

# ALERT

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## The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews

### SPECIAL FOCUS ON "SPECIAL OFFICE" - NEHEMIAH LEVANON

This issue of the ALERT is devoted entirely to reprinting a three-part article which appeared in the Israeli newspaper HaAretz at the end of December. The subject of the article is the "special office" of the Israeli Government which deals with Soviet Jewry. This office, operating under the direction of Nehemiah Levanon, and reporting only to the Prime Minister of Israel, has been little known outside the ranks of Soviet Jewry activists. Secrecy, as to its existence, its methods and its decision-making processes, has characterized its existence.

The article speaks for itself, but certain questions deserve to be raised besides the purely Israeli questions concerning the adequacy of absorption procedures and coordination of Israeli ministries dealing with Soviet Jewry. Such questions as: What is the purpose of special representatives of the "special office" in different American cities? Why should Mr. Levanon be "involved in attempts to convince the heads of American Jewry to stop the flow of money for the budgets of HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee) in Vienna and Rome, in order to cut down to a minimum aid to drop-outs"? What is Mr. Levanon talking about when he cultivates his ties with "senior politicians" throughout the world or when "the important offices on Capitol Hill throw open their doors to him"? On both accounts, as Americans and as Jews, we have the right to answers to these questions, but the secrecy of the "special office" allows us only to guess.

Similarly, as Jewish activists, we are dedicated to the well-being of Soviet Jews. Are the policies developed by world Jewry for the benefit of Soviet Jews the result of full debate and development of issues, and do those organs which ostensibly have the responsibility for the Soviet Jewry campaign have any ability to implement decisions? As Viktor Polsky says, "I am a member of the Praesidium of the Brussels Conference and the Public Council. These are important bodies but they have no bite."

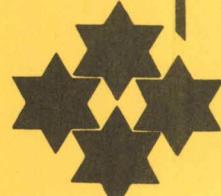
The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews believes in the full and open debate of issues relevant to Soviet Jewry and in the creation of democratic institutions which have the sufficient stature and power to effect positive change for the lives of the Jews of the Soviet Union.

### NEWS BRIEFS

In a telephone conversation yesterday, the following message was transmitted to the President of Israel, Itzhak Navon, and the people of Israel:

On Purim Eve we wish to extend our best regards and best wishes to our brothers and sisters who are so lucky to live in the Holy Land. The Book of Esther will always be a source of hope, and will always remind us that if a miracle is needed for our redemption, it will undoubtedly occur.  
Signed: Lerner, Milgrom, Ovshicher, Feldman, Tufeld, Finkelshtein, Alpert, Stolyar, Pekker, Lukatsky.

\* Shmil Rozenberg of Tashkent has been charged with article 153/2 of the Uzbek Code, which carries a minimal sentence of 7 years imprisonment. The maximum sentence for the charge of alleged bribery in connection with getting exit visas for his daughter is 15 years.



- \* During the last month, would-be immigrants in Moscow have been receiving 25 refusals weekly. These refusals are on the grounds of "insufficient kinship." The OVIR office is still accepting applications, however.
- \* The Kiev community has an estimated 2000 new refuseniks, with an additional ten refusals given weekly. Refusals are now being handed out four times weekly instead of weekly.
- \* Mark Raskin of Leningrad died in January of 1980 as a result of an electric shock. Forced to resign his job as an engineer when he applied to emigrate, he had been working as an engineer until his untimely death.
- \* The recent death of Yudko Segal from Baku has been reported. With his wife and daughters in Israel, he has made repeated application to OVIR, and has been constantly refused. He died two days after his last refusal.
- \* Eitan Finkelstein has voiced intense concern over his continued state of isolation. He is under constant surveillance, he is not allowed to leave Vilnius and he has not been receiving any mail. The KGB has called him frequently to their office. Eitan is quite concerned that his fate may be similar to that of Begun and Goldshtain.

#### WOMEN'S GROUP WARNED ABOUT DEMONSTRATION

Fifty members of the group were organizing a demonstration outside the OVIR offices. For the first time, however, each woman was personally warned of the dire consequences of this action. This warning had the desired effect as only a few women ventured to the proposed demonstration.

#### NEWS OF THE PRISONERS

- \* Victor Yelistratov accompanied Simon Shneerman's mother on a visit to Shneerman. By order of the camp commandant, they were not permitted to see him. Mrs. Shneerman was expecting a two day visit, while Yelistratov was hoping for a two hour conversation. A parcel of food was left for him at the Khersonskaya Oblast Labor Camp where he is imprisoned. Letters of support to Simon can be mailed to: Simon Shneerman, Uchr. Yuz 17/7, Selo Starosburevka, Golopristanski raion, Khersonskaya Oblast, Ukr.SSR, USSR.
- \* Federov and Murzhenko have both been visited by Federov's mother who was extremely distressed by their condition. They look starved and in very poor physical condition. Both men have been moved to another place of detention in a group of ten who have all been transferred. A parcel was left for them, although Mrs. Federov was not allowed to give them food herself.

