

The Geneva Summit: Another View

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Israel, and that the Geneva Jewish community did not want to jeopardize its relationship with the Swiss authorities. Switzerland was their home, and they were unwilling to compromise their position by singing the Israeli national anthem.

Three student leaders -- Steve Feuerstein from the U.S., Moshe Ronen from Canada, and David Makovsky, an American living in Jerusalem, agreed to join us. A peaceful sit-in at the Geneva Aeroflot office was carefully planned. It was an appropriate target, as it symbolizes closed Russian borders. From the Aeroflot office, we could dramatically demand that Soviet Jews be permitted to fly to freedom.

During the sit-in, we were continuously involved in prayer and recitation of Psalms. As we sat on the floor, we experienced real Soviet anti-Semitism from the Aeroflot personnel. A Russian official, most probably KGB, threw our skullcaps to the ground, ripped our prayerbooks from our hand, tossing them out the door, pulled at the *tallesim* we were wearing, and forcibly removed the *shofar* we were holding. We saw venomous anti-Semitism in the eyes of the Soviets, giving all of us a glimpse of the horror that Jews in Russia experience.

In the end, we were arrested by Swiss officials and, because of what we believe was Russian pressure, treated as criminals. We spent three days in prison until we were expelled from the country.

During the first-night of our incarceration, we were in Champ Dillon, a maximum security prison where hardcore inmates were held. The humiliation we experienced there is almost indescribable. We were stripped and body searched forced to shower as a guard looked on, placed in isolation in small cubicles for long

period of time, denied kosher food and hence unable to eat, and then put in cells with criminals.

While we admittedly deserved to be punished for violating Swiss law, the obvious question is, why were we treated as hardcore criminals? Why didn't the U.S. consulate step in and stop this humiliation despite repeated phone calls from concerned friends in the States? Why were the Canadians and Israelis in our group visited by an official from their respective governments, while no one saw the three Americans? My sense is that the U.S., because of Russian pressure, did not wish to tip the delicate balance at the summit, and as a consequence, failed to defend its own citizens. In turn, this raises the more vital question of whether the White House caved in to Soviet pressure and failed to raise the human rights issue as a priority concern at the summit conference.

We were not the only ones arrested. Avital Sharansky, wife of Anatoly, was detained by Swiss police as she stood outside the Soviet Mission, attempting to deliver a letter to Raisa Gorbachev. I saw the letter. It read in part, "Dear Mrs. Gorbachev: You are a wife and mother. Permit me to be a wife and mother. Release my husband, my Anatoly." For this, she was held in solitary for two hours, with Swiss police abusively screaming at her.

Here again, we believe the Swiss arrested Avital because of Russian pressure. Tragically, the Americans offered no protest to the intolerable detention of this heroic woman who previously had been received by President Reagan in the White House.

The second evening of our incarceration was spent in a detention center under police guard at the Geneva airport. We remained there until the third day, when armed police escorted us to a plane.

Immediately upon arriving home in Washington, President Reagan gave his summit report to the nation. While the jury is still out, the reality is that the president hardly mentioned human rights in his talk. Indeed, my sources indicate that human rights was scarcely spoken about at the summit.

We are serving notice that Soviet Jewry activists will not permit human rights to be relegated to a back burner. The President announced that a new USSR consulate will open in New York City. We favor such an opening, we favor cultural and scientific exchanges, we favor trade between two superpowers -- but only if

there is a *quid pro quo*. Specifically, only if the 400,000 Jews who have already begun the process for exit permits are permitted to leave, only if Anatoly Sharansky and other Prisoners of Conscience are immediately released, only if the harassment of unofficial teachers of Judaism and Hebrew is ceased. Until that time, we will be present in the thousands when that Soviet consulate opens, and will greet Russian officials with a mass, nonviolent arrest of hundreds of concerned citizens.

It is our way of serving notice to the Soviets that wherever they will be, so will we. It is our way of insisting to our Administration that while we sincerely appreciate their kind words and good intentions, the time has come to move from words to deeds. It is our way of notifying those in the Jewish community who pressured Jewish activists to lower their profile during the summit that this duplicates the silence of 45 years ago and cannot be repeated.

And it is our way of telling ourselves that we shall never cease until our brothers and sisters are free.

(Rabbi Avraham Weiss is the chairman of the Center for Russian Jewry/Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, the senior rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, an assistant professor at Stern College, and on the executive committee of Americans for a Safe Israel.)

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