

Jews in Jeopardy*

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In our fast-changing world, one thing remains constant. Thousands of Jews still live in uncertainty and fear. For purposes of our discussion, they tend to fall into two major categories. The first includes those who are in jeopardy and are not permitted to emigrate. The second encompasses those who face danger but are allowed to leave their country should they so opt. In some cases, because of complex socio-economic elements including age, material ties, fear of the resettlement process, lack of skills and language barriers, Jews in jeopardy remain where they are.

The decision to emigrate is often made when conditions become unbearable. To this "push" factor is added the strong "pull factor" of Israel and other western countries where the migrant feels he can establish roots and preserve his dignity and Jewish identity. Tragically, in many cases the "push and pull" factors are not in tandem, consequently the situation of Jews in Syria and Iraq who desperately desire emigration but are forbidden to leave.

In the USSR, the "push" factors are somewhat more subtle than in the Middle East — harassment, imprisonment, forced labor camps, discrimination, physical assaults, destruction of culture and Jewish institutions. The list is endless. On the other end, the "pull" factor includes the strong desire of relatives for family reunion and the increasing awareness of the world community of the plight of Soviet Jewry.

There is growing concern about the changing situation of the more than

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800,000 Jews who live in Latin America. Violence, political instability, and conflict between left wing and right wing groups, the Church and strife for ascendancy of these groups, further inflamed by the increasing influence of Arab propaganda may create problems for Latin America's Jews.

Jews in Arab Lands: Syria

The 4,500 Jews living in Syria, which has a total population of 6,500,000, are subjected to persecutions which have ancient historical antecedents. It was the Syrian Antiochus whose atrocities against the Jews in Palestine fomented the uprising of the Maccabees in 168 Before the Common Era. The cruelties committed by the Syrians upon the Jews are detailed in the Chanukah story found in the Books of the Maccabees.

Today, more than 2100 years later, the remnant Jewish community still lives in fear. Since 1947 successive Syrian governments have refused to allow Jews to emigrate. Since the Yom Kippur War the plight of the Jews in that country has become more desperate. A report in the *New York Times* states that Jews remained in their houses during the 18 days of the Yom Kippur War, rarely venturing to the edge of the ghetto to buy food.

The *Times* further reported:

After the fighting ended, Palestinian refugees who for years have been assaulting Jews on the street were frequently joined by Syrians who claimed revenge against the Jews for Syrian casualties caused by Israel.

Albert Elia, the Secretary of the Jewish community in Beirut, was kidnapped in September 1971 and it is believed that he was abducted to Damascus where he languishes in prison. In March of this year,

four young Jewish women attempting to cross into Lebanon were robbed, raped and slain in a cave near the border. Two prominent members of the Jewish community were falsely charged with the murder. A few weeks later, the bodies of two young Jewish men missing for six months in a similar attempt to flee the country were turned over to their families. Most recently, 11 Jewish women of Aleppo were arrested, tortured by electric shock and then released.

Jews are forbidden to work for the government in nationally-owned enterprises or in banks. When the head of a Jewish family dies, his property reverts to the state and his heirs must pay rent to the state for remaining in the house. Confined to the ghetto, Jews must obtain special permits to travel three miles from their homes. No Jew may have a telephone or own a TV set or drive an automobile. Their identity cards are marked with the word "Mousawi" — "Jew" — in red ink to enable the authorities and others to identify the bearer.

Iraq

Jewish Millennial Roots in Iraq

Many of us are familiar with the psalm which begins with the words "By the Rivers of Babylon." Ancient Babylon is today Iraq. The 450 remaining Jews, in a total population of some ten million in that country, constitute the remnant of an ancient and proud Jewish community established in 586 BCE with the Babylonian captivity. The Jewish roots of this community go back to the very beginnings of the Jewish people, for it was here that the Patriarch Abraham, the first Jew, was born in what was then called Ur Chaldees, and it was here that Jewish intellectual leadership flourished

in the famous academies of Sura and Pumbeditha. In what was ancient Babylon, Jewish sages and scholars created the Babylonian Talmud, one of the great literary and spiritual treasures of the Jewish people.

Jews Virtual Prisoners

Jewish houses are under surveillance by the security police. According to the law of March 3, 1968, Jews are forbidden to dispose of movable property without the permission of the Ministry of Interior. Where such permission is granted, Jews must deposit the proceeds in a bank without the right of withdrawal except by authorization of the Ministry. House-to-house searches were made of all Jewish homes and a register of their occupants drawn up. Jews are forbidden to travel within the country. By government order, debts owed to Jews, whether by government bodies or by private businesses, need not be paid. Licenses given to Jews have been cancelled and all companies have been ordered to discharge their Jewish employees.

