

TESTIMONY ON SOVIET JEWRY BEFORE THE REPUBLICAN PLATFORM COMMITTEE

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IN MIAMI, FLORIDA AUGUST 16, 1972, PRESENTED BY

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee: On behalf of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, I would like to extend to you our appreciation for allowing us to present testimony before this body.

The heroic strivings of Soviet Jews for freedom to leave the Soviet Union, in order to realize their desire to live as Jews and to be reunited with their relatives, has attracted world-wide concern. Approximately one quarter of the world's Jewish population resides in the Soviet Union. Over 3,000,000 Soviet Jews have been deprived, not only of the right to emigrate to Israel and other lands of their choice, but of their right to pursue their religious and cultural traditions. Despite the threatening and repressive measures of the Soviet Union towards its Jewish population, the desire of Soviet Jews to retain their Jewish identity and to emigrate to Israel and elsewhere is so great that there has been a courageous outpouring of messages from Soviet Jews appealing to the outside world, and particularly to the United States, for support and assistance.

In 1966 Bertrand Russell stated: "A comparison with other Soviet nationalities exposes the basic injustices of their (Soviet Jewry's) situation, for even the smallest nationality groups in the Soviet Union are given the opportunity to pursue a cultural, social and political life of their own denied to Soviet Jews." This situation has not been radically altered.

The Soviet government allows theological students of many other faiths to study in their own institutions, as well as in foreign seminaries or religious educational institutions. Judaism is the only significant exception. Synagogues have been closed in systematic fashion as a result of both direct and indirect government action. In 1956, there were 450 synagogues in the Soviet Union and, in April of 1963, there were under 100. Today, according to non-Soviet sources, there are about 60 official synagogues, in addition to private prayer meetings. However, few of the former function all the time.

Judaism, unlike other faiths, cannot publish periodicals and devotional literature, including journals, prayer books and Bibles. After years of world protest, 10,000 prayer books were permitted in 1968 but only several hundred were known to have been distributed. Other restrictions do not permit Soviet Jews: to produce essential devotional articles such as "Talethim" (prayer shawls) or "Tfilin" (phylacteries); to have regular and official contacts with coreligionists abroad as contrasted to the experience of Protestant, Catholic and Moslem faiths; to publish (except in isolated cases, especially the "show-piece" Central Synagogue in Moscow) religious calendars -- indispensable guides to religious observances.

Increasingly throughout the past year Soviet Jews evinced their heavy reliance on American intervention with Soviet authorities to help their cause. This was evidenced in letters smuggled out of the country and in telephone conversations, initiated by Jewish organizations and community groups in the United States. Though many of these calls were interrupted, a great many

Jewry, a nationwide event, attracted the attention of Jews and non-Jews alike in over 100 communities across the United States. Several hundred thousand people attended marches, rallies, prayer meetings and other events in an expression of unity with Soviet Jews.

In view of the tremendous groundswell of individual concern, as well as the dramatic evidence of non-partisan political support for Soviet Jewry, it is clear that the Republican party must continue to voice its concern on behalf of the American people with respect to the problem of Soviet Jewry; and we recommend the inclusion of a strong position on Soviet Jewry in the Republican platform. It must be made clear that the American people are not willing to sacrifice Soviet Jews, and that the Republican Party is committed to exert every effort on their behalf. Specifically, we recommend the following:

1. Prior to President Nixon's trip to Moscow, a number of Soviet Jews requested permission to meet with the President or to hold small demonstrations. As a result of that request, these Jews have been singled out for draft call-up, arrest and detainment. Soviet Jews must not be penalized because an American President visits the Soviet Union. We urge that President Nixon speak out immediately on behalf of those Jews who, because they desired to meet with him, have been arbitrarily persecuted. (See Appendix III, IV.)

2. With respect to the harassment of Soviet Jews, the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate freely to Israel and elsewhere, and the right of Soviet Jews to have a full cultural and religious life while remaining in the Soviet Union, we urge that the Republican Party and its candidates undertake to communicate the concern of the Republican Party and of all the American people to Soviet officials. Communication with regard to these matters must be strenuous and consistent, for it is clear that the American people have issued a mandate to their elected representatives to exert broad efforts on behalf of Soviet Jews.

