

LETTERS

Mr. Mike Wallace
60 Minutes (CBS)
555 W. 57th Street
New York, N.Y. 10019

Dear Mr. Wallace

I found your 60 Minutes segment of March 22, which purported to examine fairly the situation of Soviet Jews, to be dangerously misleading. By irresponsibly distorting the balance of easily available witnesses, it gave the Soviet Union an undeserved propaganda victory against the human rights movement that mocks the direct evidence our network of rescue workers collects every day. In so doing, you may have caused irreparable harm to the aspirations of the Refuseniks who put their lives on the line simply by seeking freedom.

By what standards of research and accuracy could you balance a single Jewish Refusenik with a long parade of English-speaking trained or court Jews, e.g., a Soviet "Frank Sinatra," a Russian "George Burns," a viciously anti-Semitic Samuel Zivs, an English teacher who denies the indisputable trend of Jews wishing to learn and speak Hebrew even when Hebrew teachers are routinely arrested, harassed and sent to jail, a class of smug, British-accented students, as if the Soviets don't discriminate against Jews applying to a university, and as if Jewish children are not generally ostracized and vilified by their schoolmates?

Could CBS not afford a proper translator of its own? Where were the Russian activists, the hunger and labor strikers, of the Jewish Refusenik movement? Where were the dozens of current and former Prisoners-of-Conscience? How obscene to trot out the Potemkin village of Birobijain. Have you too forgotten Thieriesenstadt? By whose authority do you claim that "one and one-half million Soviet Jews live more or less satisfying lives" in the face of state-sponsored anti-Semitism, and the nearly 50,000 Refuseniks who have risked all for the legal right to emigrate to a land of their choice, to say nothing of the 400,000 who are known to want desperately to leave the USSR? Is the eyewitness testimony of the Sharanskys, Orlovs, and Sakharovs to be discredited by a few smiling, ironic faces tolerated by the KGB?

We of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, the 77,000-member rescue organization, offered your producers our assistance in finding truly representative Refuseniks and prisoner families to interview. Contrary to your statement, this has never been hard to do even in the worst periods of repression. I repeat the offer today. Indeed, I seriously urge you to let us help you repair some of the grievous damage you have done to the fragile cause of rescue. I urge you to give us equal time by scheduling another segment to portray the other, blacker side of this story.

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, defending the Cabinet's decision to phase out Israel's military relationship with South Africa in the Knesset, appeared to indicate that the government was acting out of concern for American views.

Israel, he said, must take American views into account because no other nation shows more consideration for Israel.

Your program did a dangerous disservice by letting entertainment values masquerade as news and comment. Surely, CBS News is capable of a competent, careful, and well-researched presentation of the plight of Soviet Jews.

Sincerely,

Pamela B. Cohen
National President
Union of Councils For Soviet Jews

cc: Lawrence Tisch
President of CBS

(Chicago -- Pamela B. Cohen, National President of the 77,000-member rescue organization, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, vigorously protested the irreparable harm to the human rights struggle caused by the Sunday, March 22nd segment on Soviet Jews aired on CBS 60 Minutes.

According to Cohen, "The program revealed a sloppy and inaccurate journalistic style which irresponsibly distorted the precarious situation of Soviet Jews, portraying them as 'Living more or less satisfying lives.' We call upon all Americans involved in the human rights process to speak out in protest.)

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry said Friday that The Netherlands supports the opening of the United Nations archives on war criminals to all member states of the UN and to private individuals and institutions engaged in serious research.

The archives were compiled between 1943-47 by the now defunct United Nations War Crimes Commission. Israel's request for access was denied last week by UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar on grounds that all but one of the Commission's 17 member states wanted them closed. The only dissenting country was Australia.

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Soviet Jewish women feel highly motivated to work outside the home, but most Soviet Jews prefer that the women do so no more than half-time, according to a survey of 200 Soviet Jewish couples who have immigrated to Israel.

Dr. Shalvia Ben-Barak of Tel Aviv University presented these and other findings at a conference on "Women of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union" conducted by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's new Marjorie Mayrock Center for Soviet and East European Research.

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