

How the Movement Was Funded

Michael Beizer

On January 2, 1986, the *aliya* activist Vladimir Lifshitz was arrested and imprisoned in Leningrad. Reacting quickly to the crisis, the family of the late Academician Vladimir (Yerahmiel) Yoffe, who had often supported Jewish causes in the past, offered to provide a living allowance to the wife and children of the accused man. The response, to their surprise, was: “Thank you so much—but they are already receiving aid.”¹ The Yoffes did not know that by that time an effective support network had been established for Soviet Prisoners of Zion and *aliya* activists.

The Sensitivity of the Topic

No meaningful movement can be sustained without funding. Already in the movement’s early stages, in the late 1960s, activists in at least three cities—Moscow, Leningrad, and Riga—had a kitty at their disposal. When its “treasurer” received an exit permit, he would transfer the money to a successor. David Khavkin received his exit permit in July 1969 and consigned to Meir Gelfond the money that he had accumulated for purposes of Zionist activity. Gelfond also had a small sum in his possession from before the Six-Day War, and he received a further sum from Yosef Khorol who brought it with him when he left for Israel in 1969 (money that had reached Riga from Israel via Poland). As early as 1957, a number of former

1. This is how Boris Kelman, another Jewish activist, related the incident to the author in January 1986. On the Yoffe family, see: Berta Yoffe, *Semeinye zapiski* (Haifa, 2003).

Prisoners of Zion had received money from the Israeli Embassy, which they used for Zionist activity. A further sum was brought to Gelfond a year later—from Poland—which he was instructed to divide in equal portions with two other former Prisoners of Zion, Mordechai Shenkar in Lvov and Yosef Urman in Chernovtsy; the three agreed to use all the money for the cause. This and the following sums received from the Israelis constituted the first capital that the embryonic movement had at its disposal. Some of it went to help individuals who were in financial straits after applying to leave (e.g., Yiddish writer Yosef Kerler); some went to finance the three first samizdat books or brochures that were produced in Riga in 1963—one the poems of Bialik in Russian translation, another Jabotinsky's "Feuillets," and the third a shortened version of Leon Uris's *Exodus*. Three hundred copies of each were brought to Moscow for distribution in the capital, Kiev, Minsk, and the Urals. Some of the money still remained when the movement crystallized in 1969.² All this money, together with that received from Hebrew teachers, amounted at this point to about 1,500 rubles.³

The financial aspects of the Zionist and, more generally, the Jewish, national movement in the USSR remain largely uncharted territory for historians. Most scholars have preferred to avoid the issue,⁴ apparently out of apprehension that speaking of money matters might cast aspersions on the movement's ideological image. I attempted to address the issue in preliminary fashion in my article on the Relief-in-Transit package program for Soviet Jewry.⁵ The matter of material aid to the movement has been touched upon in various informal studies,⁶ memoirs,⁷ and interviews with *aliya* ac-

2. Interview by Yaacov Ro'i with Meir Gelfond, January 26, 1982.

3. Interview by Yossi Goldstein with Meir Gelfond, July 27, 1980.

4. The financial side of the movement is discussed only briefly in the comprehensive study by Benjamin Pinkus, *National Rebirth and Reestablishment: Zionism and the Zionist Movement in the Soviet Union, 1947–1987* (in Hebrew) (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Center and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1993).

5. Michael Beizer, "Assisting the Jews of Poverty and Struggle: The Post-WWII Relief-in-Transit Program of the AJJDC and Israel's 'Nativ' for the Soviet Jewry Emigration Movement (the 1950s–1970s)," in *Evreiskaya emigratsiya iz Rossii, 1881–2005*, edited by Oleg Budnitskii (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008), 220–40.

6. See Tom Shachtman, *I Seek My Brethren: Ralph Goldman and "The Joint"* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2001); Yuli Kosharovskiy, *My snova evrei: Ocherki po istorii sionistskogo dvizheniia v byvshem Sovetskom Soiuze* (We are Jews again: Reflections on the history of the Zionist movement in the Soviet Union), 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 2007–9).

7. E.g., see a remarkable book containing thirty-six essays and interviews of Mos-

tivists.⁸ However, even then its significance is often downplayed. When the Moscow religious leader Ilya (Eliyahu) Essas was asked directly about the financial basis of his activities, he avoided an explicit answer: “People gave me old books, for free of course.” “What about the summer camp [for children]?” “The parents themselves paid for that.” “All of it?” “Well, say someone had an expensive camera—that could be sold for 1,000 rubles; that was a big help. But that definitely was not the most important thing.”⁹

It is also feared that a further investigation of financial and operational aspects may open a Pandora’s Box of old quarrels among members of the movement and allegations of illicit financial operations, corruption, and the unauthorized allocation of funds. Still worse, by emphasizing the topic we are seemingly backing the Soviet claim that the *aliya* movement activists were nothing more than paid agents of foreign intelligence services. Nonetheless, I have resolved to tread this minefield and explore this sensitive but critically important issue.

This chapter addresses the following questions: What were the sources of funding for the movement, and which of these were the more important ones? What was the mechanism of the external funding, and what were the amounts of the aid provided? How were the funds actually distributed and spent? What was assigned for spending on “public needs,” and what was considered individual help? What kind of accounting or auditing of public funds existed, if any? What was the reaction of the Soviet authorities to the flow of foreign material aid to the movement? What impact did foreign aid have on the refusenik community? I also attempt to trace the changes in all aspects of funding at different stages of the movement’s evolution.

The Movement’s Financial Needs

The movement needed money for a number of major purposes: assistance to those who received emigration permits to pay their way through the

cow activists: Erlena Matlina et al., *Iz proshlogo k nastoiashchemu, Rossiia—Izrail’*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Machanaim, 2006).

8. See Aba Taratuta’s interview with Natalia and Gennady Khasin -http://www.angelfire.com/sc3/soviet_jews_exodus/Interview_s/InterviewKhasin.shtml.