\*\*\* STOP PRESS \*\*\*

Igor Guberman was sentenced to 5 years at the close of his trial on March 18. Further details will be published in the next ALERT.

We have just learned that Anatoly Shcharansky was not transferred on March 15 from Chistopol Prison. It was expected that he would be moved to a labor camp to fill out the remainder of his sentence. No reason has been given for the delay.

#### ARRIVALS IN ISRAEL

\*\* Valentina Khait - Leningrad, Yosef Gorenstein - Kishinev, Grigory Shadur - Riga.

HaAretz-December 21, 1979

THUS IS THE ALIYA FROM THE USSR HANDLED by Yehudit Winkler

Part I - In Secret, Without Coordination

During the past ten years more than a quarter of the Jewish population in the USSR has been involved in procedures to obtain Israeli permission to immigrate there. Between September 1968 and the end of June 1979, 542,419 requests were sent to the Soviets by Israelis to arrange for the aliyah (immigration to Israel) of relatives through the Dutch embassy in Moscow. The authorities permitted 205,400 Jews to leave the Soviet Union. This basic data delineates the success of the aliyah movement under the conditions of a harsh regime - the more impressive since politicians in Israel and the West did not dream that it would be possible to force the raising of the Iron Curtain and the realization of the rights of a national minority.

Between 1948 and 1968 i.e. in the twenty years that Israel maintained normal diplomatic relations with the USSR, only 6,934 Jews managed to get exit visas. And, in those same years, each case was considered separately and unusual, (and not as setting a precedent during the Stalinist regime with its especially cruel treatment of the Jews.) In contrast to this minute group, the dimensions of aliyah in the last decade, with the dramatic increase in this year's quota to 50,000 exit visas, make the Jews of the Soviet Union the largest emigrant group in the world following the Vietnamese and the Cambodians.

16,867 Drop-Outs In 1978

However, what appeared - and justly so - in the beginning to be the renewed triumph of Zionism and additional evidence of the centrality of Israel in the life of the USSR's large Jewish minority which had been denied the basic rights of a national minority for 60 years of Communist rule, has now become one of the most difficult chapters in the history of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. In 1971, out of 13,022 Jews who emigrated from the USSR only 58 dropped out in Vienna; last year, out of 28,865 Jews who arrived in Vienna only 12,192 immigrated to Israel; 16,867 chose to drop out. Between January and June of this year, the USSR allowed 24,791 Jews to leave; 16,109 dropped out in Vienna and 8,659 came to Israel.

An internal memo of a senior civil servant in the special division of the Prime Minister's office charged with handling the aliyah of Jews from the Soviet Union stated unequivocally that "the extent of Jews emigrating from the USSR with Israeli visas in the first half of 1979 has reached dimensions unheard of since the beginning of the wave of aliyah ten years ago... There is no doubt that the significant increase in the aliyah quota is the result of a high-level decision by the Soviet government regarding the issue...".

The Weakening Of The Moral Argument

The accomplishment that was essentially a daring break-through now presents (1) the danger that the primary reservoir of Jews who might increase the population of the State of Israel will be stolen from her and (2) the possible danger that, under certain international political conditions or on account of changes within the power-elite of the Soviet governmental hierarchy, the chances of emigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews who otherwise might follow in the footsteps of the 200,000 before them who have already located outside the borders of the USSR will be placed in jeopardy. In the decade of aliyah from the USSR, the drop-out rate averaged only about 30% - 202,173 emigrated: 59,035 dropped out; 143,138 immigrated to Israel. However, since 1975, the drop-out rate has been on the increase, in the first half of this year comprising 65% of all emigrants.

In the wake of the growing drop-out rate, the political justification for permitting Jews to leave is waning from the point of view of the Soviet authorities. Theoretically, Moscow thoroughly refuses to accept the term "immigration to Israel" as regards Jewish emigration and instead makes possible only "the unification of families in Israel".

In time, Moscow is liable, for external or internal reasons, to restrict the issuance of exit visas - though this may seem far-fetched to a majority of those involved with the matter. Likewise, despite differences in the approaches of various public and political elements regarding treatment of Soviet Jewry - which will be discussed in the continuation - it is generally agreed that the drop-out rate is weakening Israel's principal moral argument in the international arena in its struggle for the Jews of the Soviet Union.

In Israel the ranking individual responsible for this question is virtually unknown to the general public because of the secrecy that has shrouded his department over the years. He is Nehemia Levanon, a member of Kibbutz Kfar Blum, who, for over ten years has been directing the battle of the minds against the Kremlin from a modest office in the Tel-Aviv Kirya. In one of those rare instances of candor over the telephone, he said, among other things, "The high percentage of drop-outs, especially from the large cities and the Ukraine, creates a mood there of emigration and not of aliyah (immigration to Israel)...".

