

C-7390 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. Discussion with Alla Rusinek on being a Jew  
in the Soviet Union.

4 February 1971.

[applause]

[indistinct crowd voices]

M1:

We have with us today...a person who embodies the fundamental reasons for the existence of the United Jewish Appeal. She is Mrs. Alla Rusinek, since last November a citizen of the State of Israel, and before that, a Jew in the Soviet Union, and I want to tell you a little bit about what it mean to her, being a Jew in the Soviet Union. She'll tell you more.

She was born in Moscow twenty-one years ago. She has known and has fought antisemitism during much [01:00] of her short life. She started by fighting for the right to attend an English high school. After passing the entrance exams with brilliant marks and...she ended up by taking on, publicly, the whole system which has been, which the Soviet Union tries to expunge Jewishness from the minds and the hearts of the Russian Jews.

She was among the Russian Jews who bravely spoke out and signed their names to the written protests and appeals which have made the plight of the Russian Jewry an issue throughout the world, and drawing awareness from her Jewish background, and her increasing struggle to be permitted to go to Israel where she could live as a Jewess has meant that Mrs. Rusinek [02:00] was jeered, hounded - I think she had to give up her job. It meant living on what her sister could give her, or on whatever parcels came from abroad. It meant, finally, making the most crucial...crucial decision in her life. She had to decide whether she would leave her husband, twelve days after her marriage, on the chance that his turn to emigrate would soon come, or perhaps give up forever the opportunity to go to Israel and freedom. Mrs. Rusinek is now living with an aunt in Jerusalem and she's studying at the Hebrew University. She is here with us today under the auspices of the American Jewish Conferences on Soviet Jewry, and it is [03:00] a privilege and a pleasure to introduce her all to you. She's new amongst us. Let us give us...let us give her a big hand! [applause]

**Alla Rusinek:**

[03:35] I'm very happy to speak to you today, on behalf of my friends, of my brothers, of my family, of my husband. I am

happy and we were always happy to know that there are some people...who are thinking about us and who are [04:00] able and are eager to help us. We were born in the Soviet Union, the country that doesn't want Jews to remember anything about their culture, about their religion, about their history. But they don't want us to forget that we're Jews, that we're inferior...to Russian people. So we are living in the atmosphere of antisemitism. We want to be loyal. We are taught communism. We don't know anything else, and when we're children, we're, we believe. And we want to be useful, it is natural, but we're unwanted. We're second class citizens. [05:00] And we're disappointed in love, in life, in our studies, in our work. We don't want to leave, but we have no way out of this situation because we even don't know when we're children about the state of Israel. Never, before the year of '67, before Six-Day War, they never mentioned in the newspapers that Israel was a Jewish state, and I'm sorry to say that until the age of 18, I never knew that Israel is a Jewish state. And the same happens to all young people, but now we know it. The Six-Day War helped us. They had to mention this fact because they had to mention [06:00] the Arab-Jewish conflict, and this was salvation to us because we understood that we had a home, we have our own people to live together with them and to live for them. And we didn't

fail to understand that we must go there, we must struggle for immigration. But this is not easy. They don't want mass emigration from the Soviet Union, for many reasons. They don't want to lose Jews, they don't want to let them out. So we have to struggle, and this struggle took place already for many years, and the younger generation...that can't speak Yiddish, they don't know it, they don't know anything about Jewish history [07:00], culture, literature, religion, they are the most active part in this struggle, because they don't want to live in a strange country. They were born there, really, and they lived all their short lives in...among these strangers, but now they don't want...We study Hebrew. Hebrew is forbidden in the Soviet Union, and we study it illegally. We have some Hebrew textbooks, and we get together in small groups and help each other to study Hebrew. We try to find some old books about Jewish history. They don't publish any books about Jewish history or literature. They want us to forget everything. But we find some books published [08:00] before the great October Revolution, and we study history, and now we have our national heroes. We learned about Maccabees, about [name], about Warsaw Ghetto. For the first time in our lives, when we're already grownups, we learned about our heroes...Really we don't want to be heroes. We want just to emigrate, but they want us to become

heroes. They want us to struggle, and we are ready to struggle. We're apply for visas, they refuse us. We write letters to the members of the government. Can you imagine what it means for us to collect these letters to the members of the government, and to smuggle in across. This means Zionist conspiracy. We come to the synagogue [09:00], we are not religious, because we never knew about synagogues before. And now we come to the synagogue because it is the only place in Moscow which has a Jewish meaning, and who comes there? Thousands of young people, from ten thousand to thirty thousand, come to a narrow street to express their Jewishness, to see each other, to sing, to dance. Nobody teaches us Israel's songs or Israeli dancing, but we know hora and we know some songs because every day we listen to Kol Yisrael. Kol Yisrael is source of life for us, and we sing these songs and near the synagogue we see each other and we say [10:00] [speaking Hebrew], and we go home and we're followed by KGB men to our houses. Then we called to KGB. They try to threaten us, to frighten us, but once we heard about Israel, and once we felt that we're no more orphans, we are not afraid of them. Then they search our houses, they confiscate Hebrew textbooks, books about Israel, postcards, letters from Israel. This is considered to be anti-Soviet Zionist literature. They confiscated one textbook; we have ten more textbooks.