9. Interview by Mina Fenton with Eliyahu Essas, Oral History Division, 1987, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For Essas’s summer camp, see also chapter 11 of the present volume, “Judaism and the Jewish Movement,” by Simeon Charny.

cumbersome and expensive emigration process; aid to Prisoners of Zion and their families; fees to lawyers for the legal defense of prisoners; medical aid to the infirm and to victims of police and KGB beatings; aid to refuseniks who lost their jobs; the production and copying of samizdat (illegal uncensored) materials, including Hebrew textbooks; expenses for a variety of educational and cultural activities, including collective celebration of Jewish festivals, running Jewish schools, kindergartens and summer camps, and holding seminars; subsidies for kosher food for observant activists and others who returned to Judaism; and travel expenses for contacts between activists in different cities for the coordination of activities, mutual support, delivering samizdat, and so on.

On occasion, too, funds were requested for less conventional expenses. Thus, in the late 1970s, the Chicago Council for Soviet Jewry received a request for a sizable donation needed to bribe a local emigration official. The money was collected and sent.¹⁰

The following was a typical case where material aid was crucial. The former Moscow Prisoner of Zion Yosef Begun recalls that after submitting his application for emigration in 1971, his normal life as a Soviet citizen was over; he lost everything—his scientific work, his colleagues, and many friends. “How does one sustain oneself? Who is [ever] going to hire a ‘black-listed traitor’? Back then, refuseniks were not yet receiving assistance from abroad.”¹¹

Sources of Funding

The financial resources available to the Soviet Jewish movement fell into two categories: internal (funds raised within the USSR), and external (money received from abroad).

Internal Funding

Internal funding was the major source of support at the dawn of the movement. In the 1960s, occasional voluntary contributions by participants and

10. Author’s telephone interview with Pamela Cohen, former president of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry and of its Chicago chapter, November 2007.

11. Yosef Begun, “The Hard Path to Myself,” in *Iz proshlogo k nastoiashchemu* 1:27. Begun is, of course, referring to himself and the people he knew at that time.

sympathizers constituted the main source of funds. The Riga activist Leah Slovin remembers how they funded the copying of a home-made Russian translation of Leon Uris's *Exodus* intended for distribution among trusted fellow Zionists:

After we printed a batch of copies on a typewriter, we had to dump the machine in the River Daugava so that the KGB would never find it, and then buy a new one. . . . And we had a big problem with money. We occasionally approached well-to-do Jews, those we could trust, for help—though some did not want to become involved and others were too afraid. Back then we did not receive anything from the [Israeli] Embassy. . . . We had it hard.¹²

Leah recollects an instance when her husband Boris arrived in Moscow and asked the Moscow activist David Drabkin for funds to purchase a new typewriter. Drabkin thought a bit and then reached into a wardrobe and pulled out the required sum. Boris saw Drabkin's wife turn pale. It was the money saved for her new coat.¹³ At the same time, Yosef Khorol, also of Riga, helped fellow activists in other cities to reproduce *Exodus*. He recalls giving 500 rubles to David Chernoglaz in Leningrad, 300 rubles to activists in Kiev, and further sums to Meir Gelfond in Moscow and to Avraham Shifrin in his native Odessa.¹⁴ Vitaly Svechinsky also transferred 1,500 rubles to Leningrad to help cover the cost of preparing publications.¹⁵

At the 1971 Riga trial, Boris Maftser was questioned as to where Riga Zionists obtained the means for producing samizdat. The answer was: "From selling (Hebrew) textbooks. There were also voluntary contributions." Prosecutor: "Did you receive money from [Rigan Jewish activist David] Zilberman?" Maftser: "Yes, 500 rubles." Prosecutor: "Was he aware that

12. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 1:265. In Moscow, too, one of the main needs was the purchase of typewriters—interview by Goldstein with Gelfond.

13. Author's conversation with Leah Slovin, February 2008.

14. Interview by Yaacov Ro'i with Yosef Khorol, May 13, 1976. Earlier on, Gelfond had transferred money to Khorol; see below.

15. The money was given to Lassal Kaminsky, who went to Moscow to get it in May 1970; report on the second Leningrad trial, May 1971, in *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soiuze (1969–1971)* (Anti-Jewish Trials in the Soviet Union; Russian), edited by A. Rozhansky (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry 1979), 1:323, 390, 438.

the money would be used for the production of anti-Soviet literature?” Maftser: “Yes. He also gave us a typewriter.”¹⁶

Another source of internal funding was membership fees. In Leningrad all members of the underground Zionist organization, which was founded in the autumn of 1966, paid 3 rubles per month—about a day’s wages of a young engineer.¹⁷ This was scarcely enough for anything. So, as of April 1970, the fee was raised to 5 rubles.¹⁸

Activists in Moscow and in Riga preferred not to create a formal structure, which could incur far more severe punishment. A member of the Leningrad organization, Arkady (Aharon) Shpilberg, who had moved to Riga, was similarly against founding an organization in Riga like the one he had left (“Why should we help Soviet ‘justice’?”). At his trial Shpilberg adamantly denied collecting membership fees in Riga.¹⁹ Even today, in his interview with Yuli Kosharovsky, he tries to avoid the term “membership fees,” though somewhat lamely: “What does ‘membership fees’ mean? We did collect money in Riga. Yet, there is no need to call this ‘membership fees.’” But a few lines later, he admits: “I collected membership fees from four people.”²⁰ In Sverdlovsk, some self-financing was also carried out by collecting donations from activists in accordance with each individual’s means.²¹

The sale of samizdat and Hebrew textbooks and the collecting of fees for Hebrew lessons were two further methods of raising money. In Moscow, David Khavkin sold Uris’s *Exodus* for 10 rubles a copy.²² Answering the judge at his court hearing, Arkady Shpilberg admitted: “We collected money for studying Hebrew and for tape cassettes to record Jewish music.”²³ In Leningrad, at first, Hebrew classes were either free, or, alternatively, a merely symbolic sum was charged.²⁴ Even when all this money

16. “The Riga Trial,” in *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soyuze (1969–1971)*, 1:607, 609.