In Israel, which stands confused and powerless, the subject of drop-outs has made people aware more than ever before of the multiplicity of government and public groups that handle the aliyah of Soviet Jewry. Some of them do this under a cloak of secrecy that makes detailed public clarification of their considerations and methods of operating difficult. The lack of structure makes it difficult not only to contend with the drop-out crisis, but to absorb the small stream of immigrants flowing from Vienna.

In contrast to other areas of great national and public importance which are supervised extensively and which are under the authority of government offices which are open to criticism, responsibility for Soviet Jewry has remained officially in the hands of governmental leaders, since the rebirth of the state, and is, in fact, in the hands of a special division. Outwardly it is a division of the "Foreign Ministry", but the truth of the matter is that is not connected to the ministry but rather functions as an independent unit with exclusive power and influence, answerable directly to the Prime Minister. This department was established over 20 years ago by Shaul Avigur, one of the heads of the Hagana and the "Mosad", with the full support of David Ben-Gurion. In its first years it handled primarily the emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe. The department was known as a kind of "Mosad" for matters concerning Eastern European Jewry, and it operates in this manner to this day with one essential difference: in the last decade - more specifically, since the Six Day War of 1967 - the concentration has been on the Jews of the USSR.

Menahem Begin, for thirty years as head of the opposition, was known as an Israeli politician who had dedicated a respectable portion of his public activities to the issue of Jews in the USSR. He was also the major spokesman for a massive open international political struggle against the Soviet authorities. This he did while former Prime Ministers, including Golda Meir, who is considered by many to have the most involved in the subject, opted for a quiet struggle through diplomatic channels and international connections. Strict censorship was maintained in Israel over all relevant material; a policy of concealing publications and declarations was upheld for over twenty years.

#### A Supreme National Institution

"The Jews of Silence" were silent not only due to pressure on the part of the Soviet regime over the years, but also as a result of the theory held by the Israeli government. This silence was broken in - of all places - the Soviet Union, by the Jews themselves a short time after the Six Day War. However, even though the international political climate has unrecognizably changed, and, under the threatening cloud of the Jackson Amendment, SALT Talks, and China's rapprochement of the West, the USSR is now active on the Jewish question, there have been no appropriate changes in the concepts or the structure of the Israeli governmental establishment that handles Soviet Jewry. Menachem Begin inherited from his predecessors a structure that was perhaps suitable for the needs of the

fifties and the sixties. Despite requests since he came to power, his government has not examined this problem and has not checked anew whether the axioms of twenty years ago correlate to the needs of the late seventies. In addition, the drop-out crisis, which is a national problem of the first degree, could take up all the prime minister's time. The present Prime Minister, burdened with internal problems, is able to deal with the subject of drop-outs in the most limited manner. As for long term policy regarding Soviet Jewry, the government does not pay any attention to the developments which are liable to occur as the result of the increasing drop-out rate. The Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Aryeh Dulzin, says that in contrast to previous periods, there have been only two consultations with the participation of the Prime Minister and senior personnel since the Likud Government was set up.

Ben-Tzion Keshet, a veteran of the Herut Movement, and a former member of the Knesset, holds the position of Chairman of the Public Council for Soviet Jewry. He supports what has been said by Aryeh Dulzin. "Dulzin suggested establishing a supreme national institution to be concerned with Jews in the USSR, with the participation of the Prime Minister, ministers, and the heads of the Jewish Agency. Such an institution to this day has not been established despite the fact that promises were made that it would be. Such an institution would have been able to move things and to influence authorities in an orderly manner. With the absence of it, there exist uncountable problems of non-coordination in the area that, though few realize it, is the most critical one aside from defense.

December 23, 1979

#### Part II - The Man And The Method

During the long years in which the Soviet Union kept her gates closed to Jewish emigration, no one in Israel dreamed of the possibility that the majority of the migrants would turn their backs on Israel when the day finally came that the plea "Let my people go" was fulfilled. The strong belief in the Soviet Jewish yearning for Israel coincided with the basic world-view of the leadership of most of the parties, themselves, by and large, of Russian or Eastern European origin.

The struggle for the aliyah of Soviet Jewry was waged by Israel with a mighty and seemingly wise force. Secret systems for the struggle were decided upon; there was apprehension that open activity would put an end to any chance of arriving at an arrangement with Moscow. But, in retrospect, this policy has shown itself to be a reckless error. The Russian gates were broken through from within by the Jewish aliyah activists, in open protest which carried with it great danger. At times they did this in opposition to the State of Israel's stand, with the cooperation of the principal parliamentary opposition, at the head of which was Menahem Begin. The Herut Movement was the primary political support in Israel for the Jewish activists in the Soviet Union who demanded that Israel and world Jewry make public their grievances against the Soviet authorities. Herut was opposed to secret diplomacy in the matter of Soviet Jewry; its leaders believed that the Kremlin understands only the language of open international pressure. Time and again they accused the Labor Government of ignoring the plight of Soviet Jews because of a fundamentally misguided evaluation of the situation, both politically and mentally.