They've taken to prison now [11:00] forty young...people, our friends, we have four thousand more young Jews who will join our movement now. They can't stop us. They will never be able to frighten us. We know that we live in a strange country. And we know that no other country would want to take us, but we don't want to go to any other country. Nobody of these 300,000 Jews who apply for exit visas now wants to go to any other country but Israel. We needed Israel, and we feel that Israel needs us. [12:00] We don't want to be just burden for Israel. We want to be Israeli citizens, to build Israel, to defend it, to be useful to Israel. This is our hope, this is our dream. I can assure you that Jews in the Soviet Union would never be intimidated or suppressed and they, against their great historical struggles, but you can imagine what does it mean to fight against Russia, against mighty power. That's why we ask for help. We need help. We don't ask for pity. [Unclear], but they need help. Because they cannot struggle [13:00] with rifles for their right to immigrate, that's why we need help, and I want to spread our gratitude that you help us when we are fired from our jobs, when we have nothing to eat, when we have no money to buy clothes. The moment we feel that we have no money, suddenly we received a parcel from abroad. We don't know who sent it. Thank you very much. This helps us. And thank you very much that you give us

money to go to Vienna, and to go from Vienna to Israel. We have to pay for visas, 900 rubles. This [14:00] means \$1000, but you can't really imagine, for 900 rubles we have to work a year, and we sell everything. We...those few Jews who were allowed to go last year, we had to sell everything and we come to Israel without suitcases, without money, without gold, and working class, working for the ability to study and to work. Thank you very much. I'm sure that...with the help of the idealism of Russian Jews and the generosity of American Jews we will build a wonderful and strong home for Jewish people. Thank you. [15:00]

[applause]

[indistinct crowd voices]

**M1:**

[15:30] I don't know what to say, except, "O God, can't You see, [speaking Hebrew?] Isn't it time!?"...Alla has to leave right now. We'll excuse her, she has to get up very early in the morning. Go right ahead, Alla. [16:00] [applause]

I can't say anything. There's only one guy that must follow and close the meeting, and if there's anything to say, I know he will say it. Rabbi Herbert Friedman.

[applause]

**Herbert A. Friedman:**

Uh, gentlemen, um...[exhales heavily] I have probably made ten million speeches in my life, and somebody always has to get up and follow me, and the chairman says, "Uh, whoever follows him got a tough act to follow." Uh, I can't follow her. I, this is the first time I have heard the presentation. I don't know her, I haven't got a clue as to who she is, but it's the first time I've ever heard the presentation made, quietly, simply, authentically...I've talked to lots of Russian Jews, on the way in Vienna...there's a place to which she referred, which we maintain as a waystation. I've talked to lots of Russian Jews in Israel, the first few days of their arrival, when they've been overwhelmed with the reception. They feel they've been taken in and embraced. But I haven't spoken to anybody - I haven't heard anybody speak now, she's been in Israel about a hundred days...she's so utterly sensational, she was asked to come over here. I don't know how she got to this meeting tonight [indistinct voice from crowd]. Whoever you are, God bless you. [crowd laughter] [18:00] Who said it? Oh! Okay... And I tell you, I'm, I'm just as overwhelmed as you by this lady. I don't what her plans are, I don't know where she's going early in the



morning, but I'll go find out [crowd laughter]...uh, because this is something which, if she's here in the United States and able to talk, and willing to talk, and willing to risk it, in terms of the people of her family who have been left back home, then I think that we have to expose the leadership of American Jewry to this thing, to the impact of this person, and I saw there were two or three other kids with her, and if they're willing to do it, then, uh, I think we ought to just bomb it right open, that's all. And we will! I think you were privileged here tonight. I think something sensational and historic happened, I think a fire was lit [19:00]...In a more mundane way, I think that the meeting that began at five o'clock was, in its own way, [unclear] to distinguish, but I'll still use the same word, a sensation. I've been many years, uh, in this business, and I have not seen a meeting like this in the New York City UJA before. I've seen it in other cities, never here. I take my hat off to Larry and Rick and Ernie and Art Tenser and, and, and Jimmy Weinberg, and Elaine, and everybody who organized this thing. [applause] Great, great, great, uh two hours, three hours up to now. I think you're on the way.

I [unclear] can raise a hundred and fifty million dollars this year. I was asked to come here and tell you why four hundred million [20:00] dollars is required. I'm not going to

try to make a speech. If you want to stay and we...can answer some questions, I'll be glad to do it. I'm will answer that one question: why is four hundred million dollars required? And that... is the answer, why do you have to try to get a hundred and fifty million of it? The answer to the question is in two parts. One, the figures, the mathematics of the situation, why four hundred. And the other, the reason...the need. The mathematics are simple...they derive from the need. We need that much money because we're trying to do two things in 1971: fight a war, and win a peace. Now when you're trying to accomplish both war and peace in the same year [21:00], it's enormously more expensive than anything you ever tried to do before. There will be a shortfall of one billion dollars, on both accounts. On the account of the war, when we take into account everything that the Israelis will produce themselves, everything that we will get in the way of loans from the outside world from private sources, everything that we get from the government of the United States in the form of a loan, which is a known fact, that's five hundred million. When you add in everything that you can produce on the revenue side, from all sources, and then you take all the expenses that are related to war and peace, and peace means to us the taking in of the fifty thousand people for this year, and she's the symbol [22:00], and when Rick says that

he was talking to Golda, and Golda says she firmly believes that *hundreds* of thousands will come, and this beautiful child stands up here and says three hundred thousand have registered for exit visas - so we're not talking mythically, we're not talking wishful thinking, we're beginning to talk reality about Russian Jews. If twenty years ago you said, as Ben-Gurion used to say [rough voice affected], "I believe the Jews of Russia will come," and Eshkol echoed it, and then Sharett echoed it, everything prime minister of Israel said it, this was an expression of a millennial Jewish dream, this is the...this is the source from which you and I come!

Why do we react so emotionally to her? My father came from Vilna, somebody else's father came from Riga [23:00], somebody else's father came from [place name], somebody else's mother came from...you know, you know the names. There's a visceral reaction, there's a family reaction. She's, you know, she's the closest thing there is. So we used to say *emotionally*, "They will come, and we will take them in," it was pure emotion. We're getting closer now to the bone, fellas. We're getting closer to the reality. It's not so emotional now. Now it's getting to be *factual*. And so then it wells up inside, that hope that at last something's coming true. So when we say we want to be able to wage peace this year, as well as wage war, what we say is we

want to be able to afford to keep the door of the country open. What the hell's the sense of fighting the war if you...you want to win the war, so you can keep the door open for her, and fifty thousand more [24:00], or three *hundred* and fifty thousand more.

Okay. All the money that you have coming in on the one side and then all the expenses that you figure on the other side, for the war, and the peace, leaves you with a shortfall of just about one billion dollars. We can't balance it by about a billion. And it isn't that this is a magic figure, we didn't pick a billion dollars out of the air. We've got all the documents, which I don't have to bore you now. All the income on one side, and there was more than we thought there would be. We never thought that American loan would be five hundred million dollars from Congress. So when we took it all and put it together, we find we're short about a billion dollars. We cut up the billion dollars into three possible sources from which we can get it. We'll have to go out and borrow four hundred million [25:00] of it, that's bonds, that's borrowed money. And yes, everybody in this room buys bonds. Well you're not giving away anything, you're *loaning* some money to Israel. And, if Jews, and by the way not just Jews - banks, pension funds, insurance companies, lots of fiscal institutions - buy those bonds, loan Israel money, if they loaned Israel a couple of hundred million

dollars last year, which is just about it, around a hundred and fifty million in the United States and I think twenty or thirty million outside of the United States. Find that Israel's going to double it and find people who will buy four hundred million dollars worth of her bonds. And there's a very big push on, and for the first time the president of Israel is coming to the United States in about a month, to [26:00] launch the 1971 bonds sale campaign in the United States - the president of Israel himself. And they're going to have to break their backs, everybody working in the bond organization and all of us who work, who believe in Israel...to see if four hundred million dollars can be sold. And it's as much our responsibility to see that that gets sold, as it is for us to try to bring in the free money. Now, you never heard me say that before. But there's one Israel, and it's not a bond Israel, and it's not a UJA Israel, and it's not a Jewish National Fund Israel, and it's not a [name] Israel, and it's no...parts are [unclear] with the whole. Alright. I can't tell you. I can't make a prognosis as to whether the four hundred million in bonds can be sold, but that's the target.

