

Remembering Babi Yar

By SEN. HENRY M. JACKSON

A small item which appeared recently in THE NEW YORK TIMES brought some troubling thoughts to my mind. The item described a minor but by no means a typical incident that recently occurred in the Soviet Union. "A Jewish woman," it read, "who sent a letter to Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin has been sentenced to three years' confinement on charges of slandering the Soviet state, a Central Asian newspaper has reported.

"The newspaper... said... that the case pointed up the need for more rigorous political indoctrination.

"The woman, Emilia R. Trakhtenberg... allegedly complained of discrimination in the Soviet Union and praised Western freedoms...

"Miss Trakhtenberg's parents died in the Nazi massacre of Babi Yar in Kiev in World War II."

This newspaper item tells all of us a great deal. It tells us, first, about the plight of the Jewish people of Soviet Russia, a people whose indescribable suffering is one of the tragic stories of this century. Miss Trakhtenberg and her family are the symbols of two lost generations, one the victim of Nazi genocide, the other the victim of Soviet cultural genocide. So today, as we remember victims of Babi Yar, let us also stand in solidarity with the children of Babi Yar.

Miss Trakhtenberg's story also tells us about the courage of a people. One cannot speak out against injustice in the Soviet Union and have immunity. One speaks out only at a terrible risk to the well-being of oneself and one's family. Miss Trakhtenberg knew the risk she was taking in writing a letter of protest to Mr. Kosygin, and thousands upon thousands of her people are aware that by signing letters, demonstrating, by demanding the right to emigrate to Israel, even just by being Jews, they are putting their very lives on the line. These are genuine heroes of our time. They command our deepest respect.

Finally, the item in the newspaper tells me something about America. Miss Trakhtenberg "complained of discrimination in the Soviet Union and praised Western freedoms." The justice of her plea seems self-evident, but her words conflict with a growing tendency in our own country to denigrate the value of Western freedoms and to ignore the denial of those freedoms in countries ruled by Communist regimes. There are those who would have us turn inward, to withdraw from the problems of the international community and forget our moral obligations to so much of humanity. The brave protests of Soviet Jews should awaken these new isolationists. Just as the non-violent civil rights movement brought home to a complacent America the urgency of our racial problems



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and the necessity to resolve them peacefully, so today the protests of Soviet Jews are reminding many who would forget that the struggle for freedom must continue even behind the Iron Curtain.

Our nation must not repeat the mistakes that have been made in the past. We saw the danger signals coming out of Nazi Germany in the 1930's. We heard the cries for help. But we did not act in time. Now we can still act in time.

The President can and should utilize all available channels, formal and informal, to convey our position that the Soviet government honor the words of its own constitution by permitting the free expression of ideas and exercise of religion by all its citizens.

Moreover, the President can and should demand of the Soviet government that it permit its citizens the right to emigrate to the countries of their choice as affirmed by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The right to free emigration is fundamental to human liberty. It is a tragic crime for the Soviet -- or any other -- government to imprison its own citizens in a society where they can neither practice their religion nor make their way to countries where they might give full expression to their religious and cultural identity.

In addition, our State Department should take advantage of the present session of the United Nations to raise in the General Assembly the issue of the Soviet Union's violation of the Declaration of Human Rights -- a declaration that was unanimously adopted by the United Nations.

These proposals are embodied in a resolution

I have introduced in the Senate. I hope the Senate acts quickly and affirmatively.

No doubt, there are some people who are against this proposal on the grounds that we must not jeopardize improved relations with the Soviet Union. At all costs, they will say, we must not be abrasive. But we must recognize once and for all that the Soviet government will not grant its citizens their rights until it realizes that the issue is important to us. Until that time it will continue to manipulate Russian Jews, and the Soviet Union's Arab clients, in the most cynical way, by turning on and off the flow of emigrants, a bit faster when the Arabs are out of line, and slower when they behave. But human beings must not be used as hostages held at ransom. They are free beings whose dignity recoils at such treatment. We must stand on the side of this assertion of human dignity.

Human freedom is not a local matter, relevant to some people but not to others. It is a matter for all men everywhere. America was founded on the principle that whenever one man is enslaved, no man is free.

America, with all its many problems, retains a commitment to that principle, and we will relinquish it only at the expense of our greatness as a nation. I do not think we will relinquish it. Our commitment to it runs too deep, and the concerns that press in upon us are too urgent. But the voices of moral acquiescence to oppression are sometimes heard above the voices calling for a renewed commitment to freedom. At this time the protest of Soviet Jews is a compelling reminder of where our national commitment lies. We must support their protest for no other reason than because it is the right thing to do. In acting with justice and compassion towards them, we will enrich our own lives and strengthen the spirit of our nation.

NEW YORK--A study mission of national leaders involved with Hadassah's Zionist Youth Activities Department will leave for Israel Sunday, October 17.

NEW YORK--Moving rapidly from the joyous to the serious, the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry staged back-to-back SIMCHAT TORAH actions in New York City.

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