17. Author’s interview with David Maayan (Chernoglaz), November 2007; author’s conversation with Hillel Butman, December 2007.

18. In Kiev, too, in the late 1960s activists paid membership dues of 5 rubles per month—conversation between Yaacov Ro’i and Anatoly Gerenrot, March 8, 2010.

19. *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soyuze (1969–1971)*, 1:627.

20. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:39–40.

21. Pinkus, *National Rebirth and Reestablishment*, 295.

22. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 1:310.

23. *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soyuze (1969–1971)*, 1:627.

24. Author’s interview with David Maayan, November 2007.

was directed to public requirements, and the teachers volunteered their time, the amounts were negligible.

Donations by prospective emigrants became an important source of support in 1971, when many Jews emigrated without being able to take their savings with them. Already in 1970, Tina Brodetskaya and her parents, who sold their apartment in central Moscow, left all their savings and the money they received for their apartment to produce further copies of *Exodus*.²⁵ Some of those who were leaving, in fact, contributed sizable amounts to the activists who stayed behind. Jews from Lvov, Kiev, and Moscow who were leaving for Israel provided donations to the movement. When Mikhail Zand sold his apartment on the eve of his departure, he returned to the movement's kitty the 4,000 rubles he had received as assistance to pay his emigration expenses.²⁶ An emigrating scientist from Novosibirsk left a large sum, and well-to-do Georgian Jews granted permission for *aliya* occasionally donated significant amounts as well.²⁷ These were times when the donors did not count on any reimbursement upon their reaching Israel.

Of the 600 rubles Khavkin left behind, 500 came from Georgia. Over time, donations by wealthy Georgian Jews became an important source for the movement. In the summer of 1970, to help with the forthcoming trial of those involved in the hijacking attempt, Bentsion Yakobishvili from Tbilisi brought the Moscow activists the huge sum of 14,000 rubles, to be followed somewhat later by a further 26,000 rubles.²⁸

Internal sources of funding gradually ceased to exist in the 1970s, with the advent of very substantial foreign support.

External Funding

Funds from abroad came from the following sources: Israel's Nativ; the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC);²⁹ Western organizations

25. Interview by Yaacov Ro'i with Tina Brodetskaya, September 2, 2009.

26. Interview by Yaacov Ro'i with Michael Zand, March 8, 2009.

27. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 1:310–11, and 2:425.

28. Interview by Goldstein with Gelfond.

29. For the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's post–World War II war activities in the USSR, see Michael Beizer, "The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, vol. 1, edited by Gershon David Hundert (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 39–44; Michael Beizer and Mikhail Mitsel, *The American Brother: The "Joint" in Russia, the USSR and the CIS* (Moscow: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 2004); Beizer, "Assisting the Jews"; Michael Beizer, "'I Don't Know Whom to Thank': The American

for Soviet Jewry, including the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, all based in the United States;³⁰ the Committee of the Thirty-Fives, based in the United Kingdom; Israeli semipublic and public organizations, such as the Public Council for Soviet Jewry, established on the initiative of Nativ; Ha'Ivrim, a grassroots organization of immigrant Hebrew teachers from the Soviet Union founded in Israel in 1972, which collected second-hand Hebrew textbooks and sent them to Moscow Hebrew teachers;³¹ the Habad-Lubavitch movement and other Jewish religious organizations; Christian and missionary organizations; and private donations.

The assistance provided by these organizations took the following forms: parcels containing clothing and footwear sent by mail; money transmitted by mail order; electronic equipment and sometimes cash, brought as “presents” by Jewish emissaries of the above-mentioned organizations; Jewish ritual objects, kosher products, and books brought by “tourists,” for as Eliyahu Essas testifies, everyone who needed phylacteries (*tefillin*) received a set—thanks to foreign support;³² money from well-to-do Soviet Jewish emigrants who received reimbursement in foreign currency from one of the above-mentioned organizations upon reaching their destination;³³

Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Secret Aid to Soviet Jewry in Post-Stalinist USSR,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 111–36; Oscar Handlin, *A Continuing Task: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1914–1964* (New York: Random House, 1964); Shachtman, *I Seek My Brethren*; Mikhail Mitsel, “Programmy Amerikanskogo evreiskogo ob’edinennogo raspredelitel’nogo komiteta v SSSR. 1943–1947 gg.,” *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta* 8, no. 26 (2003): 95–122; and Mikhail Mitsel, “The Activity of ‘the Joint’ in Mukachevo in 1944–1945 and the Soviet Attitude toward It in 1953,” *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 1, no. 58 (2007): 5–39.

30. For the American Movement for Soviet Jewry and its component organizations, see, e.g., Fred A. Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005); and Henry Feingold, “Silent No More”: *Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish Effort, 1967–1989* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

31. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:236–40. Sending Hebrew textbooks was intended to save the funds needed for reproducing them in the Soviet Union, along with evading the risks involved.

32. Interview by Mina Fenton with Eliyahu Essas.

33. When a person left money counting on reimbursement in Israel, then it should be considered as external funding for the movement, as distinct from contributions without expectation of reimbursement—mostly out of ideological considerations—which were internal finding (see above).

and money transferred via the Dutch Embassy in Moscow, which represented the interests of the State of Israel in the Soviet Union after the severance of diplomatic relations in 1967.³⁴

The Relief-in-Transit Program

Virtually all financial and material support sent to the USSR via Nativ was JDC-funded. This funding was provided within the framework of a secret program called Relief-in-Transit (RIT), which operated throughout Eastern Europe for forty years after its launching in the 1950s. Because a major part of the RIT budget derived from German reparation money, which the JDC received through the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, it bore the nature, as it were, of welfare assistance to Holocaust survivors.³⁵ In the first two decades of RIT's operation, it focused on welfare cases in the "Western territories" annexed by the USSR in 1939 and 1940, and on former prisoners and deportees from these territories, because these people were less afraid to receive foreign aid than Jews in the Soviet interior and their addresses were easier to obtain, and because there were *landsmanschaften* in Israel and in the West to lobby for them.³⁶

From 1974 through 1977, the overall budget of the RIT Soviet chapter increased from \$2.6 million to \$4.5 million and continued to increase. Although other organizations contributed their share, it was primarily RIT aid—in the form of individual parcels, money transfers, gifts via tourists, and the maintenance of the public trust funds—that became the financial cornerstone of the Jewish movement in the USSR.

