

Watching *Refuseniks*

The San Francisco Bay Area is perhaps the most politically and culturally diversified area in the world with so many distinguished communities. I have frequently attended events with Chinese, Latino, Vietnamese, Japanese, Islamic and Iranian communities, but not much with Jewish communities (except a small group *Jewish for Peace* at San Jose's *Peace and Justice Center*). Thus the 14th Annual Contra Costa International Jewish Film Festival <http://eastbayjewishfilm.org/> is a rare opportunity for me to see the Jewish community activity in East Bay area.

The festival has quite a few films reflection Jewish life worldwide, I chose March 6, the last day's movie *Refuseniks*. Here are the introduction from the flyer and web site.

USA, 2008, 120 minutes, English, Russian with English subtitles

This brilliant documentary chronicles how the thirty-year movement to free Soviet Jews blossomed into what was likely the most successful human rights campaign of all time. Told through the eyes of activists on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the film is a tapestry of first-person accounts of heroism, sacrifice, and ultimately, liberation. We hear from "Prisoners of Conscience" as well as from Alan Dershowitz, Elie Wiesel, Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Schultz, Senator Henry Jackson, Natan and Avital Sharansky, Vladimir Slepak and Communist leader Mikhail Gorbachev.



I cited the above introduction because I have my own view points but I also want readers know the original Jewish text. I arrived at the East Bay Jewish Community Center at noon time. At the gate, a black woman guard asked me to sign in. This is not usual, perhaps because the film festival gathered more people than usual to the center. The simple hall is almost full with about one hundred people, mostly senior citizens. I always enjoyed attending events at which I am the only Chinese. In fact, I just attended a Tsinghua alumni party last Saturday welcoming our old professor/dean. At almost every Tsinghua alumni party, graduates talk of alumni "Jintao", "Bangguo", "Jinping" without mentioning their last names (Hu, Wu and Xi). These guys now rule the largest population in the human history, much more than the population combined under great Western rulers Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Washington, Stalin and Hitler. They also talked about Nobel prizes. No other community like this alienates me more.

The film is not short. For people not knowing much about the Cold-war history, this film provides a good case as well as a type to show how the Jewish people world-wide (and especially in the U.S.) won their course ("Let our people go") with the Western interest to win the Cold-war under the banner of human rights. However, for researchers of international politics, this *refuseniks* case is not that simple. Most American politicians could accept the Jackson Amendment (to let Soviet Jews leave) to the Soviet-U.S. trade treaty because there were not much trade between the Soviet Union and the U.S. (so the possible invalidation does no harm to the U.S. interest). Let's compare with China's case: the human rights issue is much graver than the Soviet Jews. However, the U.S. government had to abandon the policy to link human rights to trade with China. Why? Because many American companies, and the U.S. government itself, cannot lose business with China. For example, to lure Chinese companies to be listed in the U.S. stock market, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) loosed regulations for foreign companies. The SEC Rule 14a-8 protects small shareholders allowing these who hold \$2000 value stock for more than one year to submit proposals to company's annual

meeting. However, the SEC allows a Chinese company (China Southern Airlines) to restrict shareholder's rights in its company Bylaws. The company made Bylaws to deprive shareholder's right to attend the shareholders meeting (unless you hold more than 3% of company shares)! When I challenged the company and complained to the SEC, the SEC did not answer me, because the U.S. government cannot offend the Chinese company under current U.S. economic crisis. How could we expect the U.S. protect human rights for China?

When I came out of the film, I took two brochures from the table at the front door. One is of AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee, www.aipac.org). What exactly does AIPAC do? "For more than half century, AIPAC has worked to help make Israel more secure by ensuring that American support for Israel is strong." Today America's annual aid package totals \$2.55 billion in the form of security assistance to Israel (from the brochure). AIPAC is "the most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel" (The New York Times). "For more than 50 years, America and Israel have remained steadfast allies. AIPAC is one of the reasons why." (former President G. W. Bush). Once I watched Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi speaking at an AIPAC conference and had a thinking to attend its political events. Its "Washington club" membership costs \$1,500 and the Minyan club membership costs \$100,000 or more. This is not a cheap or normal game we can participate into. The brochure lists Israel's biggest challenges with a Middle Eastern American girl holding a banner "END AID TO ISRAEL" to which I want to identify myself. The war or peace in Middle East greatly depends on American public's knowledge and willingness. If this situation cannot be changed, the other hope is the reduced influence of America in this area due to America's decline due to its reckless actions in this area.

The other brochure is of the rather infamous Anti-Defamation League (ADL, www.adl.org). It says "ADL fights today's anti-Semitism...in San Francisco and around the world" with an "anti-Semitism" protesting picture to which I want to identify myself: "STOP BOMBING LEBANON & PALESTINE", "WASHINGTON DC IS ISRAELI OCCUPIED TERRITORY", "FREEDOM FIGHTERS ARE NOT TERRORISTS". As a stateless refugee, I am fortunate to be able to study international politics here in San Francisco Bay Area without a passport to go out.

That said, our Chinese democratic movement does have many to learn from the Jewish community to mobilize the American public to understand, sympathize with, and support our cause. The Jewish have a God (which is also the God of most population living in Western countries) and a state (which has been in danger since its establishment) to unit its people. This puts their inner struggles under control with guidance within limitation. As shown in this film, for example, Natan Sharansky (the man in the center of the picture) became famous in the movement. He was an ordinary person to be jailed in the Soviet for the simple reason of trying to leave for Israel to meet his family. When his wife Avital was invited to an informal luncheon with American Congressmen's wives, she could not continue to her talk. Her moist eyes are very touching and powerful to the audience. They played their roles perfectly. Natan Sharansky did not run for political positions in the Jewish world just because he was their hero. Regrettably, however, almost every accidentally famous person in our democratic movement seeks personal gains by utilizing and sacrificing our cause. The obvious consequence is the divided groups fighting each other under outside controls from Washington, Beijing, Tokyo and Taipei. To win our democratic cause, we must abandon this kind of political direction but have to support civil rights movement inside China and humanitarian tasks overseas. They are our God to guide our struggle for justice for all.

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