Public Hangings

Iraq had achieved international notoriety when it hung nine Jews in Baghdad's public square in January 1969 while bystanders cheered. On April 12, 1973, five members of the Kashkush family were brutally murdered in Baghdad. There are also reports of the kidnapping of 18 Jews whose whereabouts are still unknown. Confiscation of their property and evasive denials by Iraqi authorities as to their fate arouse grave apprehension.

Jewish Situation in Arab and Moslem World Precarious

Since the Yom Kippur War, Jews in the Arab and Moslem world live in an

increasingly precarious situation. When passions of hatred and nationalism are running high, the Jewish minorities in those lands bear the brunt of the excesses which occur, even in countries which are relatively moderate such as Morocco and Tunisia.

In both those North African countries the official government policy is to protect their Jewish minorities. However, the continuing anti-Israel campaign in the Arab world inflames popular sentiment to the point of occasional violence against Jews.

Morocco

Although King Hassan II of Morocco has stated several times that his Jewish subjects have the same rights as his Moslem subjects, there has been discrimination and bad feeling against the Jews ever since the 1967 Six-Day War, further aggravated by Moroccan participation in the Yom Kippur War.

Morocco is an Arab country with a Jewish community of 25,000 persons, vastly outnumbered in a total population of 15¼ million. In 1971 the Jewish population numbered 40,000, and before Moroccan independence in 1956, 200,000.

First Jews Settled in Eighth Century C.E.

The first Jews are thought to have settled here before the Arab invasion of the 8th century C.E. Persecuted, they later withdrew into their own quarters within the towns and cities, which became known as *mellahs* from the local word for salt. This was because the wretched inhabitants were forced to pickle the heads of rebels and criminals before these were stuck on spikes over city gateways.

Continuing Exodus of Jews

After independence, Jews and Europeans began leaving Morocco in increas-

ing numbers, most of the Jews going to Israel, Canada and France. Militant Arab nationalists have furthered this exodus. Today there are more Moslems than Jews in the *mellahs*.

In accordance with last year's Moroccanization laws, all agricultural land and farms have been expropriated, so far without compensation. All businesses must now be 51 percent Moroccan-owned and staffed.

It should be noted that the welfare of the Moroccan Jewish community is largely dependent upon the continuing well-being and power of King Hassan II, upon whom several assassination attempts have been made. Although Jews continue to live there for material and cultural reasons, a general feeling of malaise pervades this remnant Jewish community.

Tunisia

The approximately 8,000 Jews in a total Tunisian population of 5,150,000 are, like their brethren in Morocco, largely depending upon one person for their continuing well-being, President Habib Bourguiba, who is 70 and ailing. Whether the continuing pressure of Arab militants will enable more radical and anti-Jewish elements to assume control after he has gone from the scene, is a matter of extreme anxiety for Tunisian Jews and the world Jewish community.

Falasha Jews

Approximately 20,000 Falasha Jews live in Ethiopia, whose population numbers 25,500,000. "The poorest of the poor," they live in the midst of Arab hostility alongside a large Moslem population. There have been scattered voices raised in the United States, Israel and elsewhere expressing concern for their plight. Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, has affirmed that they are Jews.

Jews in South Africa

In speaking of Africa, it may surprise some to refer to Jews in jeopardy. South African Jews, comparatively well off, contribute significantly to Israeli causes and maintain a strong Jewish communal structure. Nevertheless, from reports of responsible Jewish communal leaders, some of the 118,000 Jews in the Republic of South Africa, whose total population numbers close to 20,000,000 are alone and isolated in the midst of a tense racial situation.

Within the Soviet Orbit

Three million Jews live within the borders of the USSR; limited numbers have been permitted to leave. There is some degree of culturocide evident in the USSR. The institutions which have transmitted the Jewish language, history, religion, culture and other components of the Jewish heritage are now virtually non-existent.

