

Tear Gas Bomb Disrupts Soviet Dance Group At New York Met

NEW YORK (WNS) — Police launched a widespread investigation into the tear gas bombing at the Metropolitan Opera House during the opening night of the Soviet Moiseyev Dance Company but there were no immediate arrests.

According to a Police Department spokesperson, a tear gas canister went off at about 7:45 p.m., shortly after the troupe began to perform their first dance number. The explosion injured 21 people and forced some 3,780 people to vacate the opera house. Minutes after the explosion, a man claiming to be a member of the Jewish Defense League claimed responsibility for the incident, police said.

Major Jewish organizations condemned the action as one of terrorism and denounced those responsible. However, the Jewish Defense Group, a New York-based JDL splinter organization, said it did not condemn the action.

According to press reports, an anonymous male caller told the Associated Press immediately after the blast, "Approximately five minutes ago, a powerful irritant was released at the Moiseyev Dance Company at Lincoln Center. This was done by Russian members of the Jewish Defense League movement. These actions will continue and escalate. Never again."

Shortly thereafter, a second caller identified himself as Chaim Ben Yosef, JDL national chairman, and told AP that the JDL was responsible for "the disruption of this Soviet Nazi ballet."

The second caller continued, "Members of our group did it because the Soviets came here as a cultural propaganda offensive to make Americans feel that they (The Soviets) are not so bad. We want the Soviets to know that they aren't

going to be able to continue their propaganda offensive until three million Soviet Jews are freed."

A third man who identified himself as Meir Judah Ben-Dov, JDL head of security, said the JDL was not responsible for the bomb but claimed a splinter group of the JDL may have initiated the incident.

Morris Abram, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, issued a statement saying:

"Vigilantism is the historic weapon used by the enemies of the Jewish people against us. We do not know who is responsible for the obscenity at the opera last night. That terrible act served only the interests of the Soviets by diverting attention from their massive human rights violations and virtual shut-off of all Jewish emigration."

David Gordis, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, echoed Abram's condemnation. "While we recognize that the patience of Americans is wearing thin, with Soviet suppression of Jews continuing ... we strongly assert that the cause of Soviet Jewry and human rights is far better served through diplomacy and peaceful demonstrations," he said.

Michael Pelavin, chairperson of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, said: "Violence does not advance the cause of Soviet Jewry. The Jewish community relations field does not oppose the renewed visits of Soviet artistic and sports troupes and intellectuals. Instead, we have urged that Americans should use such occasions as opportunities to impress upon and remind influential Soviet citizens through reasoned and reasonable means of Americans' concern for the human rights of Soviet Jews ... That is the responsible way to demonstrate concern for Soviet Jews."

Nathan Perlmutter, national director of ADL, called the perpetrators "terrorists" and said the incident "serves the Soviet cause - not Jews, not the United States."

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations said, "When Jews adopt this kind of lawless behavior,

it bring shame to our community and wins sympathy for the Soviets."

Only one Jewish organization expressed veiled support for the action. Rabbi Yakov Lloyd, the New York State coordinator for the Jewish Defense Group, said "We do not condemn the action of the freedom fighter at last night's tear gas bombing at Lincoln Center against the Soviets although we feel very sorry that innocent bystanders were hurt."

"We urge every Jew to do whatever they can, of course within the confines of the law, to assure the release of three million oppressed Soviet Jews behind the Iron Curtain."

Lloyd described his organization as a splinter group of the JDL which has reportedly been factionalizing over political infighting. Lloyd said his organization adheres to the principles of Rabbi Meir Kahane.

Glenn Richter, national coordinator of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ), who demonstrated outside the Met with some 70 others, said although his group did not condone the means of protest used by the perpetrators, he could understand the frustration out of which such actions are born.

Richter and Rabbi Avraham Weiss, national chairman of the SSSJ, organized the group of demonstrators outside Lincoln Center to attempt to persuade the attendants to boycott the dance performance.

Immediately after the evacuation, Richter said, some members of the audience assumed the Student Struggle was responsible for the tear gas bomb and physically and verbally attacked some of the demonstrators.

One demonstrator, Maynard Swenson, was taken into protective police custody after the crowd converged on him.

Another audience member started screaming "Jewish murderer" at Weiss. "The TV cameras were in a frenzy -- pushing," Richter said. "People were very angry, they started screaming at Swenson and tried to strike him, thinking he was responsible. The immediate response was anti-Semitic by some people."

The SSSJ has used non-violent protests for 22 years, Richter said, and would never put other individuals in danger. "On the other hand, seeing the extraordinary persecution in the Soviet Union -- if it was someone Jewish -- one could understand the frustration," Richter said.

The SSSJ said it plans to continue its protests in front of the Met throughout the Soviet troupe's New York engagement, scheduled until September 14.

JERUSALEM (WNS) — The High Court of Justice overruled the appeal by two East Jerusalem newspapers of the order to close them down. The daily Al-Mithak and the periodical Al-Ahd had petitioned the court to rescind the closure order by the Interior Ministry which claimed that the publications were promoting anti-Israel views. This was denied by the owners of the two publications.

WASHINGTON (WNS) — A submersible robotic vehicle that was used recently to film the wreck of the ocean liner Titanic will be deployed in Egyptian waters in the Mediterranean Sea in an effort to find the Israeli submarine, Dakar, sunk in January, 1968, according to the Department of Defense. If the search by the U.S. Navy is successful, efforts will then be made to salvage the submarine and recover the remains of the 69 members of her crew.

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