

Soviet Jewry - Kit IV: 1967-1980s

Contributed by: Enid L. Wurtman's Soviet Jewry Archives on the History of the Zionist Movement from the Soviet Union

Elie Weisel published a book called The Jews of Silence, after a visit to the Soviet Union in 1965.

"How they have managed to live by their sacred tradition, without books, without outside help or encouragement, without the hope of a new generation, is a mystery to me, what supports them? How do they overcome the threat of petrifying rigidity on the one hand and onrushing assimilation on the other? What hidden forces operate among them? It is a riddle. The Prophet Elijah, the Rabbis say, will answer all questions when he comes, but let him come soon, while they are Jews in Russia who still await him, who will be able to recognize him. If he delays much longer, it may be too late - not only for them but for us."

(Following the Simchat Torah celebration outside the Moscow synagogue:
"You will tell the Jews outside that you saw us dancing?"

The old man's face radiated with pride, or perhaps an excess of pain.

"I will tell them"

"And that you heard us singing?"

"I will"

"And were a witness to our rejoicing? You will tell them how we fulfilled the commandment of joy?"

"I will tell them, yes."

Except, I am not sure we deserve their gift, or their joy, or this story.

An ancient proverb says: G-d bestowed two gifts upon men. To some he gave the gift of wine and to some the faculty of thirst. He gave the reality of Israel to us; the dream of Israel he left to the Jews of Russia. We are in need of them, just as they are in need of us. Perhaps more!"

"TWO YEARS AGO, I CAME TO THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE NIGHT OF SIMCHAT TORAH. I WANTED TO SEE JEWS AND WANTED TO BE WITH THEM. I DIDN'T TELL MY WIFE WHO ISN'T JEWISH OR MY SIXTEEN YEAR OLD SON. WHY SHOULD I BURDEN THEM WITH PROBLEMS? THERE WAS TIME ENOUGH FOR THAT. I CAME BACK LAST YEAR FOR THE SECOND TIME. THE YOUNGSTERS WERE SINGING AND DANCING, ALMOST LIVE TONIGHT. I FOUND MYSELF SUDDENLY IN THE MIDDLE OF A GROUP OF YOUNGSTERS, AND MY HEART STOPPED I WAS STANDING FACE TO FACE WITH MY SON. HE SAID HE'D BEEN COMING FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS BUT HADN'T DARED TO TELL ME.

'WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HIM?', he asked

'YES, VERY MUCH'

'HE'S HERE SOMEWHERE', He said, Gesturing at the crowd as if to say....

'LOOK CLOSELY', THEY ARE ALL MY SON.'

The Leningrad Trials and Prison Camp



Boris Penson

BORIS PENSON, 31, is an artist from Riga. He too was tried and sentenced in 1970 in the First Leningrad Trial under Articles 64- treason and 70- anti-Soviet agitation. He managed to send out a message to the world - and although the message is two years old the situation has not changed since. He says: "I

appeal to you, my fellow Jews, from the very darkest depths of the 'Soviet paradise' - from a Nordevian Concentration Camp - do everything humanly possible to ensure that the bolts and bars of the All-Russian prison of peoples which have been broken asunder, are not closed and locked once more".



YOSSEF MENDELIEVICH, 30, a student from Riga was tried in camera in 1970 in the First Leningrad Trial, in connection with the "airplane" affair, under Article 64-treason, 70-anti-Soviet agitation, 72-crimes against the State, and 91 stealing state property. Yossif, an orthodox Jew, is now in the notorious Vladimir prison. He is persecuted and constantly punished for his insistence to observe religious traditions.



Isak Shkolnik

ISAAK SHKOLNIK, 41, a mechanic from Vitebsk was arrested in 1972 and tried in 1973 under Article 64-treason. When in 1972 relatives from Israel sent an invitation for submission to the authorities for an exit visa, the KGB intercepted the document. Isak's home was searched and a visiting card from a British engineer was confiscated. This formed the basis of a patently fabricated charge - first "spying for Britain" then changed to "spying for Israel". Despite the fact that no evidence was found, he was sentenced for "gathering and retaining secret information in his head with the aim of passing it on to foreign powers". He is now in Perm labor camp No. 24. His was surely one of the most bizarre espionage cases on record.