#### War of Minds

The political and practical management of the Jews of the USSR, the third largest Jewish concentration in the world, was in the hands of a small group of officials. In the beginning Shaul Avigor was their head, and, in the last decade, Nehemia Levanon, his heir.

Nehemia Levanon, a man of short stature, of sharp analytical ability, is considered today to be one of the world's experts on the Soviet Jewish question. Despite requests presented to Menahem Begin to replace Levanon, known as a Laborite, even Begin was not willing to cede the expertise and experience of the man, who, from a modest office in the Tel-Aviv Kirya, directs the war of the minds with great power. Levanon is directly responsible to

the Prime Minister. As in the days of Yitzhak Rabin, Golda Meir, Levi Eshkol, the office which he heads lies behind a sign "Foreign Ministry", even though there is no connection whatsoever with the Foreign Ministry. He maintains direct contact with the Prime Minister. Nehemia Levanon travels to Jerusalem to report on current operations, and makes basic decisions, with the approval of Menachem Begin. The matters he deals with are not brought to the government unless so recommended by the Prime Minister. The small crowded office functions, to this day, in an atmosphere of secrecy, even though Levanon himself maintains that the majority of activities today are open. A small number of aides are answerable to him. They keep a low public profile like their supervisor. They are assigned their jobs without fanfare by Levanon himself. Different parties familiar with the office note that there exists between the aides and their head a significant gap in experience, knowledge, and ability. From the building in the Kirya a network of connections branches out over the world. Its emissaries sit in the important cities of the world, that they might coordinate activities with Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. The office fosters connections with the most senior politicians in the West, mobilizes public personages and spiritual leaders, and oversees a considerable budget. Like other particulars about the unit, the budget has not been disclosed.

Nehemia Levanon holds all the information about what is happening in the Jewish-Soviet battle. He assesses the situation, keeps track of such matters as requests by Israelis to send invitations to their relatives in the USSR, and coordinates the handling of refuseniks, Prisoners of Zion and their families. He is the dominant factor in the decisions of when and where to strengthen the public or political campaign, whom to send to rally publicity and information throughout the world, which former aliyah activists from the USSR to bring closer to the operations and to assist in the work of the office, and which are not suitable. He holds the lists of refuseniks, and as has occurred in the past, it is his decision exclusively whether or not to permit their publication.

Ruth Bar-On of the Public Council for Soviet Jewry fully admits that these days relations between her and the special office are in a state of crisis. These relations are not, perhaps, understood by the public at large, but at times have been important for the success of the campaign. "Levanon is omnipotent", says Ruth Bar-On. Although theoretically the roads are open to Levanon to consult with other parties, he is not obligated to do so; he also admits that time and again he has lain awake on account of the burdensome responsibility he carries.

Levanon, in his time, was driven out of Moscow by the Russians after they declared him an undesirable during his service in the Israeli embassy in the Soviet capital. The incident was not made known, largely thanks to a quiet arrangement between Israel and the USSR. In an official Soviet publication, Levanon was dubbed the Israeli "intelligence" man.

The almost unlimited authority of Levanon was, in the days of the Labor Government, a subject of criticism from Soviet Jewry groups who supported the Herut Movement. The most prominent of these groups centered around Israel Shenkar, an industrialist from Givatayim, and his wife Ann. Shenkar was unstinting in his efforts to act as a spokesman for the Soviet aliyah activists at a time when the Israeli Government employed secret and guarded methods. Even though Shenkar's group worked with Levanon in the beginning, their paths parted over the years. With the ascension of Likud (Herut coalition) to power, Israel Shenkar initiated talks with the Prime Minister and those close to him, for the replacement of Levanon.

#### Opposition To The Method

"My opposition is not the man, but to the method he represents. Levanon, like his predecessor Avigor, belongs to the Eastern European school of the Israeli establishment that blends sheer fear of the Russians with mystification of the whole topic," says Shenkar. The Shenkarites are convinced that Golda Meir, in counsel with Nehemia Levanon, for long periods of time concealed requests from the pioneers of Soviet Jewish activism to make public their protest against the regime there. Only with systematic pressure were they ultimately forced to publish, in Israel and abroad, documents attesting to the great Jewish awakening after the Six Day War.

Over the years Israel Shenkar and his wife Ann have directed from their home an international operation for Soviet Jewry that was a thorn in the flesh of the establishment, and, above all, of Nehemia Levanon. To Israel Shenkar it is natural to expect that the man who executed and designed the practice of years of secret diplomatic policy now be relieved of his office, since it has become clear that his evaluations were misguided, as were those of the people above him. "Even if it were not so, could it be that in a state where even the Chief of Staff is replaced, and after thirty years the Government also changed, a special office, will remain without structural or personnel change", asks Shenkar.

