

ZEV WILLIAM WOLFSON  
44 WHITEHALL STREET  
NEW YORK 4, N. Y.  
DIGBY 4-5210

July 31, 1962  
SPECIAL DELIVERY

Rabbi Norman Lamm  
R F D 1  
Hancock, New York

Dear Norman:

Enclosed please find final copy of the speech you have prepared for Capehart. I have made a few minor changes on the final draft to which I hope you will not object.

I have known that you write and deliver excellent sermons. However, I did not know how excellent your talents are in political speech writing.

Perhaps we ought to suggest to someone to put you on Kennedy's ghost writing staff. (He doesn't write any of them himself.)

Regards.



ZWW:ES  
enc: mailed under separate cover.



In the last few years we have become accustomed to hearing periodic reports of a "thaw" in the Soviet Union. No doubt changes have been, and possibly are, taking place. But if we want to take the long view, and test the depth and genuineness of these reports, we might profitably examine the current treatment of Russian Jews by the Communist government.

Throughout the history of civilization, the attitudes of the prevailing power to the Jewish minority have often been an indicator of the whole nature of that government. If the Jews were treated equally with the rest of the citizens of that country, no better and no worse; if they were given the basic rights necessary for survival both physically and spiritually; if they were treated, in other words, as human beings; then the general nature of the government was civilized. But if the policy towards the exposed Jewish minority was sinister; if it were singled out for discriminatory action; then any attempts by that government to appear as otherwise humane and honorable were a mere facade and utterly unconvincing.

Last winter there took place the arrest, trial, and conviction~~ing~~ of Gedalia R. Pechersky, the religious lay leader of the Jewish community of Leningrad. Shortly afterwards followed government action against the lay leaders of five other Jewish congregations, and the closing of synagogues in a dozen other Russian cities. Then, in early spring, came the reports of the difficulties that Communist authorities were placing in the way of Jews desirous of obtaining Matzo's, or unleavened wafers, which they need for the proper observance of their Passover holiday. And now we have been hearing of the prominence given to Jewish names in the lists of those executed for "economic crimes."

Does not a pattern emerge from all this that is most disheartening and disturbing? When this community of 3 million Jews, the remnants of that proud, vibrant, and creative European Jewry so horribly decimated by Hitler, is harassed and attacked, by means both subtle and un-subtle, in an attempt to destroy its very identity, then it should be proof to us that the so-called changes for the better in the Soviet system are more fanciful than real.

The recent appointment of a Russian Jew to a high post in government does not change the situation at all. What the civilized world is looking for is fact, not propoganda. One Jewish engineer receiving a promotion does not compensate for the strange decline of Jewish enrollment in Soviet universities from 13 to 4 percent. The Soviets would do better to print ---and distribute! --- the first Hebrew Bible in Russia since 1917 than appoint a Jew to the chairmanship of the State Planning Committee. Does Mr. Khrushchev mean to tell us that "some of his best friends are Jews?"

The death penalty meted out for so-called "economic crimes" is an especially subtle and pernicious way of harassing the Jews of Russia. In general, capital punishment for this kind of crime is brutal, for it is completely disparate with the nature of the offense. When it is obviously directed against one group more than others, it is doubly wrong. When one reads the letter of a Soviet jurist to The New York Times of July 20, 1962, in which he attempts to justify that policy, one comes away more convinced than ever that this is being used as a weapon against those who displease the ruling circles. He points out that the



death penalty for economic crimes is reserved for "specially aggravating circumstances." Is it not queer that so large a number of people with Jewish-sounding names commit these crimes under "specially aggravating circumstances?" Is it perhaps their Jewishness that is "aggravating" and that merits for them "special" treatment, especially in the government-owned provincial press and radio -- which have not failed to give expression to open anti-Semitism at these occasions? The Soviet jurist ends his letter by declaring that according to the U.S.S.R. Constitution, Socialist property is sacred and inviolable. We ought to remind him and his government that by the ordinary standards of civilized men and women, human life transcends the value of any property, no matter how "sacred and inviolable" political dogma declares it to be.

The policy of the Soviet government seems to be based on this fallacious reasoning: since most Jews feel special bonds of brotherhood for each other, these must be political in nature, and therefore imply a special political loyalty to Zionism and the State of Israel, and thus a Jew is automatically a poor security risk and disloyal citizen.

