

Firm Congress Stand on Jews in Soviet

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WASHINGTON, April 5—At a time when the Nixon Administration is dominating Congress on most domestic and international issues, Congress seems to have gained the upper hand on a key question of foreign policy—the linking of a trade agreement with the Soviet Union to the problems of Russian Jews.

Vast majorities in both houses of Congress have demonstrated that they are prepared to block any trade concessions until Moscow agrees to let Jews and others emigrate without paying high exit fees.

Seventy-four senators led by Henry M. Jackson and 268 representatives led by Wilbur D. Mills have agreed to sponsor legislation to that effect, not just vote for it.

Undoubtedly, a sizable number in Congress are seriously concerned about the problems of Soviet Jews and believe that the United States Government should apply pressure on Moscow to permit them to emigrate freely. Nonetheless, it was apparent from interviews with Senators and Representatives and their aides, and with Jewish leaders, businessmen and Administration officials, that such solid Congressional support could not have been mustered were it not for the organized political activities of American Jews.

The Administration, which believes that the matter of the Soviet Jews is essentially an internal problem, is concerned that a confrontation with the Soviet Union on the issue could complicate the whole movement toward improved American-Soviet relations—a keystone of President Nixon's foreign policy.

But Congress — spurred by Jewish organizations and legislators who work closely with them — is so firm on the question that top Administration officials have made it clear to Moscow that there will be no trade agreement unless the policy of taxing emigrants is changed.

The Jewish organizations used a tactic that dozens of other interest groups—the gun lobby, for instance—have used successfully on Capitol Hill: They generated a considerable amount of grassroots pressure on individual senators and representatives. The phenomenon is a fact of life in this city, where thousands of lobbyists, representing a staggering array of interests, are constantly seeking to influence Congressional action.

The American Jews who are exerting organized political pressure on the issue are not motivated by personal gain or economic advantage, the reasons for most lobbying in the capital. Rather, like Roman Catholic groups that lobby against abortion and environ-

mentalists who put pressure on Congress to act against pollution, the Jews are acting on what they see as humanitarian principles.

The treatment of Russian Jews has weighed heavily on American Jews for generations. Today there are many who feel anger, even guilt, because they believe that their fathers and grandfathers did not do enough about the plight of the Jews in Russia and the slaughter of Jews by the Nazis.

When the Russians began last August to impose steep taxes on those who wished to emigrate, there was a sense of outrage among American Jews and a belief in many quarters that the increasing political strength of the Jewish community should be used to change the policy.

The political power of the 5.8 million American Jews has two principal sources: First, Jews tend to be regular and conscientious voters, and their votes can mean the difference between victory and defeat in many key industrial states. Second, many Jews are dependable contributors to campaign funds.

Moreover, through a network of Jewish organizations and publications, individual Jews are kept informed of national political issues and can be encouraged to convey their views to their political representatives.

Javits Speech Ignored

In theory the Soviet emigration tax was intended to make those who leave repay the socialist state for the cost of their educations. In practice the fees — ranging into the tens of thousands of dollars and far beyond the means of most Russians — apply principally to Jews, a highly educated minority, many of whom want to emigrate.

At about the time the education tax was levied, United States officials were negotiating a comprehensive trade agreement with the Russians. Under it Moscow promised to pay its Lend-Lease debt to the United States. In return the Administration pledged to seek Congressional approval of legislation granting nondiscriminatory tariff rates — most-favored nation treatment — for Soviet products as well as credit guarantees that would help the Russians pay for American goods.

There is disagreement over who originated the idea of linking the trade agreement with

the problems of the Soviet Jews. The first public mention came Aug. 30 in a short speech that Senator Jacob K. Javits gave at a small rally in New York.

His remarks got little coverage in the press and went almost unnoticed here, but a brick had been set in place in what rapidly became a solid wall of Congressional opposition to entering the trade agreement without a satisfactory resolution of the emigration matter.

In September staff members of key Senators — Mr. Jackson, who is a Washington Democrat; Mr. Javits, New York Republican; Abraham A. Ribicoff, Connecticut Democrat, and Hubert H. Humphrey, Minnesota Democrat — discussed actions Congress could take to force the Russians to change their policy.

Each Senator had been a strong supporter of Jewish causes and had received considerable election support from Jews. Their staff members—Richard Perle for Senator Jackson, Alfred A. Lakeland for Senator Javits, Morris J. Amitay for Senator Ribicoff and Richard Gilmore for Senator Humphrey — had worked closely with Jewish interests, especially on matters concerning Israel, over the years.

Throughout the discussions the staff aides kept in touch with I. L. Kenen, chief lobbyist in Washington for causes of special interest to American Jews, and Jerry Goodman, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, an umbrella group composed of 34 national Jewish organizations — the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith, for instance — and at least 200 local Jewish agencies.

Mr. Kenen and Mr. Goodman were important to the Senators because, with their contacts and mailing lists, they could generate grass-roots support for actions the Senators favored.

On Sept. 26 about 120 leaders of Jewish organizations met here to discuss the issue of the Soviet Jews. Mr. Goodman, who had called the meeting, said it was held in Washington to "sensitize Congress to the issue." Senator Jackson spoke, and the group endorsed his legislative proposal in principle, although it did not agree to specific language.

Calls began going out to round up support. In the next week senators reported receiving 20 or 30 letters a day on

the issue; others told of visits or telephone calls from Jews in their states who had been active in their election campaigns.

Mr. Javits, who had still not found a draft of the Jackson proposal he could accept, was visited by a group led by Rabbi Gilbert Klaperman, head of the New York City chapter of the Conference on Soviet Jewry. The early drafts, the Senator explained, to the consternation of some of those who came to his office, would be "unnecessarily irritating" to the Nixon Administration.