34. For the payment of loans to would-be emigrants through the Dutch Embassy in Moscow in conformity with instructions from the Israeli government, see Petrus Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration from the Soviet Union, 1967–1990* (Washington, D.C., and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 80–81; and Nechemia Levanon, *Codename Nativ (Nativ Was the Code Name)* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995), 391–93.

35. Beizer, "Assisting the Jews," 220–40, esp. 222–24; Beizer, "'Don't Know,'" On the Claims Conference, see Ronald W. Zweig, *German Reparations and the Jewish World: A History of the Claims Conference*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

36. Beizer, "Assisting the Jews," 224–25. *Landsmanschaften* are associations of people coming from the same town or area.

Parcels

RIT's most important component was the parcel program. Parcels containing clothing and footwear intended for sale were sent via Western mailing firms that held licenses with the Soviet Vneshposyltorg (External Postal Authority). In the 1960s, parcels were mailed by the London gift shipping firm "Dinerman and Co." The JDC also supported smaller parcel programs such as that of the "Association of Baltic Jews in Great Britain" based in London, as well as a Habad-Lubavitch program.³⁷ In the 1970s and 1980s, other shipping firms took part in the program—in Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Basel.

Nativ maintained the main database of parcel recipients and ran the administrative side of the operation—the purchase of goods, and arranging and monitoring their delivery. Yet the JDC was far from being a "passive sponsor" and was actively involved in all facets of this undertaking. It was hard and demanding work.

Parcels were being used for Zionist activity already before the Six Day War. Indeed, shortly before the Israeli Embassy left, Gelfond explained to a member of its staff that expenses were mounting and that the activists needed financial support above and beyond what could reach them via parcels.³⁸

Yet the parcels remained a valuable source of income. When a representative of Nativ serving in the Israel Embassy went to the seashore at Sochi in 1964, he found in the pocket of his bathing-suit a list of names and addresses of Jews wishing to receive parcels.³⁹ In the middle to late 1960s, David Chernoglaz learned that some elderly religious Jews in Leningrad, "splinters of former Jewish communities," were receiving parcels from abroad. However, Chernoglaz did not try to establish a connection with those people; nor were the recipients interested in publicizing themselves. However, in February 1969, the Riga Zionist Yosif Khorol, who was leaving for Israel, suggested that Chernoglaz compile a list of those people who were ready to receive parcels from abroad, so that the money secured from

37. Beizer, "Assisting the Jews," 223.

38. A small portion of the RIT program channeled through Nativ found its way to supporting Zionist activity in the Soviet Union already in the 1950s and early 1960s. This was the money consigned to former Prisoners of Zion by Nativ's emissaries in the Israeli Embassy; for these transfers, see above.

39. Communication between David Bartov and Yaacov Ro'i, February 11, 2010.

their sale could be used for “the common cause.” Chernoglaz gave Khorol a bunch of names, and in June the first parcels arrived.⁴⁰

At the second Leningrad trial in May 1971, the procuracy produced detailed testimony concerning overseas financing of the movement in the form of parcels. Various defendants—there were nine in all—had received parcels containing fur coats, suits, other clothing, fabrics, and shoes from Dinerman. A major part of the movement’s funds came from the sale of these goods. Recent immigrants to Israel from among the movement’s activists sought to help it by transferring valuable, permissible goods through Dinerman, with the expenses involved usually being covered by groups in Israel or Zionist groups in the United States, Britain, and other countries. The Leningrad movement treasurer Lassal Kaminsky admitted to having sold two fur coats received from abroad and depositing the proceeds in the organization’s kitty for further activity.⁴¹

After the 1970 hijacking attempt, the Zionist movement became stronger and went public, with its centers of activity located in Moscow and later also in Leningrad. This led the RIT administration to focus increasingly on the Sovietized, acculturated Jews of Russia proper, although these metropolises also became as of the mid-1970s major sources of *neshira* (dropping out). In any event, by 1979 the geographical distribution of the RIT program had shifted dramatically in favor of Jews in the Russian heartland.⁴² Thus, RIT was gradually transformed from a welfare program into a channel of support for the Zionist movement, and for cultural and religious activities.

By the mid-1970s, about half those who were receiving parcels were holders of invitations from Israel. The program administrators made every effort to deliver a parcel to each family that submitted a request for an invitation from Israel. Aba Taratuta, a long-term Leningrad refusenik and *aliya* activist, recalls:

It became known that shortly after the invitation from Israel, a parcel would arrive. Each parcel could be sold for 200 to 300 rubles [up to two

40. Author’s interview with David Maayan (Chernoglaz), November 2007; author’s conversation with Hillel Butman, December 2007.

41. Quoted by Leonard Schroeter, *The Last Exodus* (New York: Universe Books, 1974), 202–3. In Kiev, too, the proceeds from parcels went to the “cause”; see chapter 1 of the present volume, “The Surfacing of the Movement,” by Yacov Ro’i.