3. While we welcome the expansion of economic ties with the Soviet Union, the position of the Soviet Union with respect to its Jewish population is unacceptable to the American people and is a deterrent to the stated goals of both nations for detente. Expanding trade must be seized as an opportunity to place the issue of Soviet Jewry on the agenda of talks between Soviet government officials and United States businessmen and government officials.

4. In order to insure that cultural exchange with the Soviet Union is not compromised by their refusal to permit Jewish artists, scientists, and cultural leaders to come to this country, we urge that the Republican Party make it clear that the United States will not support a cultural exchange program which discriminates against Soviet Jews.

5. We urge that the Republican Party pledge to press the issue of Soviet Jewry before international bodies, particularly the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The Republican Party should commit itself to presenting the Soviet Jewry problem as a priority agenda item before international organizations.

A P P E N D I X

- I. There are now 39 Jewish prisoners of conscience languishing in Soviet labor camps. While their sentences vary from two years to fifteen years, their alleged crimes are similar. In most cases they openly expressed their desire to emigrate to Israel and the incriminating evidence presented at their trials included books on Jewish subjects. The following is a list of those in prison:

Altman, Anatolii	Kuznetsov, Eduard
Azernikov, Boris	Levit, Semyon
Bodnia, Mendl	Mendelevich, Iosif
Boguslavskii, Viktor	Meshener, Iosif
Borisov, Igor	Mogilever, Vladimir
Butman, Hillel	Murzhenko, Alexsei
Chernoglaz, David	Palatnik, Raiza
Dreizner, Shlomo	Penson, Boris
Dymshits, Mark	Renert, Chaim
Fedorov, Iuri	Shepshelevich, Mikhail
Frolov, Oleg	Shpilberg, Arkadii
Galperin, Aleksandr	Suslenskii, Iakov
Glezer, Ilya	Trakhtenberg, Lazar
Goldfeld, Anatolii	Trakhtenberg, Emilia
Grilius, Shimon	Voloshin, Arkadii
Kaminskii, Lassal	Vudka, Iuri
Khnokh, Leib	Vudka, Valerii
Kirshner, Kharri	Yagman, Lev
Kornblit, Lev	Zalmanson, Izrail
Kornblit, Mikhail	Zalmanson, Silva
Kukui, Valerii	Zalmanson, Vulf

- II. Recent cases of arrests of Soviet Jews evoke memories of the punitive trials held last year and the year before. Again, the "crime" of those involved was application for visas to go to Israel.

- A. The first case is that of Ilya Glezer, a 41-year-old scientist. A candidate in Biological Sciences, he has published a number of works on the morphology of the brain.
- B. Yuli Brind, 41 years old, was charged and tried for "slandering the Soviet system," including defense of Israel's position in the war of June, 1967. Brind was held in a mental institution and was later transferred to jail. His trial, to which none of his friends was admitted, resulted in a two-and-a-half-year sentence.
- C. Vladimir Markman of Sverdlovsk was a senior engineer until pressures at work, because he had applied to go to Israel,

IV. At the time of President Nixon's arrival in the Soviet Union, several key Jewish activists were arrested. They had presented a petition signed by 300 Moscow Jews to the American Embassy. All had been harassed previously. For example, Vladimir Slepak, who lost his job as an electronics engineer, was then threatened with charges of "parasitism" (it is against Soviet law not to be employed). He was forced in the end to take a job as a knife sharpener.

Those arrested in Moscow were:

Viktor Polsky	Vladimir Prestin (detained an additional
Vladimir Slepak	Iosif Begun ten days)
Roman Rutman	Aleksandr Slepak
Lev Libov	Leonid Tsy-pin
Valentin Prusakov	

All had received supportive telephone calls from abroad, and consequently their phones were disconnected and are still unusable. They and their families have thus been isolated by the Soviet authorities.

Those arrested in other cities were:

LUTSK

Komarovsky (first name unknown). Sentenced to two and a half years for claiming that "Israel was not an aggressor."

KHARKOV

Konstantin Skoblinsky, Solomon Grinberg, Kerbel (first name unknown) -- warned not to leave the city during President Nixon's visit.

KIEV

Lazar Slutsky -- detained.

LENINGRAD

Valery Panov -- Sentenced to ten days on charges of "hooliganism."

SVERDLOVSK

Leonid Zhabelizensky

ODESSA

Grigori Bergman -- arrested because he defied military call-up.  
Yuri Poch -- Sentenced to 3 1/2 years in labor camp.