The second piece of it is what the Jews in the rest of the world can do [27:00] in the way of giving money, and that's been assigned - out of all of the world - and that's been a total of

two hundred million dollars. I'm going down to Mexico next week, we're going to get that thing started. There's a little community of four thousand families down there. We set a target of eight million bucks, we're going after eight million dollars in Mexico City, from those four thousand Jews. They'll raise it. England took forty million, Canada took forty million. We're hoping for two hundred million in the rest of the Jewish world, not in the Soviet Union. Certain places [inaudible]. Which leaves the third element...comes to four hundred bonds and two hundred in the rest of the world and you're raising four hundred for the United States - free, gift dollars. UJA. Why four hundred million dollars has got to be raised by the UJA, in all the communities in America [28:00]. And you heard the way Larry explained it today that, in New York you have two campaigns: UJA and Federation. In all the other cities they're together, it's one campaign, so the Federation in every city needs a little bit of money. And you add up all the Federations all over the United States, what they need, for Los Angeles, and Cleveland, and Baltimore, and the [shouts] *whole thing*. It's quite modest, by the way. It comes to eighty or ninety million dollars for the whole America. So it isn't really very much, but it means if we want four hundred for the UJA, we gotta raise five hundred million out there, and all the other local stuff gets taken care

of for about a hundred million, ninety million, and that'll leave four hundred million for Israel. So, what should New York's share be, out of a five hundred million dollar gross campaign of the whole United States of America [29:00], New York should be about a third... We had terrible arguments in Los Angeles, and Boston, and other cities, where they said, "New York's got half the Jews in America. New York oughta take half the quote, two-fifty." We thought the thing out; we asked Chicago to take fifty million, we asked Los Angeles to take fifty million, and so we said New York one hundred and fifty, not two-fifty. But I want you to know that three months ago there was an awful lot of fighting on the top. One-fifty comes out therefore to be your share, and fifty Los Angeles, and fifty Chicago. That's half, in those three big towns, and probably sixty, seventy percent of all the Jews in America live in those three towns. And the other half we parceled out among all the other cities in the country [30:00]. We're running. We're running hard, we're running fast. We're all getting up early in the morning and moving on to the next town, like she is. I spoke at a lunch meeting for women here in New York on Monday, this is Thursday. Between Monday and Thursday I've been in Chicago, Detroit, and Miami. And we're running, and pushing, and pushing and we're running. We're organizing, and I must say it's going

well. It's a lot of money, a hundred and fifty million bucks, but in this gigantic metropolis it's not. It's really not. You're better organized than you've ever been. You've got better plans than you've ever had. You've got more motivation than I've ever seen. You've got better leadership at the top, in these two men, than I've ever seen. You've got everything going for you! And if somebody says you, "Why?! Why the four hundred? [31:00] Why the one-fifty for New York?" The mathematics I can't change. I gave you the mathematics, and after you explain the mathematics to people...and they say, "Why the hell is so much money required?" Then you've got only two words to answer: war, and peace.

Tomorrow the ceasefire comes to an end. Tomorrow, midnight. Twenty-four, or twenty-six hours from now. The Egyptians have said, to the Americans, not to the Israelis - the Egyptians haven't said anything to the Israelis. The Egyptians have said to the United States State Department that they will extend the ceasefire for thirty days. Fine. There'll be no shooting tomorrow at midnight, or Shabbat morning, or Sunday morning, or Monday morning [32:00]. The blessed, precious, sound of silence in which no bullets come to take no lives, will be something very desirable. We love that silence...I want you to know that there is almost no one in any position of responsible authority



in Israel who believe that that will last. Or to put it the other way...the bets are for the resumption of war, not because anybody wants it on the Israeli side but because the ceasefire, whether extended one month or not, will at some point be broken, as the last ceasefire was broken [33:00]. Nasser announced it, and in March of '69 he broke it and firing went on sixteen months. March of '69 to August 5<sup>th</sup> of '70. I don't think the next round, which will break out quite soon, in my judgment, will last sixteen months. I think the intensity of fire will be much higher; I think the escalation will be much faster; I think the explosive quality of it will generate more quickly; and I think therefore it'll be over sooner, because I think they will come to an understanding that they cannot achieve their objectives by force. When they learn that, they'll cool it [34:00]. We have no objectives...have no desire to conquer Cairo. There's no place we wanna go. The only thing we don't want to do is move back. We don't want to move forward. We'll sit tight. They can pour all the fire in the world on us, they won't force us back. When they learn that they...[abrupt end]

END OF AUDIO FILE [34:36]