations of Jewish deprivations.

Although Communist commitment to scientific materialism sparks opposition to all religion, a whole cluster of circumstances cause Judaism and Jews singular hardship: Jewish individualism and legacy of freedom is anathema to Communist uniformity; Soviet Jewry's many relatives in the West arouse suspicion; cultural ties to Israel run counter to Soviet xenophobia; and the Jew is too convenient and indigenous a scapegoat—as he is for other East European regimes in suppressing liberalization—for the Kremlin to ignore.

And this is not discounting Arab admiration for Jew-baiting, although, in truth, the Arab position represents a dividend of, rather than incentive for, Moscow's racism. There is nothing especially new in harassing an ideology

²² The background of the Jewish community's role and the Australian intervention is explained in Isi Leibler, *Soviet Jewry and Human Rights* (Victoria, Australia: Human Rights Publications, 1963).

²³ The verbatim text cited here was summarized in a press release of the Australian Mission to UN; AC.3/S.R. 1170.

internally, while reaching an accommodation with it internationally. Even UAR President Nasser's public identification with Soviet foreign policy does not prevent the suppression of the Egyptian Communist party.

Yet foreign condemnation at the UN of Soviet antisemitism gets on Moscow's nerves. (The Soviet Union's sensitivity to such accusations voiced in other forums is indicated by the distribution in the free world of a steady stream of publications denying discrimination against Jews.) It has made the fundamental policy decision that these charges will not go unanswered. Increasingly, the Soviet Union has developed a more systematic response to such criticisms, one that has gone through three stages: Originally, attacks at the UN were ignored. Then they were challenged by the Soviet Union on the ground that they constituted interference in the USSR's internal affairs, and thereby violated the UN Charter; occasionally Soviet diplomats mildly took issue with accusations of Soviet antisemitism. Now they are elaborately contested by the Soviet Union. Soviet diplomats take the offensive in rebutting such accusations. Nations raising charges of Soviet antisemitism are accused of attempting to subvert the Soviet Union by destroying its multinational character through the introduction of the poison of nationalism.

In rebutting allegations of antisemitism, Soviet delegates to the UN call on a mixed bag of arguments. As with many exchanges at the UN, their response has no relevance to the accusation. They cite carefully prepared statistics intended to do away with these charges. In taking the trouble to draw up these doctored arguments, Moscow shows it is disturbed.

It is revealing that Soviet UN denials of antisemitism contradict certain official admissions. On July 19, 1965, for the first time in decades, Premier Aleksei Kosygin surprised Soviet audiences by acknowledging the danger of antisemitism. On that occasion, the 25th anniversary of Latvia's "liberation" by the Soviet Union, he said that "nationalism, Great Power chauvinism, racism, and antisemitism are completely alien to our society and contradict our *Weltanschauung*."

In an editorial on the "friendship of peoples" in the USSR, *Pravda*, on September 5, 1965, also deplored antisemitism on Soviet soil. However, that condemnation of antisemitism rested not on morality, but on the practical ground that such manifestations blacken the Soviet image abroad. After underscoring the "international obligations" of the USSR, the editorial stated:

V. I. Lenin, the great creator of the Communist Party and founder of the Soviet State, bade our Party hold sacred the friendship of peoples of the USSR. He wrathfully assailed any manifestations of nationalism whatsoever, and in particular he demanded an unceasing "struggle against anti-Semitism, that foul fanning of racial specialness and national enmity" created by the exploiting classes.²⁴

²⁴ Moshe Decter, "Soviet Jewry: A Current Survey," *Congress bi-Weekly*, December 5, 1966, p. 12.

No such admissions intended for internal Soviet consumption have ever been voiced at the UN.

The procedures of UN bodies involved with human rights make for the discussion of broad areas of social justice rather than of concrete cases of repressions. USSR references to the status of its Jewish citizens most often occurred in debates on declarations outlawing religious and racial discrimination. These can be divided into defensive and offensive statements.

DEFENSIVE ARGUMENTS

Here are characteristic defensive arguments regarding Soviet antisemitism as they were used by Soviet diplomats, as they were summarized in UN documents:

1. The problem does not exist in law. The Soviet Constitution and laws are cited as placing Jews on an equal footing with other Soviet citizens.

No one was entitled to charge the USSR government with antisemitism when the USSR Constitution stipulated that any discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin was punishable by law.²⁵

2. The problem does not exist in fact. Soviet diplomats further argue that anti-Jewish discrimination, at least so far as religious observance is concerned, is actually nonexistent in the USSR.

On the other hand, many of the Jewish inhabitants of the USSR did not practice their religion, since the number of believers in any faith was declining rapidly in that country, as in many others.²⁶

It was regrettable that the delegation of a Member State should try to use for selfish and political ends an important discussion to which everyone should try to make a constructive contribution. The Israeli delegation was obsessed by a problem which existed only in its imagination and which it tried to relate to every question being dealt with by the different organs of the United Nations.²⁷

3. Soviet Jews have no cause to complain. In attempting to show that Jews have no cause for complaint, Soviet representatives cite certain statistics of Jewish professional employment. They never concede existing discrimination in employment, particularly the bars against Jews in senior policy-making posts. Neither is mention made of the increasing difficulties for Jews to gain university admission, and of the pressure exerted on Soviet Jews after the six-day war to denounce Israeli policy. Most importantly, Soviet statements at the UN do not adequately answer charges that Jews are denied the essential religious and cultural institutions and other means for preserving their separate identity.²⁸

²⁵ E/CN.4/Sub.2/S.R. 416.