What the Russian authorities fail to realize is the deep religious quality of the Jewish bonds, and the non-political nature of these associations. Many of the most pious and devout religious Jews have been and are ardently anti-Zionist. The press in recent weeks offers ample evidence of very religious Jews throughout the world who are opposed to the State of Israel on religious grounds, and who have gone to all lengths to articulate and express this opposition in practice, much to



the chagrine of Israel. ~~Many of these Jews have not, in effect, recognized Israel as something which the U.S.S.R. has done.~~

There is nothing paradoxical about this. It means simply that the Jewish religion is not a political one, and does not impose political doctrines or obligations upon its communicants. Individual Jews throughout the ages have entertained all kinds of economic theories and been of all sorts of political persuasion. But when they crossed the threshold of the Synagogue, all these differences in doctrine disappeared, they became irrelevant, because the Synagogue is not a forum, a platform, or an exchange. It is purely a House of Worship. Jewish law expressly forbids it to be desecrated by such mundane matters as political discussions or economic transactions. The Russian authorities should bear this in mind, and abandon their scurrilous canard of presenting the Synagogue as anything but a house of the spirit.

Jews are heir to a religious and cultural tradition that goes back some 3500 years. During this time they have made some of the greatest contributions to human society. Nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, they have been persecuted in every climate and age. They have been the victims of every kind of ruthless oppression. Usually they had no one to look to for help and encouragement except their faith and their own brethren. Despite all the cruelty perpetrated against them, their religion proclaims it a principle of their faith that they are to be loyal citizens of whatever country they find themselves in. The nature of this closeness Jews feel for each other is thus part history, part religion, part culture, part mutual suffering. It is essentially the kind of concern and sympathy



any two human beings feel for each other just because they are human beings; except that it is more so, more intense, more charged with shared experiences of centuries past.

One of the things the Russian Communists have always boasted of is the enlightened and humane provision in their Constitution outlawing anti-Semitism and declaring it a crime. Beyond doubt, this was and is a positive step in the right direction, ~~especially considering the endemic anti-Jewishness of the Russian people for generations.~~ Today, therefore, we must ask, in the name of all that is decent, that Soviet practice live up to Soviet theory. If they are not to make a tragic farce of one of their finest achievements, they must desist from their recent anti-Jewish measures, whether direct or subtle, aimed at both the Jewish people and the Jewish faith. A continuation of their present policy is, in effect, a reversion to one of the ugliest features of Czarist, pre-revolutionary Russian society.

Jews have achieved great distinction in American government and in the general cultural and scientific life of our country. They have contributed creative leadership to France and England and many other countries. Their civic and political loyalties were given uncompromisingly to the countries they served. It has been the experience of the Western world that the special feelings of comradeship Jews feel towards each other never conflicted with these loyalties to their countries. The Soviets too have had Jews who contributed to their nation in the army, in science, in economics, and in other spheres. We ought to <sup>say to</sup> ~~advise~~ the Soviet government that their xenophobic and



unfounded suspicions of Jews will not benefit their country in the long run. Rather, our experience has taught us that Jews are usually grateful, and that if they are treated no worse than any one else, they will reciprocate in loyalty to their land and society.

If the Soviet authorities would understand and appreciate this point, they would allow the Jewish minority behind the Iron Curtain to live in peace and receive the rights to which they are entitled. They would be allowed to have their own schools. They would be permitted a much freer exercise of their religion, something which has now been granted to other faiths in the U.S.S.R. They would be permitted to organize a national association of their religious congregations, as other sects have, so that they might keep their old synagogues in repair and perhaps build new ones. They would be allowed to manufacture religious articles such as prayer shawls and phylacteries, and print and distribute religious literature, and teach Hebrew, their Holy Tongue to their children. They would revive the solitary Jewish seminary which has been <sup>opened in</sup> ~~operat-~~ for a relatively short period since 1957, with a grand total of 20 students, and which has all along given the impression of being more a show-piece than a real school.

When the Soviets will have begun to do some of these things, they will be more convincing in their assertions that they are undergoing a genuine change to a more humanitarian government and open society. Until such a time, we have no choice but to regard the so-called changes as nothing more than posturing, as mere maneuvers and not something substantial.