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IMMORAL AND UNWISE

Editorial in Yedioth Achronoth by Dr. Herzl Rozenblum, Mar. 2, 1973
(Translated from the Hebrew)

There is great bitterness among many Russian immigrants in Israel about what they describe as the lack of action on the part of Jerusalem on the matter of saving Jews from Russia. Things have reached such a state that some of them have begun to speak of the need to make a special list of their own so that they may bring their protest to the Knesset. When members of Kibbutz Hazerim heard their complaints directly from them, they said, "We are shocked." We understand their feelings.

For it is the very truth. There is opposition, unspoken, but strong and stubborn. in the government to everything that smells of an effective struggle for emigration from the Soviet Union. This is known to everyone who comes in contact with the government on this vital matter. Its attitude to any suggestion which smacks of war activism is one which recalls "an Italian strike," no objection and no debate--only deep tomb-like silence.

Our newspaper editors have learned this through their own experiences. Golda came to them a little over two years ago and asked them "to lower their tone" in their publicizing of the small trickle of immigrants from Russia which began then. She said, "This would only harm the rest of the Jews in the USSR who hope to emigrate to Israel, and the spotlights which we directed on the immigrants is liable to make trouble for them. Because of the noise which we make over this small aliya, the Soviets will stop aliya altogether, and we must be careful." She added, that our silence in this "delicate" matter will be to the benefit of the Russian immigrants here who have relatives in Russia awaiting aliyah.

However, only a short time passed and it became apparent that the Russian immigrants who arrived here were of the opposite opinion, demanding from their personal knowledge of Russia "to raise the tone" in Israel's fight for the aliya of the rest of their brothers. Another meeting was held with Golda to which, this time, she brought as supporting authority, a friend, himself a Russian immigrant but from the second aliya who had left Russia during the time of the Tsars and knew only from reading what was happening now...and this "expert" said the following: "It does not matter what the new olim say. What matters is that publicity will endanger the present small trickle of aliyah." And Golda's opinion was the same as his, and their opinion was accepted.

...But not by everybody. There were editors who revolted against this silencing of voices and not, God forbid, because of their instinct for publicity but because of the damage which silence brings to the question of aliya in their opinion. Their view was that the opinion of the new Russian olim was more important than that of someone from the second aliya. And they made it clear: "We are not a part to the agreement and we will write whatever, in our opinion, is necessary." Golda had this to say: "You leave me no choice, my friends, but to impose censorship on you." And censorship was imposed on us, and when there is censorship, discussion is finished because it is stronger than discussion. And it applies to all of us--those "who agree" and those "who do not agree" as one.

Again there was quiet throughout the State. The new Soviet immigrants were astonished at this and as they had no alternative, began a "private struggle" of their own to save their brothers in Russia. One still remembers their assemblies and hunger strikes near the Wall, which became their "specialty" when the rest of the country looked on in silence. And the members of the government said to themselves, "This is probably

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the best situation for us--the Russian olim themselves will fight for their brothers in Russia and we will shout "hurrah" (quietly) from the sidelines, and the bear will be sated and the sheep whole."

But not all the new olim were satisfied with saying Psalms in a corner near the Wall, and some of them began to widen their scope and went into action at the UN and Washington--and this was regarded with less favor by the Jerusalem government which understood that even with all its absence from this battle arena, the war had broken out in various parts of the world without it, and this could be "dangerous" in itself. And so it happened that the representative of our government in America began a stormy battle, not against Russia but against those very olim who fought Russia there, and the whole thing became a scandal.

It aroused the attention of several sections of the Knesset in Jerusalem who felt that in view of the battle against the fighters for aliya, they could not continue to stand indifferently on the sidelines. The voices of the Jews who remained in Russia rose with the plea, "Where are you? And grant us your citizenship." And so, official Jerusalem had no choice but to agree to issue passports to those Russian Jews who requested them. They simply forced passports out of its hands! But after sending some passports (after innumerable checks and delays) again Jerusalem became silent. And there was no reaction to this because it remained an episode and did not become a general campaign.

Many Russian Jews began to flood our government with requests to publish the list of Soviet Jews who requested permission to emigrate. Their view was, apparently, that since the citizenship granting operation was bogged down in deep sand, it would be useful to give publicity at least to their desire to emigrate here. This would serve as a denial to the Russian claim that only a few Jews are prepared to emigrate to Israel, and this would give something of a "shot in the arm" to the Israelis in hiding. And as the hint was understood, the government rejected this with abhorrence. And until today it ignores this request by our brothers.

And so we have seen how, step by step, Jerusalem slowly disappeared altogether from the arena of active battle for the immigration of Soviet Jews, not only in Israel, but also abroad. We had various reports about the World Jewish Congress doing something, and individual people planning something here and there, but our government is completely out of the picture. Its spokesman whispered into our ears something about this intellectual and that artist who did what he did in his own name but on the initiative of our government which, as it were, stood behind him, but this initiative, if it existed, remained absolutely secret because of the principle: No Open Struggle.

This phenomenon was expressed very painfully especially in the case of the American Senator Jackson, a man who has no peer throughout the US in the extent of his self-sacrifice in the battle for emigration from the USSR. We simply threw him to the dogs ...exactly so. He stopped the entire American administrative machine, all in order to force it to make the expansion of economic ties with Russia dependent on its abolition of the ransom, and we...what did we do? We stood aside, inactive, as if it had nothing to do with us. In addition, if the American Jews pulled back their support from Jackson, undoubtedly, our had was in this too.

You may ask: What is the basis of this "policy" of Jerusalem? There is a very clear answer. Its aim is to tone down the problem of emigration from Russia in order to bring about the renewal of relations sooner. Their train of thought was: Russia will see that we are not making any difficulties for her in her relations with her Jews, and she will speed up the procedure to return to Tel Aviv...and in our modest opinion this is not only immoral but also unwise. It is clear why it is immoral. It is unwise because even if Russia will return to us someday, it will not do so in order to "pay a debt" to those policy makers in Israel who have enforced a policy of silence.