²⁶ E/CN.4/Sub.2/S.R. 438.

²⁷ AC.3/S.R. 1241.

²⁸ In this connection see annual reviews of the USSR Jewish community in the AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK.

. . . 7,647 Jews were delegates to central and local public bodies and 290,707 had received diplomas from national universities or institutions of higher technical education; which meant that in the latter respect Jews ranked third after the Russians and the Ukrainians. Of Soviet scientific workers, 36,173 were Jews. In addition, more than 2,000 Jews had received doctorates in science and 13,000 had obtained advanced scientific diplomas; eighty Academicians or corresponding members of the Academy were Jews. Forty-two Jews had been given the highest awards for socialist labour and a large percentage of the members of various artistic and cultural associations were Jews. 14.7 per cent of Soviet physicians were Jews; 8.5 per cent were critics and newsmen; 10.4 per cent were prosecutors, lawyers and judges; 7 per cent actors, sculptors, etc. A Jewish-language cultural newspaper was published in Moscow. While Jews in Czarist Russia had lived in ghettos and had been subject to many measures of harassment, they were today better treated in the USSR than in most countries of the free world. Those facts proved how false the picture drawn by the Western Press was.²⁹

. . . [was] the United States representative . . . aware that in the Soviet Union there was not a single case in which a citizen had been prevented from taking part in elections—a frequent occurrence in the United States—and that in the USSR no one had ever been discriminated against in regard to his choice of dwelling, work or education—a form of discrimination which was widespread in the United States. In September 1959, in New York, Mr. Khrushchev, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, replying to a question asked him at a press conference, had stated that in the USSR all nationals, including Jews, enjoyed equal rights and lived in peace and that, moreover, a substantial number of Jews were high in the ranks of those who worked on interplanetary travel. That was a clear reply to the United States representative's question.³⁰

OFFENSIVE ARGUMENTS

From an offensive position, Soviet diplomats maintain that:

1) Charges of antisemitism represent a smoke screen.

This, they say, is used to conceal Israeli aggressive policies.

The object of those remarks had been simply to spread a smoke-screen to conceal the situation in Israel and the occupation of Arab territories brought about as a result of Israel's aggressive policies.³¹

How could the United States representative dare to raise his voice in an appeal for the freedom of nations when the soldiers of his country were killing thousands of people in Vietnam? The United States representative should read the newspaper; he should be informed about the crimes against humanity committed daily by his country in Vietnam.³²

2) Balance is needed in assessing antisemitism.

While antisemitism is unjust, it is argued, it is no more loathsome than other types of racism including apartheid, Zionism and Nazism.

²⁹ E/CN.4/S.R. 808.

³⁰ AC.3/S.R. 1171.

³¹ E/CN.4/S.R. 979.

³² E/CN.4/S.R. 928.

Anti-Semitism was a manifestation of discrimination against one particular race. Consequently, *apartheid* and anti-Semitism could not be placed on the same footing. The former was a general form of racial discrimination which might be applied at any period and against any race. The latter was merely one manifestation of racial discrimination in a particular case.³³

In this connection, the following episode is noteworthy. In drafting a convention in 1965 on the "Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination," the United States and Brazil proposed before the General Assembly's Third Committee an article to "condemn anti-Semitism and take appropriate action for its eradication" (AJYB, 1966 [Vol. 67], p. 263). The USSR proposed instead the following amendment:

States Parties condemn anti-Semitism, Zionism, Nazism, neo-Nazism and all other forms of the policy and ideology of colonialism, national and race hatred and exclusiveness, and shall take action as appropriate for the speedy eradication of those inhuman ideas and practices in the territories subject to their jurisdiction.³⁴

Of course, the Committee turned down this absurd grouping. But the Soviet Union successfully used the ploy of grouping together antisemitism, Zionism and Nazism to bring about the rejection of the original amendment on antisemitism.

3) Antisemitism is peculiarly a product of Nazism; Zionism is the same as Judaism.

Here is a favorite Soviet device of linking odious strawmen. Antisemitism is continually said to originate in West Germany—a nation posing a compelling threat to the Soviet Union—and thereby to augur a revival of Nazism. Also, Jews are never attacked as Jews, but for their professional, cultural, or religious ties. Thus, in scoring Jewish NGOs, the Kremlin does not cite their religion, but their political support of Israel (Zionism) which, for certain NGOs, represents only a part of their UN responsibilities.

The wave of Nazi and anti-Semitic outbursts which, beginning in West Germany, had recently swept the whole of Western Europe and the United States of America, had focused world attention on the threat of a revival of Nazism and its terrible consequences. . .

