

C-7392 Transcription

"Israel Report No. 1."

June 1971.

M1:

[singing in Yiddish]

M2:

[M1 continues singing in background] Though we are still far from you we bitterly feel your pain. Your liberation was to us a miracle, to every Jewish heart. Jerusalem, the town of gold, town of peace and amity, to us, in the darkness, you are a ray of light.

[singing continues]

Yosef ben Menahem:

[singing fades] The songs and the feelings of Russian Jewry. [01:00] This is the first issue of Israel Report, Israel's audio magazine. I am Yosef ben Menachem, speaking to you from Jerusalem. Close to three million of us live in the place which Jews have longed for for two thousand years, and today no group of Jews thinks of Israel more than those living in the Soviet Union. A trickle of Russian Jews *has* managed to

escape the Soviet Union in recent years, and to find a new life in Israel. They, perhaps more than the rest of us, remember their past lives in Russia, and hope for the day when Russian Jews will emerge into freedom.

[women singing in Hebrew.] [02:00]

The song is "Kachol Velavan," "Blue and White", the theme song of Russian Jewry. "Blue and white, the colors of Israel's flag. These are my colors. There are no others."

Avram Shifrin:

I am Avram Shifrin, um...I came from Russia. Excuse please my English, because, uh, I learn English only in Russia prison.

M3:

Why were you in Russian prisons for ten years?

Avram Shifrin:

From '53 to '63.

M3:

But why?

Avram Shifrin:

Ah, why?! Uh.... Because, *slicha* [excuse me], Zionism.

M3:

You were a Zionist and that was your crime?

Avram Shifrin:

Ken, ken, ken [Yes, yes, yes]. They visit me in the streets, when I go in the street in Moscow. [03:00] And they take me to the central prison, to the KGB Lubyanka, and they search me, uh, I cannot explain you how they search me. If you want to know, you can read Solzhenitsyn, um, *In the First Circle*.

M3:

Now tell me about your trial.

Avram Shifrin:

It was not a trial. They have not men which tell against me. They only tell me you are spy of Israel, you are spy, you are spy, and that's all. They, uh, tell me, you in the name of the peoples of the Russia, you must shot, that's all.

M3:

They took you to be shot?

Avram Shifrin:

Shot, shot. Ken [Yes]. But then they give me twenty-five and some days. And when I finished ten years, I go to the freedom. But that was not freedom.

M3:

What was it?

Avram Shifrin:

[04:00] Because, because, all the years...uh, sometimes two men, sometimes three men, go with me in all the streets.

Golda Meir:

[speaking Hebrew]

Yosef ben Menahem:

The voice you're hearing is that of Israel's prime minister Golda Meir. She says, "What is happening now in the Soviet Union is another example of the persecution of the Jewish people which

has been going on for generations. The struggle of an individual Jew, or of a group of Jews, is automatically the struggle of the State of Israel and the people of Israel. I am confident that one day the Jews of the Soviet Union will come to Israel."

Alla:

[speaking Russian]

Yosef ben Menahem:

"In Russia, we would sing about Golda Meir, 'O, Golda!' and about Moshe Dayan." Alla is a young Russian girl, who participated in a hunger strike for Soviet Jewry [05:00] in the shadow of the stones of the Western, or Wailing Wall, in Jerusalem.

Alla:

[indistinct male voice in background] Every day, people come to us and they sit with us, they want to, to sit with us for one day, and they're not eating also. People who never were in Russia, and they can't understand it really, but they feel, and I think that today there are many people here, and all of them are young, and I see in their faces, they do understand us.

Alta:

[singing in Yiddish?]

Yosef ben Menahem:

This song was written by the singer, under the pseudonym Alta. He's saying goodbye to his friends as he leaves for Israel. Many of the tunes are old, scarcely remembered Yiddish folk songs, but the words are new, telling of the hopes, [06:00] the dreams, and the present situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union. Some are sung behind closed doors, [singing continues] others outside the synagogues in mass gatherings. This song, a ballad of farewell, was written by the wife of one of the Jews arrested recently.

M2:

"My bags are packed and I'm ready to go home. The road is long. Buh-bye, Grandma, KGB. In a little while I'll be happy, don't get in my way Grandma. Our struggle has been taken up by thousands. Goodbye, red star, I'll never forget you. We'll take the road together, there's no way back.

Yosef ben Menahem:

'Russian Jewry, the story of a continuing struggle,'
reported by Elia Zerlukov and Naphtali Lebrecht.

M4:

[singing in Yiddish] [07:00]

Yosef ben Menahem:

"Yerushalayim shel zahav," "Jerusalem of Gold," sung in
Yiddish by a Russian immigrant.

[children laughing, calling out in classroom] A *gan* for
children in Israel. Literally the word *gan* means "garden" in
Hebrew, but a *gan* is a nursery school, and everyday more than
100,000 Israeli children head for their *gan*. For two thousand
years Hebrew was used only to pray, but today it is natural for
every four year old not only to speak Hebrew, but to sing it.
[children singing]. Many people say that Israel is a country
built for children, but raising and providing for children in
Israel, [08:00] just as elsewhere, is never easy. We're in the
home of Albert Masada, senior radio technician in Israel's
broadcasting service. He has four children, two in high school.
He, like most Israelis, has managed to attain a decent standard
of living, though not a luxurious one. But he lives with the
burden of the highest rate of taxation of any country in the

world. He brings home a good Israeli salary every month, eleven hundred pounds, or about three hundred and fifty dollars. Our reporter asked him if he was able to get along on his salary.