42. JDC Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter JDC Jerusalem), shipment (sh.) Geneva 3, box (b.) L24, folder (f.). 445 (RIT Programs): 5–6; sh. Geneva 1, b. 59A, f. United HIAS Service (UHS) Israel.

months' wages of a young engineer], which was a considerable help for people. To tell the truth, there were a few cases when people would use this [request an invitation just to receive the package], with no intention of emigrating. An *aliya* activist came to persuade me to start combating these "plunderers of the people's property," but I would not agree, as I felt that the losses were negligible compared with the enormous PR impact [produced by the parcels], so that these losses were bearable.⁴³

Larger parcels were sent to refuseniks who had lost their jobs as a result of their expressed desire to emigrate and to the families of Prisoners of Zion. In 1976, the RIT administration listed 1,000 special cases—Jewish activists and leaders, Prisoners of Zion, a small number of general dissidents, and Jews in extreme financial need, as well as persons whose ability to emigrate was made conditional on the repayment of large debts. These categories would receive especially extensive financial support.⁴⁴ A total of 30,000 to 40,000 parcels were received each year in the mid-1970s in more than 800 locations throughout the USSR;⁴⁵ in 1984, this number exceeded 81,000.⁴⁶

Money Transfers

In the early 1970s, the RIT program also transferred money to Jewish activists, frequently via Switzerland. These transfers were very heavily taxed by the Soviet authorities; whatever was left after taxation would be issued in "ruble certificates"—vouchers for which expensive, imported items could be purchased at special stores of the Vneshposyltorg at a low price. These vouchers were invented in order to collect foreign currency from Soviet citizens who traveled abroad on business; therefore, the compensation had to be meaningful. A Moscow religious leader Vladimir (Zeev) Dashevsky reflects on his experiences:

Refuseniks led a rather peculiar existence in those days. They were few in number and received quite a lot of support. While they were usually short of cash, they had ruble certificates with which they could make

43. Aba Taratuta's testimony to the author, November 17, 2007.

44. Memorandum for File, January 6, 1976; JDC Jerusalem, sh. Geneva 2, b. 332B, f. RIT 1970–71.

45. Beizer, "Assisting the Jews," 233.

46. Beizer, "American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee," 43.

purchases at “currency” shops—so there was never a shortage of expensive imported liquor.⁴⁷

Money transfers played the role of SOS relief—for those who did not have the time or could not sell items included in their parcels—and for those who lived in cities where such voucher stores operated. The families of those who were arrested following the hijacking attempt, along with many refuseniks, received aid in this form.

Gifts and Money from “Tourists”

A well-established routine for transferring material aid to Soviet Jews was to send goods via emissaries posing as tourists, whose travel was partly or fully funded by Nativ or an American or some other Western Soviet Jewry organization, especially the Union of Councils.⁴⁸ The tourists sent by Nativ, on the RIT budget, were frequently Israelis holding a second passport. Tourists brought expensive cameras, watches, and tape-recorders, as well as clothes and footwear. Upon their return, they brought with them vital information on the state of affairs within the movement, and dozens of new requests for invitations and material assistance. Two messages brought back by tourists sent by Nativ, who traveled to Moscow, Kiev, Novosibirsk, and Leningrad in July 1974, read: “Anna Berkovsky (Novosibirsk), young single mother with small child, both parents arrested on allegations of fraud.” “Assist the father of Aleksandr Feldman, Kiev. Aleksandr was recently arrested.”⁴⁹

Aba Taratuta testifies that the gifts brought by tourists in fact became a major source of support. He used to distribute most of these items to those in need, in the name of Lynn Singer (of the Long Island Committee of the Union of Councils), and sold the remaining items for “public needs.”⁵⁰

The former president of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry, Pamela Cohen, recalls that the majority of this organization’s funds went to delivering such aid. Sending a couple of tourists to the USSR from the United

47. Vladimir (Zeev) Dashevsky, “My Way to Tora,” in *Iz proshlogo k nastoiashchemu*, 1:80.

48. Although this section appears under the caption RIT, many tourists in fact came to the USSR under the auspices not of Nativ, but of groups connected to the Soviet Jewry movement in the West.

49. Report by M. & A.F., J.& L.K. to Nativ; author’s collection.

50. Taratuta’s testimony to the author.

States could cost \$5,000 to \$6,000; about \$4,000 went toward the tickets, hotels, and other expenses, and the rest was spent on goods that the tourists brought with them. The Chicago Council alone, which was far from being the largest chapter, sent about twenty-five couples per year, at a cost of \$100,000 to \$120,000 annually, of which about \$30,000 reached Soviet Jews in the form of presents.⁵¹

The former Leningrad activist, mathematician, and poet Yuri Kolker recalls:

Guests from the free world with presents for sale would appear. A painful moment: to take or not to take them? We had to accept overcoming shame. Our guests would not understand otherwise; also it was hard to manage on 110 rubles a month, a stoker's salary before taxes. They brought small things (like inexpensive tape-recorders or gold chains) and not so small ones: a Nikon camera cost 1,000 rubles, which meant five months' budget for our family. But expensive things were usually intended for a group of people, not just for one man. A blood pressure monitor was a real treasure for Tanya and me, as she developed hypertension after surgery.⁵²

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) functioned on a limited budget; its help focused rather on generating public response. As Glenn Richter, the former national coordinator of SSSJ, testifies:

Because our own SSSJ budget was so small, and our funding so erratic, there was never any formal budget line for this assistance, and we were careful not to put these matters into published writings. But for decades we solicited goods such as Levi jeans and Marlboro cigarettes which we sent along with travelers to the USSR to give to refusenik and prisoner [*sic*] families. We asked travelers to additionally supply these items themselves or ask others to supply them.⁵³

Sometimes tourists brought money as well. In the early 1970s, Irene Manikovskiy of the Union of Councils showed up at the Taratuta home.

51. Author's telephone interview with Pamela Cohen. December 2, 2007.

52. Yuri Kolker, "Parkhatogo mogila ispraviv, ili Kak ya byl antisemitom," http://yuri-kolker.narod.ru/prose/IM_AS_1.htm.

53. Glenn Richter to the author, November 2007. I cannot speak for the activities of the National Conference in this field, as Jerry Goodman, its former executive, did not respond to my questions.