Detente

A growing number of influential persons and publications have stressed the benefits to be derived from trade between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Responsible opinion in the Jewish and general community maintains that we should not make available our capital, technology and other resources without underscoring our deep and traditional concern for the human values which has distinguished our country from earliest days. Indeed I am reminded of a statement made in 1911 by the then Governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson who, speaking in support of cancelling a United States—Russian commercial treaty as the Russians persisted in discriminating against Jews, stated:

We are a practical people. Like the rest of the world we establish our trade relations upon the

grounds of interest and not sentiment... But there lies a principle back of our life. America is not a mere body of traders; it is a body of free men... We have a great ardor for gain; but we have a deep passion for the rights of man. Principles lie back of our actions. America would be inconceivable without them.

We note with dismay that this year (1974) the movement of Jews from the USSR has been even more restricted by the Soviet authorities.

Global Detente:—Yes—Freedom to leave:Yes

While we welcome and endorse efforts for global detente, we also stress that cooperation between our two countries should include greater recognition of human rights. However, this is especially important for Soviet Jews who have shown great courage in fighting for their rights even at the cost, for some, of long terms in forced labor camps and psychiatric hospitals. In many cases their crime was their expressed wish to emigrate. There are 135,000 other Jews who have applied for permission to emigrate.

Rumania

Others in the Soviet orbit with significant numbers of Jews are Rumania, where 90,000 Jews live in a total population of 20,500,000. The atmosphere there is more benevolent and Jews are permitted to organize and maintain Jewish institutions. Chief Rabbi Dr. Moses Rosen even sits in the Rumanian Parliament. There is a moderate emigration from that country, mostly to Israel. However, there are strictures upon the numbers permitted to leave.

Hungary

In Hungary, where there are 80,000 Jews in a total population of almost 10½ million, Jews enjoy a good deal of freedom. While they have Jewish seminaries

and other institutions, the regime does not permit free emigration.

Czechoslovakia and Poland

In our rapid overview of this area, I have time to mention only the approximate 14,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia, in a total population of 14,400,000 and the approximately 8,000 Jews remaining in Poland, whose total population is some 33,000,000. There is little emigration from these countries since the remnant communities are largely elderly and ill.

Latin America

The final area in our survey of Jews in jeopardy is our southern neighbor, Latin America, where there are some 800,000 Jews including 500,000 in Argentina, 150,000 in Brazil, 50,000 in Uruguay, 30,000 in Chile and the remainder in other countries, in a total population of 200,000,000. A wide variety of sources, including UHS offices in Latin America, Jewish organizations and the press indicate that the area is in ferment. There are frequent changes in governments and an ongoing conflict between left and right wing groups.

Pressures against the Jews have been augmented by the growing activity of the Arab League and the lavish use of oil money for anti-Semitic propaganda. Among other things, the immense funds of the League have become noticeable in the mass media.

Chile

The recent military coup in Chile does not appear to have threatened the established Jewish community, which has offered its support to the new regime. However, there are Jews, former Allende supporters and others, caught in

the crossfire between the left and right, who are turning to HIAS for help.

Assimilation Rampant

Added to these hostile pressures, it should be noted in passing that there is a growing rate of intermarriage and lack of interest in Judaism among young people in Latin America. According to an American Jewish Committee report: "In Argentina approximately 40 percent of the Jews are assimilated or on their way to assimilation. Many of the younger Jews are totally unconcerned with Jewish tradition or Judaism as a whole. Some university students have turned to the left, adopting an anti-Israel attitude that contains elements of anti-Semitism, and reject Jewish organizations as representative of a reactionary, conservative and bourgeois establishment."

While the overall situation of Jews in Latin America is of continuing concern, there appears at the moment to be some balance between the "push" and "pull" factors. However, it is essential that we be alert to the developments which may ultimately push many to seek new homes elsewhere.

Conclusion

Our concern for the rights of Jews to live in freedom and dignity wherever they may be, or to leave for areas where they can do so, are still very much on our agenda. Thirty years after the war against Nazism, the tragedy of the Holocaust is still with us and sharpens our concern for Jews.

The hoped-for respect of man for man, the kind of world so passionately proclaimed by our ancient prophets, has not become a reality. Indifference can sometimes be as deadly as the assassin's bullet.

It is essential that we maintain living links with Jews wherever they may be;

that we keep informed of their plight; and that we help to rouse the conscience of the world to impending threats.

For us at United Hias Service it means that we must be prepared at a moment's notice to rescue Jews in jeopardy, whatever and wherever the contingency.

As Jewish communal workers, we must be particularly attuned to develop-

ing situations and to involve ourselves, our agencies and our communities in keeping abreast of world events, particularly as they affect Jews.

The history of the Jewish people has underscored time and again that we share with our fellow Jews an interdependence of fate. We are all responsible one for another.