

Failure of Soviet putsch a blow to Israel's Sharon

by Mark Burdman

The recent Soviet putsch received support from some strange places. Much attention has been given in the media to the support from Iraq, Libya, and a handful of other nations. But the paradoxical fact is that senior figures in the Israeli government backed the coup. A powerful group in the Israeli establishment continues to pray for chaos and mass disorder on the territory of what has been the Soviet Union since 1917, so that, as they hope, large numbers of Russian Jews will emigrate to "mother Israel," and reinforce "Zionism." These fanatics, congregated around Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, seem to be suicidally oblivious to the effects Soviet chaos would have on the entire world, including Israel.

Sharon's policies could boomerang. The immediate effect of the defeat of the coup has been to reinforce the desire of many Jews to *stay* in post-Bolshevik Russia and help rebuild the country. Such effects could be felt by groups like the Anti-Defamation League and the World Jewish Congress of Edgar Bronfman, which have been instrumental in negotiating cynical "Jewish bodies for money" exchanges with the old regime in Moscow. During the Bush-Gorbachov summit, Israeli wheeler-dealer Shaul Eisenberg played an important behind-the-scenes role negotiating for increased Jewish emigration to Israel in return for what Gorbachov intimates referred to as help from "Jewish financial power."

A 'silver lining' for Israel

While the putsch was ongoing, Israeli Agriculture Minister Rafael Eytan, a former chief of staff and ally of Sharon, gushed with praise for Gennadi Yanayev, the "acting president" of the self-proclaimed Soviet National Committee for the State of Emergency. Eytan praised Yanayev as "a nice guy" and "very pro-Israel." During July, Eytan had met Yanayev in the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir failed to condemn the coup, and was reportedly privately criticized by the Soviet consul general in Jerusalem for his silence. Foreign Minister David Levy's only comment was that he hoped the coup wouldn't hurt "Jewish emigration" to Israel. (In fact, reports are now emerging that Israel had drawn up contingency plans for evacuating Soviet Jews to Israel if the crisis worsened, and that unspecified "options" for future such evacuations have been drawn up.)

The viewpoint of this element in the Zionist establish-

ment was displayed in the Aug. 21 *Jerusalem Post*, written and published while the coup leaders were still in power. The commentary was a case of swinish realpolitik, attempting to portray the putsch as no threat, and possibly a boon to Israel. It was authored by Moshe Zak, an editor of *Ma'ariv*, a Hebrew-language daily the majority shares of which are owned by Robert Maxwell, Britain's socialist millionaire publisher and friend of communist dictators everywhere.

"Neither *aliya* nor the peace process is endangered by the ouster of Mikhail Gorbachov," Zak began. (*Aliya* means immigration of Jews abroad to Israel, but has the Zionist connotation of an obligatory act of "return" that all Jews must sooner or later perform.) "There are many reasons to be disturbed by the Moscow putsch, but they are not related to Israel. In fact, the new Moscow leadership may expedite the resumption of full diplomatic relations with Jerusalem. . . . Nor does the coup endanger Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. The new leadership will want to prove to the world, at least at first, that it is keeping Soviet commitments in the sphere of human rights, of which the freedom to emigrate is one of the most fundamental. . . . In the new regime there are no new faces. They are all Gorbachov appointees. Among them are Valentin Pavlov, who has conducted many cordial discussions with Israeli ministers."

The *Jerusalem Post* editorial in this edition argued that the turmoil could have a "silver lining" because it would force Soviet Jews to go to Israel.

Entitled "Uncertainty and Turmoil," the article speculated that the new putsch leaders might succeed in weakening international opposition to their regime, just as the Chinese Communist leadership did after the Tiananmen Square massacre. But whether it were successful or not, the situation in the U.S.S.R. would continue to deteriorate because of the economy. So, "no matter how this mindless and clumsy coup ends, the Soviet Union is in for a long period of instability and restiveness. Traditionally, such political and economic uncertainty puts the lives of Jews in jeopardy."

It concluded: "When the promise of freedom first bloomed under Gorbachov, many Soviet Jews wanted to participate in the renaissance of democracy in the country of their birth. Their almost messianic dedication to this ideal was reminiscent of the zeal of the Jews who served the Bolshevik revolution and were later devoured by it. There may

prove to be a silver lining in this latest upheaval if it reminds these Jews that they have only one true home; that there is only one place in the world where they are welcomed as they are needed.”

Even after the coup had failed, the *Post* kept up the propaganda drumbeat. The next day’s editorial warned: “The intrinsic problems of the U.S.S.R. will not disappear as rapidly as the putschists, and they may be as resistant to solutions as ever. . . . This week’s tremor will undoubtedly not be the last. Nor can one count on the next ones to be as benign. That is the lesson one hopes the Jews of the U.S.S.R. have now thoroughly learned.”