Today the criticism of the special division is also leveled by some of the aliyah activists whose names once appeared in dramatic headlines. Viktor Polksky, one of the outstanding activists of the Jewish culture group in Moscow said: "It makes no sense that a matter so important in both human and nationalistic terms - the fate of Russian Jewry - be in the hands of one man without any ministerial responsibility towards the public. It is all conducted like a closed struggle, like twenty years ago. The man cannot change psychologically. He grew and developed within the method. It mustn't be that the fate of three million people rests in the hands of one person - be he the best, the most successful - and I know that Nehemia Levanon is truly an exceptional man."

Prof. Benjamin Fein, even in Moscow, joined the criticism forcefully: "One is not allowed to criticize the operations of the office and Nehemia Levanon. He is directly responsible to the Prime Minister and Menahem Begin is so busy that it is impossible to run to him all the time. There are many debatable issues. There not being an opportunity for debate, Levanon's office decides everything." Fein focuses his interest in Israel, as he did in the past in the USSR, on the development of Jewish culture. He initiated various projects, together with former activists, to create in Israel a center from which appropriate books and study material would be sent to the USSR, after he came to the conclusion that activities in this area of the special office are not appropriate nor do they meet the needs. In the next article, we will deal with these projects and about an attempt to circumvent the special office via a senior government official.

#### Unequivocal Dependence

Ruth Bar-On, the life force of the Public Council for Soviet Jewry, joins Prof. Benjamin Fein in her criticism of the office. Ms. Bar-On complains that the Public Council is unequivocally dependent on the special office, without any possibility of appealing against its permanence. Like Prof. Fein and Viktor Polksky, she emphasizes that it is impossible to run with every problem to the Prime Minister, and that today there is an urgent need in the Soviet Union of cultural activities, especially a strengthening of those connected with Israel, in order to halt the disintegration of the backbone of the aliyah movement. "And all decisions are in the hands of Nehemia Levanon. There is no open public debate as demanded by the drop-out situation. The situation is intolerable."

Nehemia Levanon is aware of the criticisms directed against him. "I am ready to help anyone who offers appropriate ideas. The problem is that people like Fein are in conflict with themselves, and are barely familiar with the problems of Western reality. One must take into account different, complicated constellations." Even Nehemia Levanon's virulent enemies cannot ignore his unusual talent and success in building a ramified system with great force for the struggle. He can, almost with the press of a button, and the lifting of a receiver, activate dozens of people throughout the world, breathe life into political organizations and bodies, mobilize public personages, spiritual leaders and diplomats. The important offices on Capitol Hill in Washington throw their doors open to him.

The Prime Minister partially complied with the criticism that also reached him, and appointed former Minister without Portfolio Haim Landau as the responsible party for the

care of Soviet Jewry. Minister Landau established a think-tank with the participation of the Speaker of the Knesset, Yitzhak Shamir, Israel Shenkar and Dr. Merlman who has dedicated time and means to the issue. With the appointment of Minister Landau as Minister of Transportation, the think-tank disbanded. The problem of Soviet Jewry was returned to its former caretaker.

In the absence of a governmental authority over those chosen to handle Soviet Jewry, the only address for public inquiry in this area is the Aliya and Absorption Committee of the Knesset. The Committee Chairman, M.K. Roni Milo, does not find any fault with the structure or the stand of the special office. "Thus it was in the days of Golda. It's absolutely alright." In the opinion of M.K. Milo, it is good that the Prime Minister is the responsible party. He feels that "one conversation between the Prime Minister and the President of the United States led to more than all other activities." The committee which he heads is briefed on what is being done through the reports of Mr. Levanon, either in full committee or in private.

December 26, 1979    PART III - "An Aspirin For The Critically Ill"

With the end of a decade of aliyah from the USSR, two characteristic phenomena can be distinguished:(1) an increasing drop-out rate and(2) rising criticism of the Israeli establishment that handles the matter. The criticism comes from immigrants who in the past were counted among the intellectual group which carried on the struggle for Jewish culture and emigration. These people feel that time is running out, and that it is impossible to deal properly with the drop-out phenomenon without going to its roots, including the continued development of ties with Soviet Jews and an overhaul of the arrangements for Soviet immigrant absorption, which is the subject of conflict between the Jewish Agency and the Absorption Ministry.

Disappointment in the present government's ability to work towards these achievements is the lot of former aliyah activists, Jewish Agency personnel and the public committees involved. Leah Slovina, who was among the activist leaders in Riga, joined the Herut Movement upon her aliyah and had great hope that "things would move" if the party came to power. As of this year, she severed her ties with the Herut Movement: "I was terribly disappointed with what my government did and is not doing. More than once I asked myself now if I have the moral right to be part of this establishment when my work is comparable to giving aspirin to the critically ill. We have worked to make the Jewish Agency more efficient in Vienna, we have taken the first steps towards reaching the drop-outs in the US, through local radio programs and meeting places we hoped to set up in cooperation with the communities. I am aware that all this is of limited effect. The root of the evil is to a great extent to be found in Israel's absorption program, which could be summed up in one simple word: catastrophe."

