

"SHATTER THE SILENCE, VIGIL 1979"

Remarks by Congressman Les AuCoin

on behalf of Solomon Alber

Congressional Record, August 1979

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Mr. Speaker. As part of the "Shatter the Silence, Vigil 1979" on behalf of Soviet Jewry, I want to bring to the attention of my colleagues once more the plight of the Solomon Alber family in the Soviet Union.

Last year before this House, I detailed the distressing circumstances of the Alber family. I was hoping that this year I would be able to report that at long last they were allowed to emigrate. But unfortunately, this is not the case; I do not have good news to share with you today. Indeed, all I have to report is the same story, the same story of harrassment and violation of fundamental human rights. Solomon Alber and his courageous family are still in the Soviet Union.

Let me recall for you the plight of the Albers. Mr. Alber, a mathematician and physicist, was director of a computer research laboratory when he applied for emigration visas for himself and his family. He was refused in 1975 and, as a consequence of the application,

he was demoted. His wife, Evangelina, a physician, lost her job as a pathologist.

News about the family's application refusal spread quickly in their small scientific community outside Moscow.

On June 23, 1976, the New York Times reported that Mr. Alber's 15-year-old son, Mark, had become the target of an officially inspired campaign of threats and violence. First, his fellow students began the "silent treatment," refusing to speak to him. Then, as the shunning wore off, they taunted him, calling him "Jew, Jew, Jew" in derisive tones. Later, Mark was twice beaten, once into unconsciousness. Nevertheless, the police took no action, even though they apparently knew the identity of the assailants.

Shortly after this, a 3-ounce metal ball was shot through the third floor bedroom window in the Alber home. Fortunately, neither Mark, nor his younger brother, Ilya, were in the room at the time. Still, the police dismissed the incident as a prank.

Sadly, this is not an unusual story. It is typical of many other stories we hear about Soviet Jews.

But it is not enough to lament these stories and wish things were different. It is not enough to hope that someday the Soviet Union will implement a policy of free emigration.

What is to be done? Many Members of this House have already written countless letters and spoken out on behalf of Soviet Jews, urging that they be allowed to emigrate. This is a start. We must let the leadership of the U.S.S.R. know these people are not forgotten.

But we can do more. We can all bend our efforts toward those policies which provide our government with maximum leverage in carrying out our concern for international human rights.

This is a critical time. In response to current initiatives in arms limitations and the upcoming Olympic games, we have seen a growing number of Soviet Jews leaving the U.S.S.R. If the rate continues, maybe Solomon Alber and his family will eventually be among those allowed to leave.

But what happens after these events pass? What will happen to the "refuseniks" and prisoners of conscience when there is no longer a pending summit or treaty to elicit continued high levels of emigration? We simply must have more flexible tools for the United States to use on behalf of these people.

With the support of this House for such policies, perhaps next year I will be able to report to you that the Solomon Alber family is free.