Upon her request, a group of refuseniks gathered, and she proceeded to write \$25 checks to each of them. These checks could be exchanged for “ruble certificates.”⁵⁴

Emissaries of Christian organizations also provided assistance. In 1980, Taratuta made the acquaintance of Esther Dorflinger, a Christian of Jewish origin from the United States, and later also met her Finnish colleague Maarika Røemer. On one occasion, Røemer arrived at Taratuta’s home and produced a pack of paper napkins, with 100 ruble bills slipped in among them—10,000 rubles in all! It was a big sum. An average salary was 170 rubles, and a [Soviet] car cost 5,000 to 7,000 rubles. The Taratutas were horrified, and they tried to impress on Røemer the degree of danger in which she had placed herself; they begged her never to do this again. However, she did not heed their advice and repeated the same operation a year or two later.⁵⁵

Naturally, there was a significant degree of correlation between the international renown of individual activists and the extent of funding they received. The better an individual was known abroad, the more emissaries would arrive at his or her door. There would even be competition between international organizations for certain “celebrities.” The “star appeal” of individual activists resulted not only from their activity inside the movement but also from their proficiency in English, their owning a nice apartment in the city center within easy reach of foreign visitors, and their high status in Soviet society before becoming a refusenik. Toward the end of the “refusenik era,” some “stars” actually complained that they were “sick and tired” of the constant stream of Western visitors.⁵⁶

Fund-raising involved “demonstrating” Jewish activity to the visiting emissaries, bringing them to kindergartens or Hebrew lessons, introducing students and other members of the refusenik social circle, and presenting samizdat publications to the guests. This enhanced the inflow of aid; however, the obvious downside was the danger of exposure and subsequent interference by the security forces. Indeed, work that was not funded was safer. To cite but one example, my own research seminar on Jewish history and culture, which continued for five years in the 1980s with no funding whatsoever, no public relations, and no visits by emissaries. Nobody ever tried to shut us down.

54. Taratuta’s testimony to the author.

55. *Ibid.*

56. David Horowitz, “Refuseniks Sick of Stream of Visitors,” *Jerusalem Post*, November 4, 1988.

Trust Funds

The emigration of a large number of Soviet Jews who could not transfer their savings abroad created another channel of financial support for the Soviet Jewish movement. It is well known that valuable items and money could not be taken out of the USSR by their owners—the maximum amount a person was allowed to exchange for foreign currency over the entire period from 1970 to 1989 equaled 100 rubles. For many well-off Jews in the USSR who sold their homes before leaving, and particularly perhaps for certain Georgian and Bukharan Jews, this created a very serious problem. But the leaders of the Jewish movement, aided by foreign organizations, mainly Nativ, devised a solution, simultaneously securing a significant source of funding for the Jewish movement.

The idea was for the emigrants to transfer their ruble savings to reliable members of the Jewish movement who managed trust funds. Upon arrival at their destination, the emigrants would receive reimbursement in foreign currency from a representative of Nativ or another organization, according to an exchange rate negotiated in advance. Pamela Cohen remembers several occasions when her organization transferred funds to private bank accounts in Israel as reimbursement to new *olim* who left their money in the USSR for the needs of the Jewish movement.⁵⁷

Among the Nativ trust fund custodians was Vladimir Prestin, who worked in cooperation with Tzilia Rightburd-Mengeritzky. Prestin managed the ruble end of the operation and financed cultural activities; Rightburd-Mengeritzky arranged for currency equivalents to be provided to the donors.⁵⁸ According to Prestin, the fund that he managed for a number of years was first run by Meir Gelfond, then by Michael Zand, and later by Viktor Polsky, who on leaving Moscow entrusted the fund to Prestin.⁵⁹

Nativ operated several such funds in the USSR, mostly in Moscow, which were run by a number of public fund custodians. Apart from Prestin, two other major funds were managed respectively by the Moscow activists Yuli Kosharovskiy (as of 1978; he had moved to the capital from Sverdlovsk in 1972) and Viktor Fulmakht. Nativ's Leningrad "agent" was Yosef

57. Interview with Cohen.

58. Author's telephone interview with Vladimir Prestin, November 2007; author's interview with Tzilia Raitburd-Mendzheritsky, November 4, 2007. Also see Tzilia and Emil (Milan) Mendzheritsky, "Sources: Choice of Destiny—Exodus," in *Iz proshlogo k nastoyashchemu*, 1:290.

59. Interview with Prestin.

Radomyslsky, a popular Hebrew teacher and organizer of Hebrew classes. Whereas Aba Taratuta mostly distributed presents from the Union of Councils, for the larger sums needed to help Prisoners of Zion, he went to Moscow.⁶⁰

The major distributor of funds to Prisoners of Zion in the 1970s was Ida Nudel. She started her work in 1972, when relatives of Prisoners of Zion were leaving for Israel and somebody had to take care of the prisoners. She started to correspond with the prisoners, as well as with the authorities on their behalf. But she could not simply send prisoners food parcels or visit them, because she was not a relative. So she helped the remaining relatives to do this. Viktor Polsky supplied a portion of these funds until his departure in 1974.⁶¹

When Nudel was arrested in 1978, Natalia (Natasha) Khasina took this responsibility upon herself. She recalls that when the distribution of material aid to prisoners “became ‘orphaned,’ and they had to be helped nonetheless, several people including myself attempted to set this channel in motion again. . . . I had a friend [in Israel], Dina Beilin. . . . Somebody who made *aliya* passed word to Dina that a worrisome situation had arisen: the boys [the Prisoners of Zion] have been left without help, and this has to be arranged. And Dina fixed this with Nativ, so that aid started to arrive.” Khasina testified that “most of the funding came from Israel. The Americans helped a lot, bringing cameras and other items. However, when a large sum was needed urgently—it was sent from Israel, in cash.”⁶²

Expenditures on Public Needs and Personal Use

The movement’s financial operations can be divided into *public* funding and *personal* support. Over time, the refusenik community’s perception of which category of foreign aid was designed for public needs and what was earmarked for “personal use” underwent a significant transformation.