In the battle waged by olim from the USSR there is now movement and excitement. They are pounding on all the doors, making suggestions for the improvement of absorption, for deepening the ties with Soviet Jewry. Leah Slovina has established in her department a think-tank that offers advice on matters which fall within her responsibility. Among the members are Prof. Branover, Prof. Giterman, Prof. Voronel, Dr. Polsky, and Prof. Libushitz.

#### The Meeting Exploded

These parties are of the opinion that action must urgently be taken to strengthen relations between the Jews in the Soviet Union and Israel, especially through an international political struggle for the legalization of Jewish culture in the USSR. Recently contacts were established with the Minister of Education and Culture regarding this matter, and the subject was raised in the Education and Aliya and Absorption Committees of the Knesset. Prof. Benjamin Fein, who was appointed to organize the subject, requested the establishment

of a central authority that would fulfill the needs of Soviet Jewry in the areas of culture and Jewish heritage. He requested that this area be withdrawn from the responsibility of the special office. To do this Nehemia Levanon replied: "We did and do many things." Levanon expresses doubt about Prof. Fein's erudition in this area.

Aryeh Dulzin maintains that the only type of [cultural] activity which the Russians would allow would be communist oriented. The Public Council for Soviet Jewry was called upon to consider the matter, but its abilities are apparently limited. According to the testimony of the Chairman, Ben-Tzion Keshet, the budget of the institution, which is funded by the establishment, has not yet been approved for the current fiscal year.

Nehemia Levanon is absolutely convinced that the conditions of the absorption of Jews from the USSR do not contribute to curbing the drop-out rate. Formally, this office has nothing to do with this matter, yet Levanon is now involved in attempts to convince the heads of American Jewry to stop the flow of money for the budgets of HIAS and the JDC in Vienna and Rome in order to cut down to a minimum aid to drop-outs. His varied connections among Jewish leadership strengthen his position vis-a-vis the present Prime Minister.

The Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Aryeh Dulzin, established a think-tank in which, among others, Leah Slovina's advisors participate. In addition, there is another think-tank organized among Soviet academicians and professors at Tel Aviv University.

On the 18th of October they met with the Prime Minister, and in a penetrating discussion said, among other things, that "absorption of olim from the Soviet Union has reached a catastrophic state and is one of the primary reasons for the large drop-out rate. There is no way to increase aliyah without making essential changes in every aspect of absorption." The Prime Minister suggested that they meet with the Minister of Absorption, David Levy. The meeting became an incident, the repercussions of which cause ill-feelings to this day among the members of the group. Viktor Polsky says: "We presented a written summary of our position to Minister Levy. He challenged us that this was a political document, a false charge. The meeting exploded before any decision was reached. With this, our dialogue with the Minister of Absorption ended." Dr. Polsky came out forcefully against inaction in seeking appropriate solutions for olim from the USSR and specifically against settling remote places and development areas only with Russian immigrants.

#### A Unique Opportunity

There is without a doubt a great deal of naivete in emotional appeals such as that of Dr. Polsky to the Prime Minister, or of Prof. Benjamin Fein (One of the aliyah and culture activists in the USSR before his aliyah) to the Education, Culture, Aliyah and Absorption Committees of the Knesset. But there is something new here that cannot be ignored: The Israeli establishment that handles the subject of aliyah from the USSR was accustomed in the past to criticism only from the opposition which was easier to dismiss as politically motivated. Now the criticism is growing among the ranks of an academic group whose intentions cannot be denied even if the methods suggested by them are not always practical. The mere existence of criticism from these groups has created a new situation, with great irony; the criticism is directed specifically against those who, for so many years, were the leading critics of the Labor Government in their handling of the problem of Jews in the USSR.

A group of Israeli scientists, including academicians from the USSR and Prof. Asher Arian, Dean of the School of Political Science at Tel Aviv University, has established fixed consultations about the issue. Recently they decided to present an ultimatum, to demand massive action to permit the dissemination of material for the study of Hebrew and Jewish culture in the USSR, the establishment of diplomatic contacts at a senior level, and

freedom for the Prisoners of Zion and refuseniks imprisoned for more than five years. They suggest warning the Soviet Union, that if she does not respond to this, they will organize protests in Moscow during the Olympics. In the opinion of the scientists, these contacts must be established by the end of January, and it must be demanded that arrangements for permission to emigrate be made before the end of April 1980.