Some United States Zionist organizations also tried to cover up the shameful situation by shifting the blame on the U.S.S.R. It was common knowledge, however, that the U.S.S.R. was one of the few European countries where there had been no manifestations of that kind and where Jews suffered no discrimination.³⁵

4) Antisemitism is an American phenomenon.

In an effort to undermine United States criticism of Soviet antisemitism, it

³³ E/CN.4/S.R. 784.

³⁴ Decter, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³⁵ E/CN.4/S.R. 686.

is stated that the United States has no right to sit in judgment on the Soviet Union inasmuch as antisemitism is still deeply rooted in Americans.

In regard to the Jewish question, which seemed to be of special interest to the United States representative, the book by Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Foster, *Some of My Best Friends*, published in 1962, showed that anti-semitism had not died with Hitler and was deeply imbedded in the American subconscious mind. That some 5.5 million Americans were discriminated against in various fields and particularly in the matters of education and accommodation.³⁶

CONCLUSION

While the Soviet Union remains faithful to its aim of wiping out the Jewish identity, it does not turn a deaf ear to foreign criticism. Protests have at least slowed the Kremlin's timetable for cultural genocide. The visit of Moscow's Chief Rabbi Judah Leib Levin to the United States in 1968; the availability of *matzot* in many large cities; the termination of trials of Jews as "economic criminals," and the removal of Kichko's *Judaism Without Embellishment*, all show that the Soviet Union will not defy completely outraged world opinion.

Realistically, what is the UN's role in fighting Soviet antisemitism? The complexities of international relations make it impossible to assess the actual effectiveness of the UN, as compared with other forums in which the Soviet Union has been assailed. Political interaction is hard enough to measure accurately nationally; it is 125 times more difficult to define in the UN organization. One can only point to the cumulative impact: Moscow's embarrassment with public attacks on its antisemitism.

Bolder use must be made of intergovernmental and interpersonal communication at the UN in drawing attention to the persecution of Soviet Jewry. Except for Israel and the United States, member nations have scarcely raised the question.

Its human rights apparatus makes the UN a natural milieu for sympathetic diplomats to raise again and again (as in the case of apartheid in South Africa) the tragedy of Soviet Jewry. Between formal sessions the UN also offers unique opportunities for personal contact. Face-to-face activity in this concentrated diplomatic setting—in the delegate's lounge, in the corridors, at cocktail parties, and receptions—will increase delegate awareness, while intensifying Soviet embarrassment.³⁷ The following comment by an East European diplomat illustrates the UN's potential in that area:

The contact that you have here with other diplomats is ten or twenty times more than that which you would have in a national capital. This is especially

³⁶ AC.3/S.R. 1171.

³⁷ Ronald I. Rubin's "The UN Correspondent," *The Western Political Quarterly*, December, 1964, discusses the communications opportunities at the UN, drawing largely on Chadwick F. Alger, "Personal Contact in Intergovernmental Organizations" in Robert W. Gregg and Michael Barkun, eds., *The United Nations System and its Functions* (Princeton, 1968).

true during the Assembly sessions. You have contacts every day not just with one person, but with many persons. Between sessions, there is still more contact here with diplomats from other countries than there would be in a national capital.³⁸

Besides, UN diplomats are rotated to other posts and they will take with them their understanding of, if not compassion for, Soviet Jewry, derived from their experience of public exchanges and face-to-face contact.

The opinion of mankind, represented in part by the UN, is a crucial factor of today's international relations. An increasingly informed world public judges rivalries between the Communist world and the West by their respective adherence to publicly professed values. Of course, nations do not carry out foreign policy on the strength of world opinion polls. Certain interests are sacrosanct. Thus, despite a shocked world opinion, the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. But the crushing of Jewish identity, while convenient for Soviet politics, is not essential to it.

Moscow's vulnerability must be trumpeted. In vying with the United States in the nonaligned world, Soviet diplomacy patiently projects a humanitarian image. The Kremlin, too, condemns racism in its attempt to undermine the social fabric of the Western democracies. Harlan Cleveland notes the illuminating role of the UN in this context:

Let no one believe that this is a pointless exercise, unrelated to political reality. Under the strong light of world opinion, a nation's prestige is engaged; and since national power is not unrelated to national prestige, governments are influenced by world opinion—even though it is hard to prove because they seldom admit it. The blended conscience of men of good will may wink at injustice in the dark; but when the lights are on, a good conscience must speak, or desert its possessor. No government anywhere is immune to the moral indignation of those, including its own citizens, who watch it at work.³⁹

But even if the UN does not deflect the USSR from its oppressive course, even if all the verbal exchanges fail to move the Kremlin, the suffering of Soviet Jewry must be registered for the record. How ironic if the Jew, whose teachings of brotherhood and justice are at the bedrock of the UN, would remain as obscure today in the council of nations as he was earlier in this generation when silence greeted Hitler's gathering storm.

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³⁸ Alger, *ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁹ Harlan Cleveland, *The Obligations of Power* (New York, 1966), p. 133.