

THE POWER OF PEOPLEHOOD: THE SOVIET JEWISH JOURNEY

An International Conference

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union

In tribute to those who struggled for the rights of Soviet Jews

Organized and Sponsored

By

American Association of Jews from the Former USSR (AAJFSU)
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI)

In cooperation with

Andrei Sakharov Foundation (ASF)
Council of Jewish Émigré Community Organizations (COJECO)
Jewish Community Relations Council of New York (JCRC of NY)
NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, (NCSJ)
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia

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Wednesday, November 9, 2011
1:00 pm – 7:00 pm
At the headquarters of
American Jewish Committee
165 East 56th Street, New York, NY

Twenty years ago, in 1991, a series of momentous events occurred in Jewish and world history. It began when Moscow began to open up society, in the wake of internal and external pressures and, among other changes, adopted policies that affirmed the right to leave. This followed decades of struggle by Soviet Jewish activists, and their advocates in America and other nations in the West. That same year a coup attempting to reverse the transformative changes in the country was defeated. By the end of the year the Soviet Union had imploded and ceased to exist. In a significant footnote to twentieth century history, Soviet Jews and their supporters in other countries had evidently played a role in these events.

In the Soviet Union thousands of Jews had struggled for years to be able to leave for Israel, and tens of thousands became refuseniks. Many of these same activists, as well as others, had also fought to revive Jewish culture, end state-sponsored anti-Semitism, and enjoy the legal right to organize Jewish religious life.

Some were engaged with non-Jewish dissidents who had placed freedom of religion and the Right to Leave at the apex of their human rights agendas. As an example to the world Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner, leaders of the Soviet human rights movement, became outspoken supporters of Jewish activists.

For those Jews who were involved there was a common sense of purpose, as they fought to have the state end discriminatory policies or practices. Their efforts provided a powerful experience of belonging to the Jewish people, united across political, geographic and ideological boundaries. At the same time Jews and non-Jews in the West created a well organized and highly motivated advocacy campaign on behalf of those struggling within the Soviet Union.

For this conference, we have brought together veterans of Soviet, American and Israeli advocacy campaigns to help provide a better understanding of that historic era. We will reflect upon the events of that period, and whether they continue to play a role in forming a collective sensibility among former Soviet Jews.

The first panel will encompass the activism of Soviet and Western Jews, from the 1960s to the late 1980s. It will focus upon the nature and scope of a unique advocacy effort, and help us understand the impact of this successful struggle for freedom and human rights.

The second panel will address the lessons taught by those who spawned the Soviet Jewry movement, as they are relevant to the search for Jewish identity and peoplehood among Russian and English speaking Jews today.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Welcoming Remarks

Jerry Goodman

Dmitri Glinski

Opening Remarks

David Harris

Keynote

Natan Sharansky

Panel I. The Struggle: Refuseniks and Activists

Moderator: Mark Levin

Panelists

Yosef Begun

Boris Gorbis

Joshua Rubenstein

David Waksberg

Discussion

Break

Comments: Inna Arolovich

Address: Michael Beizer

Panel II. The Challenge of Identity

Moderator: Misha Galperin

Panelists

Steven Bayme

Matvey Chlenov

Sam Kliger

Glenn Richter

Discussion

Closing Remarks:

Gil Lainer, Jerry Goodman

Speakers and Panel Members (In order of presentation)

JERRY GOODMAN

Goodman interned at the New York based Foreign Policy Association prior to joining the American Jewish Committee as its Director of European Affairs. Active in the nascent Soviet Jewry movement, he became the founding Executive Director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), a coalition of over 300 national organizations and local community councils and federations. During his tenure the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to Trade Legislation became law, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the “Helsinki Commission”) was created, and the Jewish community mounted the historic Freedom Sunday, on December 6, 1987. Organized to address a Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting, it was the largest demonstration in Washington organized for a Jewish issue.

He is the Founder of the Archive of the American Soviet Jewry Movement, at the American Jewish Historical Society, and a member of the Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

DMITRI GLINSKI

Dmitri Glinski is the Executive Director of the American Association of Jews from the Former USSR. In 1990 he launched a pro-democracy youth organization in Moscow, and was a member of the national board of the Democratic Russia Movement. The DRM was the largest public advocacy organization in the Soviet Union at the time of the country’s 1991 implosion. While a graduate student in this country, in the 1990’s, he co-authored *The Tragedy of Russia’s Reforms*, published by the U.S. Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C. He also worked as a research associate with the Chief Librarian of the U.S. Congress. After immigrating to America in 2003, he taught at Columbia University, where he founded and edited *In Their Own Voices: Eurasian Human Rights Digest*. Glinski is a member of the Commission on the Jewish People at UJA-Federation of NY.

DAVID HARRIS

David Harris has been the Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee since 1990. For many years he was professionally active on behalf of the emigration of Soviet Jews, and was described by the Washington Post as “one of the leading spokesmen” for the Soviet Jewry movement. In the course of this work, he was twice detained by Soviet authorities and once expelled from the country.

He is the former director of the Washington Office of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and later, as the Washington Representative of the American Jewish Committee, served as the national coordinator for the historic Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jewry. Held on December 6, 1987, the event brought 250,000 people to Washington, DC to demonstrate one day before a Reagan-Gorbachev Summit meeting. In the 1980s Harris played a significant role in the rescue of Ethiopian Jews, and was central to the successful struggle to repeal the infamous “Zionism is Racism” resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1975.

NATAN SHARANSKY

Best known as a Prisoner of Zion in the Soviet Union, and a long term refusenik, Natan Sharansky is the Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). Born in Donetsk, Ukraine, he graduated in computer science from the Physical Technical Institute in Moscow. Denied an exit visa for Israel, he became active in the struggle of Soviet Jews seeking *aliyah* and also joined the human rights movement led by Andrei Sakharov. To stifle his efforts he was arrested and accused of collaborating with the CIA, for which he was sentenced to thirteen years in prison, including solitary confinement, and to a labor camp in Moscow's *gulag*. An international campaign on his behalf, with his wife, Avital, at its center, pressured the authorities to release him in 1986. He immigrated to Israel and assisted new immigrants as well as educated the public about absorption issues, through the Soviet Jewry Zionist Forum, which he helped create.

Sharansky's memoir, *Fear No Evil*, was published in 1988 and translated into 9 languages. He authored a New York Times best seller, *The Case for Democracy*. In 2008 *Defending Identity, Its Indispensable Role in Protecting Democracy*, was issued by Public Affairs Press. He is the recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal and the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom

MARK B. LEVIN

Since 1992 Levin has served as Executive Director of NCSJ: Advocates for Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia. He is viewed as one of the Jewish community's leading specialists on national and international political issues. His first visit to the Soviet Union, in 1982, was with a Congressional delegation that met with officials and Jewish activists in Moscow and Leningrad, now St. Petersburg..

Levin played a central role in creating the Congressional Coalition for Soviet Jews, and organized the first international conference of parliamentary spouses in Washington, DC. He was a core member of the Summit Task Force that organized the historic demonstration for Soviet Jews on December 6, 1987, in Washington DC, timed for a Reagan-Gorbachev Summit meeting.

YOSEF BEGUN

Yosef Begun, with a PhD in radio-engineering, applied for an exit visa to Israel in 1971, and spent 17 years as a refusenik and as a Prisoner of Zion. He was among the leading Jewish activists in the struggle for *aliyah* and the civil rights of Soviet Jews. An underground Hebrew teacher, he protested the forced assimilation of Jews in the USSR. For his efforts to disseminate materials about Jewish culture he spent 9 years in the Soviet Gulag. In 1983, while still a prisoner, Begun was awarded Israel's prestigious Shield of Jerusalem Prize for "defense of the rights of the Jewish people."

Since making *aliyah* in 1988, Dr. Begun has continued his efforts to strengthen Jewish identity through lectures at Jewish community centers, schools, synagogues, and college-based Hillel groups. The documentary, "*Through Struggle You Will Gain Your Rights*," presents his personal story, while reflecting on some central lessons of the Russian Jewish Exodus.

BORIS GORBIS

Born in 1950 in Odessa, Ukraine, Boris was a four year refusenik, and came to America in 1975. A 1980 graduate of UC Berkeley Law School, he has represented thousands of individuals, community organizations, media companies, and start-up businesses, and is an experienced arbitrator and mediator. An active participant in the Jewish community, Gorbis is a founder of the America-Israel Museum in Los Angeles, which celebrates the human and artistic connections between the two countries. In 2011 he received the Outstanding Community Service Award from the **Jewish Federation of Los Angeles**.

JOSHUA RUBENSTEIN

The Northeast Regional Director of Amnesty International USA and a long-time Associate of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, Joshua Rubenstein has been a staff member of Amnesty International since 1975, and a strong advocate for Soviet Jews. He is the author of *Soviet Dissidents, Their Struggle for Human Rights* and *Tangled Loyalties, the Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg*, and the co-editor of *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, for which he received a National Jewish Book Award. Rubenstein is the co-editor of *The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov*, and helped edit and translate *The Unknown Black Book, the Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*. His latest book, *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary's Life*, was released in 2011.

INNA AROLOVICH

Inna Arolovich co-founded the American Association of Jews from the Former USSR (AAJFSU), in 1989, and has continued to serve as one of its national leaders and spokesperson. The group's initial mission was to organize support for the Lautenberg-Morrison Amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that granted refugee status to Soviet Jews and other persecuted minorities. Inna and her colleagues at AAJFSU published annual *Chronicles of Anti-Semitism* in the former Soviet Union, briefed members of Congress about Soviet violations of human rights, helped refuseniks in their transition to American society, and built AAJFSU into a major national advocacy organization of Russian-speaking Jews.

For nearly a decade Arolovich served as the Russian Jewish community's national coordinator of assistance to victims of terror in Israel. She is on the boards of the New York chapter of the AAFSJU and the New York Immigration Coalition and, in 2011, she was designated the Honorary President of the AAFSJU.

MICHAEL BEIZER

A former refusenik, Michael Beizer was active in the Jewish emigration and culture movements in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg. After immigrating to Israel in 1987, he earned a Ph.D. in history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Dr. Beizer currently teaches Russian Jewish history at the same university, co-edits *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta*, and works as an historical advisor at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). He is the author of several books and scholarly articles on the Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, the JDC in Russia, and the Jewish emigration movement in the USSR.

MISHA GALPERIN

Misha Galperin, Ph.D., is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Jewish Agency International Development, with responsibility for external affairs, financial resource development, and many of its global strategic initiatives. Prior to assuming his position Galperin was the Chief Executive Officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, after serving as the Chief Operating Officer of UJA-Federation of New York.

Galperin was born in Odessa, Ukraine and immigrated to America as a teen ager. He has a doctorate in clinical psychology, graduated the Wexner Heritage Program, and has been a psychotherapist and an executive of social and community service organizations. In addition to being co-author of *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood: Can We Be One?*, Dr. Galperin has written and spoken on the issues of peoplehood, Jewish identity and community development.

STEVEN BAYME

Steven Bayme is the Director of the American Jewish Committee's Contemporary Jewish Life Department, and of the Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations. He is a Visiting Associate Professor of History at the Jewish Theological Seminary. With a degree in history from Yeshiva University, and an MA and PhD from Columbia University, he taught at Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Seminary and Queens College.

Bayme has edited a volume of essays, *Facing the Future: Essays in Contemporary Jewish Life*, and co-edited *Rebuilding the Nest: a New Commitment to the American Family, the Jewish Family and Jewish Continuity*. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, and served on the faculties of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, the Nahum Goldman Fellowship, and the Wexner Foundation Fellowship Committee. He also served as a judge for the prestigious National Jewish Book Award.

MATVEY CHLENOV

A resident of Moscow, Matvey Chlenov is a specialist in Jewish history and anti-Semitism. He is a graduate of the post-Soviet Project Judaica program of the Russian State University for Humanities (RSUH), in Moscow, as well as the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University College, London.

A second generation activist, Chlenov's recent work in contemporary Russian Jewish history is based on his extensive research in Israel, Russia, Ukraine and the United States, and resulted in several published monographs. He teaches modern Jewish history at RSUH, as well as Jewish studies, fund raising and political advocacy. Chlenov also serves as a media and public relations adviser to members of the Upper Chamber of the Russian parliament, and has helped organize visiting missions of American Jewish leaders.

SAM KLIGER

As the director of the American Jewish Committee's Department of Russian Jewish Community Affairs, Sam Kliger is responsible for creating, developing and implementing programs to help integrate former Soviet and Russian Jews into the Jewish community, as well as the broader society. In this capacity he serves as a liaison between the AJC and Russian Jewish communities throughout the world.

A former refusenik, who arrived in America in 1990, Kliger is the founder and chairman of the Research Institute for New Americans (RINA), a think tank and research organization. Having received his doctorate from the USSR Academy of Sciences, he has published several works on Russian immigrants in America, and served as lead investigator in major research studies.

GLENN RICHTER

A graduate of Queens College Glenn Richter took his degree in political science and became a political activist. He was a co-founder of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, in 1964, and served as its national coordinator for 26 years. Prior to his work with the SSSJ, he was active in the civil rights movement, as a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Richter continues his commitment to Jewish life as a speaker on the Soviet Jewry Advocacy Movement.

GIL LAINER

Gil Lainer is Consul for Public Affairs at the Consulate General of Israel in New York. Prior to his arrival in New York, Gil was a counselor in the Bureau for Middle East Economy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem, where he worked to establish Israel's current policy on humanitarian aid and projects in the Gaza Strip. He also served as Deputy Consul General to the Pacific Northwest at the Israeli Consulate in San Francisco. In this position he dealt extensively with media relations and public diplomacy. Gil took a leave of absence from the Ministry in 2006 to serve as the Aliyah emissary ("Shaliach") for Montreal and eastern Canada.

Before beginning his diplomatic career, Gil worked in the private sector as an account executive for a Tel Aviv public relations firm, representing primarily Hi-Tech companies. Prior to that, he was as a reporter, producer and editor-in-chief in the news section at Israel's largest commercial radio station, 103 FM Tel Aviv. He is a graduate of the School of Media Studies at The College of Management in Tel Aviv.