It is not clear what the effectiveness of such an operation would be; however, there is still no integrated coordination of activities among the parties which could take advantage of this unique opportunity to free the Prisoners of Zion and help refuseniks to win the hoped-for exit permits. All are aware of the unique opportunity the Olympics provide, but there is the danger that, due to the multiplicity of authorities handling the matter, the preparations for action will be delayed substantially until the very last moment, and the event will not be properly exploited.

What will be after the Olympics? Will the Soviets grant further permission for Jews to leave to the tune of 4,192 a month as was the case in the first half of 1979? (The total number for this year is about 50,000). Or will there be an abrupt cut-back? How can we prepare for other possibilities? These are unanswerable at the moment, for there is no wide ranging discussion in an authorized forum. Nehemia Levanon stresses that, as of late, it has been noted that the Soviet authorities have been simplifying the administrative procedures for getting an exit permit, and in not a few cases, the waiting period has not exceeded three to four months. On the other hand, evidence of difficulties is accumulating that is apparently intended to halt the large wave of applicants for permits.

"The immediate attention to applications gave rise to the rumor in the USSR that after the Olympics they will again heap difficulties upon the Jews. The interesting thing," adds Levanon, "is that despite the increase in the number of emigrants, the ratio between the number of Jews asking for invitations for visas from their relatives to the number leaving remains 3:1."

Viktor Polksky and the group of scientists argue for vigorous activity now. He raises his hands in helplessness and asks: "Where is the authorized forum for this? To whom does one turn? To Nehemia Levanon, the Jewish Agency, the Prime Minister, The Public Council, the Members of Knesset? I am a member of the Praesidium of the Brussels Conference and the Public Council. These are important bodies, but they have no bite. The Government of Israel has ceased to be an address for this issue."

Again the question is raised: What is the authorized address ultimately? Even if there are answers to the criticism heard against the governmental structure that today attends to Soviet Jewry, there is no doubt that, in theory, the period in which the subject was treated in closed discussion has ended. Today, there live in Israel thousands of people who have felt on their flesh the Soviet reality and do not comply with the centralization of authority in the hands of a few people who are not obliged to report nor are open to public scrutiny.

The establishment is not accustomed to criticism in this area. Over the long years of its activity it was used to seeing itself as a supreme authority, defended to a large extent by the prime ministers who attested almost indisputably to its evaluations. The special office is undoubtedly closing up its secret files so as not to take any chances. These files contain many chapters of success, but they could also tell about the not-so-few mistakes that perhaps would have been possible to prevent at another time, had the system not been closed and almost impenetrable to criticism.

## Avital Shecharansky: She wages a lonely battle



**The wife of a Jewish dissident fights to free her husband from Soviet imprisonment**

By MARY KASDAN

**F**irst and foremost, and politics aside, Avital Shecharansky is a young wife who wants her husband back. Anatoly Shecharansky became a political symbol in July of 1978 when a Soviet court found him guilty of "espionage and treason" for his human rights activities. He was sentenced to three years in prison and 10 more years at hard labor.

The free world cried out in rage, but the very first thought that rushed through Mrs. Shecharansky's mind was this: "In 13 years, I will not be able to bear children."

A native of Siberia, she was living in Moscow and had met Shecharansky just nine months before she received her own visa to emigrate. They were married the day before she left.

That was 5 1/2 years ago. Mrs. Shecharansky has not seen her husband since.

He was arrested and held incommunicado for 16 months before his trial. Next February, he will complete three years in prison and is scheduled to be transferred to a camp for 10 years at hard labor.

"If I could go to Russia and open the door and just take my husband out, I do it, but I can't," Mrs. Shecharansky says in broken English.

"That's why I am coming (here) again and again and again. If people will help us... if people don't forget us... if people do something, we have a chance."

This is her life's work now — trying to make sure people remember. She lives with friends in Jerusalem, Israel, but travels incessantly to one conference after another to gain support for her husband.

Jew who had applied for a visa to emigrate but had been refused — when his future wife met him in late 1973. The visa was denied on the grounds that his work as a computer engineer gave him access to "state secrets."

Like many "refuseniks," he lost his job and scrambled to find work as a tutor to avoid imprisonment for "parasitism."

Mrs. Shecharansky first met her husband on a cold day at a demonstration but writes, "His eyes were brown and warm and brilliant and full of life." He was a brilliant mathematician and a chess champion, she says. "No one had victory over him."

It is laughable to think that her husband could have been a spy, says Mrs. Shecharansky, considering KGB men were always with him.

"First, they hear everything, they know every word," she says of the KGB. In the book, she writes that KGB agents were always hovering outside homes where meetings were taking place or on the edges of demonstrations.

"Second, they all the time demonstrate their strength. When I first met Anatoly, I met who's strongest. When they want to break him psychologically, emotionally."

Shecharansky even managed to find humor in this, as a transcript of a cassette he sent his wife in October, 1976 indicates.

"The tails were following me — the surveillance was intense and crude, with threats," he reports, but goes on, "They even traveled with me in taxis and paid half without arguing, they were so afraid to let me out of their sight."

This incident, she says, occurred shortly after Shecharansky helped to found an unofficial group to monitor Kremlin compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki agreement. Publishing reports on such issues as emigration, psychiatric abuses for political aims, and prison conditions did not cut him favor.

Shecharansky taught himself English and further enraged Soviet officials by serving as a liaison between Soviet dissidents and Western news-paper correspondents.

"What he did was open and not secret," Mrs. Shecharansky says. "All those contacts were only about the emigration issue and things happening to refuseniks. He invited Soviet journalists too, but they never came."

## U.S. Bill Would Allow More Refugees to Immigrate

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 1 — The number of refugees allowed to enter the United States would be substantially increased under legislation being completed by a House-Senate conference committee.

The package, which includes, for the first time, reimbursement to other nations for refugee expenses, follows a proposal by President Carter. The Administration has objected, however, to some of the bill's organizational provisions.

Under the measure, the ceiling on annual refugee admissions into the United States would be increased from 17,000 to 50,000.

The legislation represents the first substantive overhaul of the United States provisions for refugees since 1962 and would bring the United States into compliance with United Nations guidelines, which it ratified in 1968.

"This bill replaces an antiquated and discriminatory system with a comprehensive, flexible one," said Representative Elizabeth J. Holtzman, Democrat of Brooklyn.

### Accord in January Foreseen

Similar versions of the bill have recently been approved by the House and Senate, and a conference committee is

expected to work out the differences January.

Sponsored in the House by Miss Holtzman and Peter Rodino, Democrat of Newark, and in the Senate by Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, the bill would also empower the President to admit unlimited numbers of refugees after consultation with Congress, which could block an increase only through legislation.

Last amended in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act stipulates that only those fleeing Communist or Middle East countries can enter the United States as refugees and, Miss Holtzman noted, does

not provide for people who are forced to flee "right-wing dictatorships."

They and other categories of refugees can be admitted only under the Attorney General's "parole" authority, which has been invoked repeatedly over the years to exceed the ceiling of 17,000.

As adopted by the House and Senate, the bills remove such ideological or geographical limitations, saying that a refugee is defined as anyone who fears to live in his homeland because of persecution for race, nationality, religion or social group. Refugee status could also be applied to those who have fled to another country for the same reasons. Parole authority is eliminated by the legislation.

The legislation would not affect the commitment by the United States to ac-

cept 168,000 Indochinese refugees in 1980 under the parole provision.

Individual states, which have partly borne the financial burden of admitting the refugees through welfare and Medicaid payments, would be reimbursed for all their expenses.

The House version of the measure offers a more generous plan for the states and it makes the Federal Government liable for state-paid refugee aid for up to four years after entry into the country.

The House version, in amendments sponsored by Representative Holtzman, also calls for the creation of an Office of Refugee Resettlement, which would be administered by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

The bill would require the new office to provide prearrival orientation and language programs and to coordinate other adjustment programs such as job training or special education.

Despite Administration objections, the House bill would also move the office of the Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, the chief policy position, from the State Department to the White House. The Senate version would not change the present arrangement.

In addition, the House version allows refugees to gain Medicaid benefits without going on welfare. The two programs are normally linked. Miss Holtzman contended that many refugees, who often arrive here in poor physical condition, go on the welfare rolls to obtain medical care.

## Authorities Tighten Lid on Sakharov Kin

THE WASHINGTON STAR Thursday, March 6, 1980

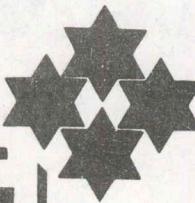
MOSCOW — The Soviet authorities appear to have tightened their curb on the exiled human-rights activist Andrei D. Sakharov by trying to deter his family and friends from acting as a link between him and the West.

For the second straight day, two policemen stood guard at the door of the Sakharovs' Moscow apartment and barred entry to Western reporters who wished to speak with Ruf Bonner, his 80-year-old mother-in-law.

Before posting police at her door Tuesday morning, the Moscow prosecutor's office warned her against holding any more news conferences in her apartment, and the warning presumably would apply to any attempt to meet with reporters elsewhere.

## Union of Councils for Soviet Jews

24 Crescent St., Suite 3A, Waltham, Ma 02154  
617/893-4780



Silvia Zalmanson, Soviet Jewish emigration activist who was jailed for her Zionist activities, poses with her sabra daughter, born last week at Sheba (Tel Hashomer) Medical Centre in Tel Aviv. Silvia and her husband, Eduard Kuznetzov were married 11 years ago in Riga. Eduard joined his wife in Israel last May after being released from prison, where he had served nine years after being convicted in the "Leningrad trial" for his part in the attempt to hijack a Soviet plane in order to reach Israel. (Lester Millman)

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