The Zionist activists of the 1960s believed that all parcels, presents, and money from abroad should be used for public purposes only.⁶³ Leaving for Israel in early 1969, the Riga activist Yosef Khorol asked David Chernoglaz

60. Taratuta’s testimony to the author.

61. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:408–10.

62. Author’s interview with Natalia Khasina, November 2007.

63. Author’s interview with David Maayan, November 2007.

whether he would be prepared to receive a clothing parcel for public funding (see above). Two months later, along with his invitation to Israel, Chernoglaz received a parcel, followed by two more. Some of his friends also received parcels. All the money raised from selling the clothes was used for public purposes. Just one sweater, with an Israeli label, was not sold; Chernoglaz asked to keep it for himself, but not before paying its value to the organization's funds.

Following the wave of arrests in June 1970, the Leningrad Committee of Prisoners' Wives, led by Sima Kaminskaya and Eva Butman, tried to collect parcels received by other people from abroad, in order to use this aid for public purposes—namely, to support the prisoners. Some people turned in their parcels, but others chose not to follow suit. By the time Chernoglaz returned to Leningrad in 1975, after serving five years in the camps, foreign material support had increased substantially. By this time, however, it was accepted practice that parcels and money transfers would be used for personal rather than public support.⁶⁴

The Assignment of Public Funds

Although I have noted for what purposes the movement needed funds, it is pertinent to address an additional question: How was public money used in effect? The answer to this question depends on the period. In the 1960s, public funds were allocated almost entirely to reproducing Hebrew textbooks and other Jewish samizdat materials. One book that all Hebrew teachers and many students needed was Feliks Shapiro's Hebrew-Russian dictionary, which was published in Moscow in 1963. At one point in the late 1960s, Izia Shmerler located sixty copies of the dictionary in a Novosibirsk warehouse. He phoned Vladimir Slepak, who collected the necessary sum in Moscow and sent it to Novosibirsk.⁶⁵

When the All-Union Coordinating Committee was formed in 1969 in Moscow, the Jewish movement already had some funds (see above). Vitaly (Vilia) Svechinsky, who in 1969 and 1971 was a central figure in the movement, recalls that "those who faced financial difficulty could receive assistance—but not for travel, only for [technical] work."⁶⁶ All travel expenses were out of pocket.

64. Ibid.

65. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:125.

66. Ibid., 1:310.

Although the authors and editors of Jewish samizdat worked without pay, the costs of copying the books and journals for distribution, typing, and purchasing typewriters had to be paid for, although some of the “insider” typists also worked for free.⁶⁷ With the appearance of additional funds, the “ascetic” approach was mitigated. From the summer of 1970, with the scores of arrests following the hijacking attempt, a major item was added to the movement’s budget. Paying prisoners’ wives for typing was one way of supporting their family budget.⁶⁸

Aid to Prisoners of Zion

A vital component of support provided to Prisoners of Zion was legal representation. In the words of Natalia Khasina, it was clear to the activists that an attorney who took on a Jewish political case would request significant additional “off-the-book” fees. “We are talking about four-digit figures.” Yet,

whatever the expense, the significance of legal aid was enormous. Say, a person is locked up in a cell at the police interrogation unit, sometimes for six months or a whole year. He is completely cut off from the outside world. The prisoner’s lawyer is his only link to the outside world. Just as we on the outside cannot know anything about the progression of the case and the prisoner’s situation without the lawyer’s help, so the prisoner remains completely in the dark as to what is happening on the outside.⁶⁹

Although Soviet attorneys had far less authority and freedom of action than their Western colleagues, they were nonetheless able to procure milder sentences for their clients. In 1981, the Moscow activist Boris Chernobylsky, for instance, received “only” one year for allegedly striking a militiaman, rather than five, thanks to his attorney, who managed to convince the court to modify the charges for a lighter category. When, in 1980, Aleksandr Magidovich was on trial in Tula for the “dissemination of slander against the Soviet regime,” Khasina urged the same lawyer to take his case. Through his lawyer, Magidovich was connected with his refusenik friends (which

67. E.g., Silva Zalmanson (Riga) typed samizdat without any fee.

68. Interview by Ann Komaromi with Alexander Voronel, January 2008. I am grateful to Ann Komaromi for sharing this information with me.

69. Interview with Khasina.

meant connection with the West as well) and avoided many complications during his incarceration—including threats to his physical survival.⁷⁰

Medical aid delivered in time could manifestly save a prisoner's life. In Odessa in 1984, Yan Mesh was arrested and brutally beaten, which caused him to develop a critical liver dysfunction. In this condition, he was released, with the expectation that he would die at home (the KGB feared he would perish in prison—which would have unpleasant ramifications for the authorities). Within a day, Khasina and her friends were able to contact a famous Chinese physician in Moscow, who gave the proper medicine. Khasina then rushed Inna Elbert, a Kiev physician and wife of a Prisoner of Zion, to Odessa and traveled there herself with the medicine. The two women transported the patient to the capital, where the Chinese doctor gave him prolonged and effective treatment. An appreciable amount of money went toward this undertaking, and the young man's life was saved.

Food parcels for prisoners were another very important project: "We sent food products, as well as some 'souvenirs' for other convicts, like postcards of smiling girls, which would buy relative safety for our comrades in their confinement."⁷¹

Visits to prisons and camps by wives and friends raised the spirits of prisoners and were an important channel for supplying them with food and clothing. The visitor's trip with a companion could cost 2,000 rubles, including tickets, lodging, food for the travelers and the prisoner, and presents.⁷² Jewish solidarity expressed through material aid greatly impressed the prison authorities. This, without doubt, spared the prisoners a good deal of trouble. The Leningrad activist Vladimir Lifshits, arrested in January 1986, recalls that his wife Anya received money from different sources: from Taratuta, from Natasha Khasina, and from tourists. "When Anya flew all the way to Kamchatka to see me, the camp's superintendent said in front of the prisoners: 'Can your wives afford to fly here?'"⁷³

Some would require larger amounts of aid than others. For example, Galina, wife of Roald Zelichonok, Lifshits's friend, who was arrested half a year before him, would need a bit less help, as she received aid directly through emissaries. Conversely, the mother of Yury Fedorov, one of the

70. A superintendent of the camp where Magidovich served his sentence told him that he would see him (Magidovich) rot in jail, but what prevented this from happening was that the superintendent knew the Voice of America would report anything he did.

