

AJCongress Challenges '60 Minutes' Segment On Views Of Soviet Jews

The American Jewish Congress says it is "deeply distressed" by a CBS "60 Minutes" segment Sunday night (March 22) because it claims the program suggested that only a relatively small number of Soviet Jews are unhappy with life in the Soviet Union.

A statement by Theodore R. Mann, president of AJCongress, said the segment, featuring Mike Wallace, presented a "simplistic and inaccurate picture" of Soviet Jewish reality and was dedicated "to sweeping aside painful evidence of decades of anti-Jewish discrimination and oppression."

The statement asserted it has never been denied by American Jewish organizations that some Jews are satisfied with Soviet life and do not wish to leave. But it noted that the "key concern" is with the "400,000 Jews who have requested and received invitations from Israel" and with additional hundreds of thousands "who may wish to leave but are fearful of even expressing such a desire."

Mr. Mann's statement also questioned the candor of "satisfied" Jews interviewed by Mr. Wallace, contending they were fully aware that their comments "would eventually be seen and heard by the Soviet government."

The text of Mr. Mann's statement follows:

We are deeply distressed by a March 22 segment on CBS's "Sixty Minutes" suggesting that only a small group of hard-core Soviet Jewish dissidents are dissatisfied with life in the Soviet Union.

We have never denied that there are some Jews who are satisfied with Soviet life and do not wish to leave. Others, referred to in the TV segment by a Soviet Jewish refusenik as "trained Jews," have been willing to trade their Jewish identity for material rewards within the

Soviet system.

Our key concern, rather, is with the 400,000 Soviet Jews who have requested and received invitations from Israel. These do not even include the additional hundreds of thousands of Jews who may wish to leave but are fearful of even expressing such a desire.

The Sixty Minutes segment ignores this truth about the Soviet Jewish condition and dedicates itself to sweeping aside painful evidence of decades of anti-Jewish discrimination and oppression.

One cannot help wonder about the candor of some of those "satisfied" Jews interviewed on camera who knew full well that their comments would eventually be seen and heard by the Soviet government.

It is strange that Sixty Minutes did not make a single reference to the U.S. State Department's recently issued "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1986" which notes that Jews in the Soviet Union are subjected to systematic persecution based on ancestry." This report also declares that Jews are denied access to the better schools and universities, are virtually banned from political careers in the Communist Party and upper echelons of state government and from other crucial areas of public life, and have been subjected to vicious anti-Semitic vilification in official Soviet propaganda, including books, broadcasts and newspaper articles. Moreover, Soviet Jews study or teach Hebrew or Jewish history only at the risk of imprisonment.

Even those assimilated Jews who have sought accommodation with the Soviet system cannot entirely escape the burden of their official designation as Jews. And for those who choose to live as Jews, worship as Jews or maintain Jewish cultural traditions, the price is infinitely greater. In Soviet terms, one cannot be a full-fledged citizen and also be a Jew.

It is regrettable that Sixty Minutes, in its eagerness to scoop its competitors in the media, has presented a simplistic and inaccurate pic-

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ture of a complex and troubling problem that will surely be recorded by Soviet public relations specialists as a major triumph.



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