Albert Masada:

Eh, no. I must say that it's rather impossible to, uh, to get on with this salary, more than fifteen or twenty each month.

Reporter:

Why is that? What kind of expenses do you have?

Albert Masada:

I have, of, saving. I have two children...[09:00] in high school.

Reporter:

Does that cost, to send the children to high school?

Albert Masada:

Very much. Here in this country, you must be rich in order to send two or three children in high school. You must, you must be rich, or poor.

Reporter:

How much does it cost actually?

Albert Masada:

Costs, eh, nominally, one hundred, uh, pounds for each children, ah monthly.

Reporter:

One hundred pounds a month for each child?

Albert Masada:

Yes. But, effectively, it costs much more. Very much more.

Reporter:

What do you do?

Albert Masada:

I have, with my bank, I have a, an agreement with my bank, an overdraft agreement, that enables me to draw, and after that to cover the month after. But, uh, it's not viable. This way of life is not viable.

Reporter:

Let me ask you this: there was a recent rise in taxation in Israel, how did this affect your salary?

Albert Masada:

It has affected, uh, in the saddest way. [10:00]

Report:

How much less do you take home a month now, because of the, uh, rise in taxation?

Albert Masada:

I think about two hundred...pounds.

Reporter:

Close to sixty, about sixty dollars.

Albert Masada:

Yes.

Reporter:

So, this has really been a severe problem for you and your family?

Albert Masada:

Yes, it's a severe problem. Because, ah, you can't, uh, finish with it. It's, eh....continuous, it's eh, you have no hope of, of uh of finishing this.

Reporter:

Uh, David Kravin of the Jerusalem Post, how can the average Israeli make it on his salary?

David Kravin:

I don't know how the average Israeli can, but he does. According to statistical material published, the average family in Israel spends a thousand Israeli pounds a month, and that's based on the earnings of one and a half breadwinners, on the average. So that means that a family lives on...[11:00] slightly under three hundred dollars.

Reporter:

Now there was recently a tax increase in Isarel. What was its purpose?

David Kravin:

Well, as you know...we're in a, we're a country, a small country, with tremendous expenses, mainly defense. We can't finance everything. The item which is at the end of the queue is consumption. We can't cut defense, we don't intend to cut social services. Above all, we're not going to cut investment, because the, I think, that the greatest triumph and success of Israel of the past twenty years is despite all the calls made on her resources, she has never let the rate of investment fall, and we have maintained consistently, I would say, the highest growth rate of any country of the world, with the possible exception of Japan.

Reporter:

So the Israeli is, in essence, paying for the current costs of both defense and of building his country? [12:00]

David Kravin:

The Israeli is paying, um, a very large contribution indeed! I think we are, by now, probably the most highly taxed country in the world.

Reporter:

How does this affect you personally?

David Kravin:

Well, uh, if I look at my pay slip, my gross salary as a grade 3 plus journalist with some seniority is 1449 pounds a month, and some *grusch*, and if I look at the bottom of the pay slip after deducing income tax, social insurance, pension fund, and compulsory loans, which were introduced with the last budget, all I have left is 799 pound and some *grusch*.

Reporter:

Can you live on that?

David Kravin:

Let me put it this way: I visualize myself as having a salary of, let's say 3000 pounds a month, of which 2200 is my contribution to the UJA.

[recording of Shoshana Damari singing] [13:00]

Yosef ben Menahem:

This Shoshana Damari, one of Israel's best known singers, with a song about "Am Yisrael," the People of Israel.

[Damari continues]

Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, the leading Democratic candidate for the Presidential nomination in 1972, visited Israel in January. [14:00] Speaking in Tel Aviv, he summed up his feelings about Israel.

Edmund Muskie:

I have the impression of the great urge for peace, of the people of Israel. A great desire to live at peace with her neighbors. There are some rather interesting illustrations of this, for me. One was the...meeting with Ben Gurion, which at the close of a very stimulating discussion, he undertook to summarize Judaism for me in three sentences. The first sentence: there is one God. Second sentence: love thy neighbor as thyself. Third sentence: love the truth and peace. These were the thoughts he wanted to leave with me as I left him. The second incident [15:00] was at Gesher Kibbutz in northern Israel. The thing that struck me were the illustrations on the walls of the bomb shelters, where the children are sheltered. There wasn't a single piece of propagandizing on the walls. Nothing to remind the children that they were there because of war, or because they had hostile neighbors, or that they ought to have...that

they had neighbors they ought to hate or dislike. Indeed, one of the young fathers at Geshar told me that his great concern was that the lives of his children might be changed by reason of the fact that they live in these hostile conditions, that they are learning that hatred is a part of their way of life. And this concern on the part of parents [16:00] I found everywhere.

And the third impression was a new Kibbutz on the Golan Heights, where there are some thirty young Israelis in their 20s building a new life for themselves, some of them children of kibbutzes established by their parents or grandparents. And their whole emphasis was upon arts of peace. I asked them what they did for recreation. They went to concerts, the libraries. Visited one of their rooms, a wall lined with books. These are young people who are concerned not with the preoccupations of war but the preoccupations of peace. And I hope that these impressions of one American may have [17:00] some probative value for those who are seeking to identify...the main thrust of Israeli hopes and aspirations for the immediate and the long distant future.

[women singing "Kachol Velavan"]

Yosef ben Menahem:

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman Collection, C-7392. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Blue and white, the colors of Israel's flag. These are my colors, there are no others.

["Kachol Velavan" continues]

[18:00] This has been the first issue of Israel Report. I am Yosef ben Menachem. Shalom from Jerusalem.