VILF ZALMANSON, 36, an engineer from Riga. Like his brother Israel he too was arrested in connection with the airplane affair and was sentenced in the second Leningrad Trial on charges of treason and stealing state property.



EDWARD KUZNETSOV, translator from Riga, was sentenced in the First Leningrad trial for treason, stealing state property, anti-Soviet agitation and crimes against the State. He is now in Votna camp. He suffers from infected lungs. "Having been sentenced to (fifteen years deprivation of freedom, to fifteen years torture of an act which would only be a minor offence according to the laws of civilized states, I do not intend to back away from the insults with which I am daily rewarded for being a Jew..." (Prison Diaries - 1971)

HELIEL HUITMAN, 44, an engineer from Leningrad was sentenced in the Second Leningrad Trial in 1971 under article 64a-treason, 70-anti-Soviet agitation, 72-crimes against the State, and 184-divulging of data of preliminary investigation or enquiry. Recently Hittel staged a seven day "Strike of Silence" as a protest against the new Soviet constitution, which did not give cultural rights to the Jewish minority. He is in a Perm labor camp.



He is now in a labor camp in Navoi, Central Asia.



MARK DYMSHITZ, 50, is a pilot from Leningrad. He was sentenced in the First Leningrad Trial for treason, violating government property, anti-Soviet agitation and crimes against the State. Mark was recently moved from Perm complex labor camp No. 25 to Camp 35.

MARK MASHITS, 25, a dentist from Moscow, was sentenced in 1975 under Articles 190-2 violation of public order and 70- anti-Soviet agitation. "I am in the dock because I took part in the demonstration near the Lenin library carrying placards reading 'Viva, instead of Prisons'. 'You have accused me of wanting to go to my homeland'. (final speech at the trial.) He is now in Tadjik-Olekmineki region.



AMNER ZAYUROV, 27, a repairman from Chakh-rizyabe was sentenced in 1970 under Article 199 of the Uzbek Criminal Code - violation of passport regulations and Article 204-hooliganism. On the eve of his departure to Israel, Amner's passport was confiscated following an anonymous letter to the KGB accusation of speculation. He is now in a labor camp in Navoi, Central Asia.

ANATOLY SHECHARANSKY - 30 year old mathematician, first applied to emigrate in 1973. During his years as a refusenik, he became a leader in the Jewish Aliyah Movement. Having a good command of the English language, SHECHARANSKY often acted as an 'interpreter' for Western visitors, including many Parliamentarians and Congressmen. During the 1974 visit of Richard NIXON, ANATOLY, and many other of his refusenik friends were imprisoned, in order to prevent any demonstrations in Moscow. It was during this time, that AVITAL, his fiancée, received her exit visa. ANATOLY was released from prison on July 4th, and that evening he and AVITAL were married. The following day, AVITAL left for Israel, with a promise from the Soviet Authorities that ANATOLY would be permitted to join her soon. They have not seen one another since.

In March 1977, an article appeared in the Government newspaper, IZVESTIA, accusing ANATOLY and other refuseniks, of being agents of the American CIA. Shortly thereafter, ANATOLY was arrested and held incommunicado until his trial, in July 1978. PRESIDENT J. CARTER personally denied the allegation that SHECHARANSKY had worked for any American agency. On July 14, ANATOLY SHECHARANSKY was sentenced to 13 years incarceration - 3 years in prison and 10 years in strict labour camp.