By early October Senators Jackson and Ribicoff had gathered 32 co-sponsors for their legislation, which they offered as an amendment to an East-West trade bill. The assembly of sponsors was a show of strength rather than a serious legislative move since it was known that the bill would not reach the Senate floor before adjournment.

Javits Adds to Roster

Then Senator Javits agreed to support a modified amendment and brought in 30 more senators as co-sponsors. Later the number of sponsors went up to 76 — more than three-quarters of the Senate—and Mr. Jackson introduced his amendment on the Senate floor.

"Why did so many people sign the amendment?" a Northern Senator asked rhetorically. "Because there's no political advantage in not signing. If you do sign, you don't offend anyone. If you don't sign, you might offend some Jews in your state."

Last year no serious effort was made to gather support for the amendment in the House of Representatives, but

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Is Traced to Efforts by Those in U.S.

An intensive drive began early this year.

On Jan. 18 Mr. Kenen, executive vice chairman of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, sent an urgent letter to about 1,000 Jewish leaders across the country. It included a list of 144 representatives who had agreed to sponsor a move identical to Senator Jackson's and said: "If your congressman has not yet joined in co-sponsorship, will you please urge him to do so without delay."

Most of those who received Mr. Kenen's letter—his mailing list has been carefully cultivated over the years—were in position to pass the word to hundreds of others. By the third week in January there were few representatives who had not received dozens of letters and calls from important constituents.

At the same time Mark E. Salisman, an assistant to Representative Vanik, an Ohio Democrat, began calling every member of the House in search of co-sponsors. By early February he had gathered 238 names, more than a majority. It was then that Mr. Vanik took the measure to Mr. Mills, Democrat of Arkansas and chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, and asked him to be the chief sponsor. Mr. Mills agreed, announcing his position on the House floor on Feb. 7.

Mills's Support Crucial

Mr. Mills was won over because he was presented with a fait accompli—a majority behind a piece of legislation. As a Congressional aide put it, "When there's movement in the House, Mills knows how to step to the front."

His strength is such that,

without his support, a measure involving trade is unlikely to reach the floor for a vote; with his support, passage is likely.

In the Senate, the groundwork having been laid, it took only two weeks for Senator Jackson to get 73 other sponsors for his proposal this time, and the measure was reintroduced on March 15.

Some who refused to join in sponsoring the amendment were subjected to pressures from friends and contributors at home.

No Real Lobbying

For example, Senator William B. Saxbe, Republican of Ohio, the only member of Congress who has spoken out publicly against the move, was asked to a breakfast meeting in Columbus with Ohio Jewish leaders. The meeting was arranged by Leon Friedman, president of the Columbus Savings and Loan Association, who is one of the Senator's oldest and closest friends. Mr. Friedman, a former president of B'nai B'rith in Columbus, said he had been asked to call the meeting by Jewish friends in Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Toledo.

Senator Saxbe refused to switch, remarking after the meeting: "I just can't believe how astonished they were that they didn't change my mind." He believes that a trade agreement with the Russians is too important to risk by meddling in what he sees as a domestic problem.

Close followers of the issue in the Administration and on Capitol Hill agree that the White House has done no real lobbying.

Peter G. Peterson, former Secretary of Commerce, who played the leading role in negotiating the trade agreement and in explaining it on Capitol Hill, went out of the Cabinet early this year. After that, according to Administration sources, no one at the top level concentrated on the issue for some time.

Peter M. Flanigan, President Nixon's assistant for international economic affairs, did talk privately with a few Senators, as did Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser. They argued that the problem could be more readily settled with quiet diplomacy than with legislation. Furthermore, enough public statements were made by such officials as Secretary of State William P. Rogers that congressmen were aware of the Administration's concern.

However, no effort was made to persuade rank-and-file senators and representatives to oppose the Jackson amendment.

An Administration expert commented that the time was not ripe for legislative activity because the trade bill to which the Jackson-Mills-Vanik measure would be offered as an amendment had still not even been submitted to Congress.

Another expert put forward another explanation for the Administration's stance: Mr. Jackson is one of the few Senators with direct access to Mr. Nixon, and any Presidential aides who took him on directly "might get their legs cut out from under them by the President."

Whatever the reason for the Administration's inactivity, its officials have been explaining to the Russians that there is

no chance of getting the most-favored-nation agreement through Congress until the emigration question is settled.

According to a reliable Administration official, Charles W. Colson, then a Presidential aide, impressed that point on Vasily V. Kuznetsov, Deputy Foreign Minister, during a visit to Moscow in February. George P. Shultz, Secretary of the Treasury, made the same point when he went in March.

The Administration source quoted Mr. Kuznetsov as telling Mr. Colson: "We will do our part."

When Vladimir S. Alkhimov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and the head of a delegation that recently visited the United States, met with Mr. Mills, according to Congressional aides, Mr. Mills told him that 350 representatives would vote to block the trade measure if the exit tax was still in force but that if the tax was repealed, most-favored-nation treatment would be approved. "My job," Mr. Alkhimov is said to have replied, "is to tell Moscow that."

Since mid-March the Soviet Government has been overlooking the emigration tax for a sizable number of Jews who could not afford it. Though the action seemed to be a response to the attitude in Congress, the leaders of American Jewish organizations are not convinced that there is to be a wholesale waiver.

"We don't want to rub their noses in it," Mr. Kenen said. "If they can find a face-saving way out, that's fine. But I can promise you that we'll keep the heat on at home until we're satisfied that anyone who wants to can leave Russia."