The *Jerusalem Post* reflects the views of the crowd close to Sharon. It is owned by the Hollinger Corp., the Canada-based entity of magnate Conrad Black. Hollinger’s board of directors include Henry Kissinger, Britain’s Peter Lord Carrington, and representatives of the shady Reichmann and Bronfman families of Canada. The *Post*’s international advisory board includes Robert Maxwell.

‘I want to help build this country’

Such a policy could be a miscalculation. The mood among many Soviet Jews is moving in precisely the opposite direction. One singularity in the Aug. 24 funeral for the three honored “heroes of the Soviet Union” who were killed by the putschists’ tanks during the night of Aug. 20-21, is that one of the honored, Ilya Krichevsky, was a Jew. With 1 million people in attendance, an extraordinary joint religious ceremony was conducted, perhaps unprecedented in the history of Russia, involving both the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Aleksii II and the Chief Rabbi of Moscow. The event was broadcast live on Russian television, and was seen by millions.

So moved were many recent Soviet Jewish emigrés when they watched this event on television in Israel, that they said they never would have left Russia if such a thing had happened while they were there, the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported from Jerusalem Aug. 26. The paper said that many Israelis believe emigration will plummet if reforms in Russia succeed.

Even before the funeral, but after the failure of the putsch, many Russian Jews were already saying that their attitude toward Russia was changing, and that they now aspired to stay and help build Russia. It is worth quoting the account on the front page of the Aug. 22 *Jerusalem Post*, published one day after the failure of the coup:

“Many Jews who came to help guard the Russian Parliament, and stayed on to take part in the victory celebration, said the apparent overthrow of the junta had convinced them to stay in the Soviet Union.

“ ‘On Tuesday, I had made the decision to leave here if I could,’ said Alexander Goland, a 37-year-old engineer. ‘Now I want to stay on and help build this country into a place in which I can be proud to live. I want to make a

contribution, and I believe I have something to contribute.’

“ ‘This is my homeland,’ said Olga Ginzberg, 45, who noted she had also considered emigrating. ‘I always loved Russia, but I never expected to see the day when it would rise up and pull itself out of the mud. I don’t think anti-Semitism will be a serious problem in the new humanistic Russia being born now. Anti-Semitism was one of the methods of the communists, and they are now utterly discredited.’ ”

Of course, if the Soviet-Russian economic situation dramatically deteriorates, all bets could be off. But many leaders of the democratic movement in Russia will likely replicate the approach of the Ukrainian Rukh movement, which has made the fight against traditional forms of anti-Semitism a primary plank of its program, and which has enlisted many Jews to help build Ukraine.

‘Tomorrow they may kill living Jews’

Such sanity seems to be maddening Sharon and his friends. The same Aug. 22 *Jerusalem Post* quoted him speaking to an emergency meeting of the so-called *aliya* cabinet, which Sharon heads. He stated: “Israel is ready and prepared to accept any number of Jews. Now the question is one of saving Jewish lives. I think that every Jew who can should leave everything behind and come to the one place where Jews can defend themselves.” The meeting concluded, according to Sharon, with an “emotional appeal”: “Come to Israel, come to Israel now.”

According to the *Post*, “the [*aliya*] cabinet was reportedly told that some 200,000 Jews may arrive by the end of the year, and it was decided to set up a committee to deal with that possibility.” Sharon declared: “We are prepared for any number.” One participant in the meeting, parliamentarian Geula Cohen, told reporters afterward that “all options were discussed, including what to do if the Soviet Union seals its borders,” according to the Aug. 22 *Jerusalem Post*, which added, “She did not elaborate.”

Days later, after the funeral for Krichevsky and his two friends and the expressed intent of several would-be Jewish emigrés to remain in Russia, Cohen became unhinged, attacking those Jews who now want to stay. “No one should let themselves be fooled,” she said Aug. 25. “The Jews must pay with their blood for any new movement in Russia. . . . Today they are demolishing the statues of those who led the communist revolution, tomorrow they may kill living Jews, in the name of the current revolution, or a counter-revolution, or whatever. . . . The Jews must come to Israel before it’s too late.”

The danger is that Sharon and other Israeli friends of Kissinger are committed to *causing* chaos in the Soviet Union, for their own utopian Zionist purposes. They should be treated as pariahs and as threats to world peace. And Sharon should beware: The KGB archives are now in the hands of the new crowd. What if they publish the details of the collaboration of himself and his friends in the Mossad with the KGB in dirty operations over past years?