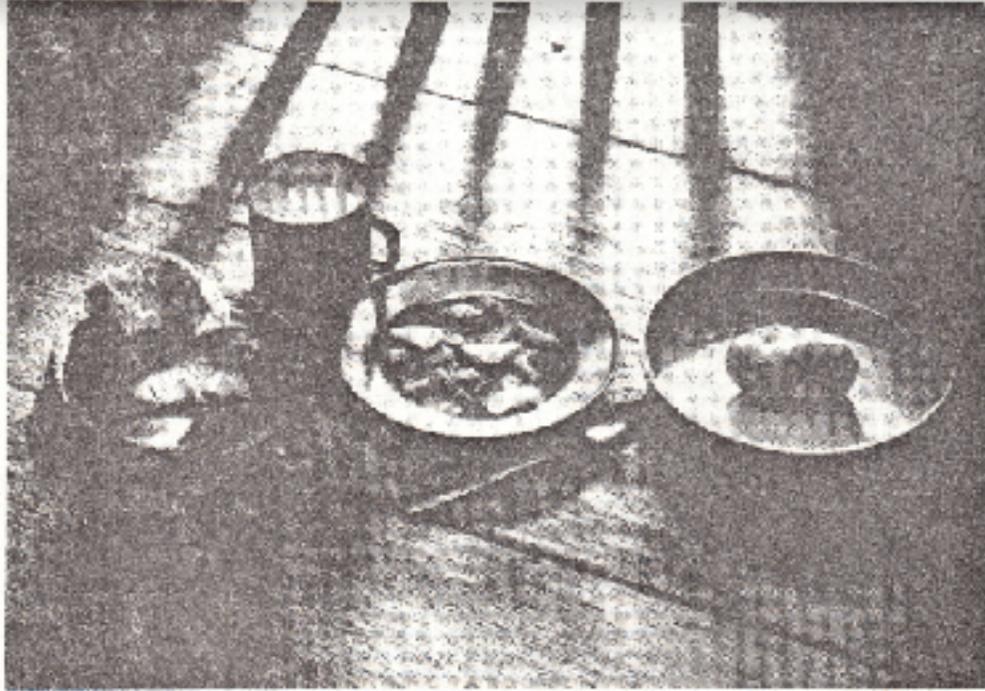
The imprisonment of SHECHARANSKY, was seen as an attempt to intimidate the entire Jewish aliyah movement.

IDA NOBEL - 47 years old, worked as an Economist until she lost her job, upon applying for an exit visa in 1973. She is one of the most prominent activists in Russia today, adored by all the other refuseniks, who fondly call her, "angel of mercy". IDA remained in contact with all the Jewish PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE, sent them parcels of clothes, food and medicine, and cared for them, upon their release from prison. IDA has been arrested many times. She married ex-POC YULI BRINK, in January 1975. However, he received an exit visa in April 1975, and she has been completely alone ever since. On June 1st, 1978, having been prevented from joining a 'women's demonstration', taking place in Moscow, IDA hung a banner from her apartment balcony, asking to be allowed to join her husband and sister in ISRAEL. She was arrested and sentenced to 4 years Siberian exile. She is presently working as a cleaning woman.

VLADIMIR SLEPAK - 51 year old RADIO ENGINEER, applied to emigrate to ISRAEL in 1970, along with his wife MARIA and two sons, ALEXANDER and LEONID. During his 8 years of waiting he became a leader of the ALIYAH movement. In 1977, his son ALEXANDER was granted permission to leave. In June, 1978, VLADIMIR AND MARIA hung a banner from the window of their apartment which read, "Let us join our son in Israel". For this he was accused of 'malicious hooliganism' and sentenced to 5 years in exile and MARIA received a 3 year suspended sentence.

Prisoners of Conscience

Look at the quote and picture below. Discuss what it might have been like for prisoners each day. What formative experiences or beliefs gave prisoners the strength to go on each day?



**This is the daily diet in a Soviet prison camp,
with nine hours of hard labour**

MORNING

14 oz. black bread (but dry's ration); 1 cup hot water--no sugar allowed; 1 oz. herring.

MIDDAY

1 cup of soup (beefed cabbage and 1 medium-sized potato); no fat allowed.

EVENING

3/4 to 1 oz. potato (no fat); or 1 cup raw cabbage and tomato in vinegar.

The lesson of the Holocaust will be of no value unless we continue, today, to act on what we have learned about the necessity for vigilance and protest. As we mourn the loss of six million Jews, let us not forget that our present silence will allow one-quarter of the world's Jews, those who live in the Soviet Union, to be destroyed--slowly and quietly through assimilation and the lack of Jewish culture and education, and dramatically, through the imprisonment of those courageous Soviet Jews who become-----

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE