

OPINIONS

2 million Jews eager to escape life of fear Soviet Jews' freedom threatened

by Alan Grad

With the rise of nationalism and greater freedom in the Soviet Union, the lives of Soviet Jews are being seriously threatened. The Soviet Union's economy is in a shambles and Jews find themselves in the familiar position of scapegoats for a country's problems.

Already there have been street rallies, marches by uniformed guards, individual acts of violence against Jews and threats of pogroms.

Cries of "This wouldn't happen in Hitler's time" were shouted at the trial of a Pamyat society (a Russian nationalist society) member who was later convicted of inciting inter-ethnic hatred in the Soviet Union.

Now that the Iron Curtain has opened (who knows if it may shut again), Israel is doing all it can to bring these desperate Soviets to Israel. In attempting to help 1.5 million Soviets who have requested exit visas to Israel, this human rights issue has unfortunately been turned into a passionately political one.

One of the basic freedoms of democracy is freedom of movement. To deny Soviet Jews the opportunity to move to Israel would be a strong negative signal sent to Jews the world over.

The Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis very much continues to shape the mindset of Jews. Still fresh in their minds is the fact that many democratic countries, and especially Canada, closed their doors to Jews during the war and this contributed to the murder of

six million Jews in Europe.

With acts of anti-semitism and grave desecration increasing all over Western and Eastern Europe, Jews themselves must realize that Israel is invaluable as a homeland for Jews who face danger in other countries.

Israel accepts this responsibility and has already brought in 90,000 Soviets of Jewish heritage. (One is considered to be Jewish if they had one Jewish grandparent — this is parallel to the Nazi blood laws). However, another 2 million Jews remain in the Soviet Union eager to escape their life of fear, intimidation and economic upheaval.

The costs of transportation and absorption, however, are prohibitive. Once they have been brought to Israel, they must be provided with food, clothing, shelter, job retraining and lessons in Hebrew.

Aside from funds, the greatest barrier to this immigration is its effect on the Palestinian/Israeli issue.

Palestinians claim that this immigration is part of Israel's plan to settle the West Bank with a Jewish majority. Palestinians fear that their hopes for a Palestinian state in the West Bank are harmed by this immigration. Prime Minister Shamir's choice of words did not help matters when he spoke of a "bigger Israel."

Israeli figures, however, indicate that less than half a per cent of the Soviets settle in the Gaza Strip and West Bank (not including annexed eastern Jerusalem, which Israel considers a part of Israel as much as Tel Aviv.)

To further assuage those who may view the immigration as anti-

Palestinian, it is important to point out that most of these Soviets are accustomed to living in urban centres like Moscow and have no desire to live anywhere but in Israel's major cities.

Furthermore, the impression they have of the territories is one of great violence. Having been deprived of much religion while living under Communism, they also do not carry fervent Zionist religious beliefs of settling "Biblical Israel". As a result, few have any desire to settle in the disputed territories.

In fact, many are apprehensive about moving to Israel altogether. More than anything, these Jews just want to leave the Soviet Union before it is too late. Israel, having already demonstrated its dedication to freedom in secretly getting Jews out of Ethiopia, must be held as an example to the world of putting human rights ahead of economics, in this regard.

With Jews still trapped in Ethiopia and also in hostile Syria, and the suffering of many religions the world over, there is no time to wait.

We must pounce on every opportunity to free a group of people in need and political beliefs must take a back seat until this is accomplished.

All who believe in freedom of movement, freedom of religion and the rights of these Soviet Jews to live a life without constant fear, must support the cause of "Operation Exodus."

However, with the threat of a Gulf war hanging over the heads of Israelis, Israel requires financial help to absorb these immigrants without jeopardizing its own existence along the way.

YFS recognizes diversity

by Sue Pennypacker

When I was in public school, I always thought of university as a place where people joined together to share different ideas and views. This included visions of protests, rallies and activism.

I envisioned university as a place where idealists (like myself) would fight against the status quo and the kill-or-be-killed mentality which seems to define our society.

My first few years at York were a real disappointment. Although there were students who involved themselves in organizations which strive to improve our society, the majority of students just didn't give a damn. This attitude was not at all improved by the student governments. York's entire identity was apathy.

Finally we have a student government which recognizes the diversity of the York population. Take a look at this year's student handbook. It's a refreshing way to begin the year.

The subjects covered in the handbook pay special attention to women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians. It's not a party, party handbook which panders to the media-inspired image of the typical university student (male, blonde, blue eyed athletic bozo — see beer ads). Instead, real issues are raised and discussed.

For once, York students are being treated like adults with legitimate concerns and complaints. Hopefully, this year's student

government is an indication that York students really do want to make a difference.

One of the goals of the YFS is to fight racism, sexism and homophobia on campus. As the purpose of a student government is to represent and protect the interests of students and student groups, this goal is not very radical. Considering the records of past student governments however, the objectives of this year's YFS are both needed and welcome.

So far this year, the YFS has committed five thousand dollars to the Women's Centre. Jean Ghomeshi, the YFS president says that this large amount of money has been allocated to address the lack of funding which the Women's Centre has faced over the past three years. He also noted that the "door is not closed" on the women's groups that need addi-

tional funding. It seems that York is taking a step in the right direction.

Attending York must be an experience of total education. Our degrees are not the only things with which we should graduate. The exchange of ideas and attitudes must also become a part of our educational career. What better place for a human rights movement that an institution of higher learning?

We have the skills and opportunities to change our communities. For this reason, we must educate ourselves about the social ills of sexism, racism and homophobia. Progress cannot be made unless we challenge the existing order and think of the alternatives.

A student government which encourages confrontation and gives us the tools for change can only lead to improvement.



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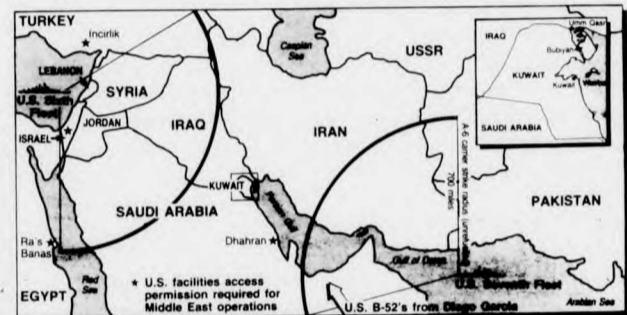
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