71. Interview with Khasina.

72. Ibid.

73. Author's conversation with Vladimir Lifshits, May 2008.

two non-Jewish defendants in the hijacking trial, “received nothing aside from what we were able to give her—so when she traveled to visit her son in prison, she needed help from A to Z—from tickets to food, even to adequate winter clothing.”

Aid to certain prisoners extended to purchasing housing. Thus, through Natasha Khasina, Nativ financed the purchase of two houses for Ida Nudel—one in Siberia, where she was exiled; and one in Bendery, Moldavia, where she was permitted to live after returning from exile. The Union of Councils paid for another house in Moscow Oblast for Mark Napshitz after his release.⁷⁴

Cultural Work and Education

A major area of public expenditures was cultural work. For instance, preparations for the aborted 1976 symposium on Jewish culture in the USSR involved significant expenses, including the travel costs of residents from the periphery to Moscow and the publication of conference materials.⁷⁵

Although, at the end of the 1960s, samizdat publications were funded from internal sources (see above), the journals of the 1970s and 1980s were mostly supported from abroad through activists who had access to foreign contributions. *Evrei v SSSR* (Jews in the USSR), *Tarbut* (Culture), *Leningradskii evreiskii almanakh* (Leningrad Jewish Almanac), and many other journals were published this way. Another field of “cultural” spending involved the reproduction of Hebrew textbooks and related materials. The Moscow activist Mikhail Nudler managed to find a professional photographer, an ethnic Russian, who photographed and reproduced textbooks in any number of copies. Vladimir Mushinsky, also in Moscow, who joined the movement in 1976, headed one of the largest underground Jewish samizdat “publishing houses.” About seventy typists, photographers, couriers, and “storemen” (people who concealed reproduced samizdat materials in their homes before distribution) worked for him. His activity was financed by Viktor Fulmakht, Vladimir Prestin, Yuli Kosharovsky, and Vladimir Geizel.⁷⁶ Aba Taratuta was one of the principal and long-term sponsors and distributors of samizdat publications in Leningrad. Yuri Shpeizman, Aba’s

74. Interview with Khasina.

75. For the symposium, see chapter 2 in the present volume, “Strategy and Tactics,” by Yaacov Ro’i.

76. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:373, 377–80.

right hand, employed typists, whom only he knew, for the reproduction of Hebrew textbooks, books of Sifriyat Aliya, and other samizdat material. “I consciously did not want to meet the actual producers of samizdat, so that under investigation, when they would stick needles under my nails, I would not betray my accomplices,” Taratuta remembers with a wry smile.

The establishment of a large underground Judaica library was another important element in Jewish cultural work in Leningrad. Taratuta recalls:

In 1981, when Isak Furshtein was leaving, we bought his huge—900-volume—Jewish library. Lynn Singer paid him \$3,000 upon his arrival in the United States. Then in 1987, we bought Leonid Belotserkovsky’s collection as well. Any double copies we either sold, or transferred to Yosef Begun—that was the beginning of Colonel Sokol’s Moscow Jewish Library.

Apart from reproducing samizdat and purchasing libraries, Taratuta financed a Holocaust historical expedition to Belorussia in 1988, which was led by Daniel Romanovsky and Aleksandr Frenkel.⁷⁷ This was also considered cultural work.

Raising children in conditions of “refusal” constituted an especially acute problem. To protect children from conflicts arising from their “special” status and to raise them as Jews, refuseniks organized their own kindergartens, schools, and summer camps, which of course needed funding.⁷⁸ The Moscow activists Slava and Mark Shifrin organized a kindergarten and a summer school. They were supported from abroad, for, while those who worked at the school worked for free, “educators at the kindergarten had to be paid. They worked around-the-clock; children would come on Monday and leave on Thursday evening.”⁷⁹

Emigration Expenses

As noted above, a parcel often arrived to those who applied for a *vyzov* to Israel. Its contents were normally sold, and the money thus received was used for emigration expenses. The cost of departure was high; as of October 1970, each emigrant had to pay 500 rubles for the compulsory forfeiture of

77. Taratuta’s testimony to the author.

78. For mention of summer camps in this connection, see note 8 above.

79. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:333–34. For the kindergartens, see also chapter 11, “Judaism and the Jewish Movement.”

his Soviet citizenship (as required by Soviet law) and a further 400 rubles for his exit permit,⁸⁰ plus the flight ticket to Vienna—not to mention the huge expense of transporting baggage, custom taxes on personal belongings, the family’s living expenses during the period of waiting for departure, and so on. Although a parcel could cover only a fraction of these expenses, its contribution was significant, and some families did not go to OVIR with their *vyzov* to apply for an exit visa until they received their parcel.⁸¹

Trust fund custodians provided special assistance to facilitate the emigration of released prisoners and their families. When David Chernoglaz was released from camp, a sum of money was waiting for him—enough to tide him over the several months until his departure for Israel. Alevtina Dymshitz, whose husband served fifteen years, received financial support from Jewish movement funds when her emigration permit was issued.⁸² One way or the other, nobody recalls a case when a Jew received an emigration permit but failed to make *aliya* due to a lack of the funds required to go through this lengthy and expensive process.

When the Soviet government introduced the extortionate “education tax” on emigrating Jews in 1972, the Israeli government arranged that Jews could “borrow” the necessary sum through the Dutch Embassy. For example, Aleksandr Belinsky, who emigrated from Leningrad at the end of 1972, received a large sum to pay for his education from the embassy.⁸³ To the best of my knowledge, no *oleh* was ever requested to reimburse this debt.

The Trust Custodian

The role of a trust fund custodian demanded confidence on the part of the money’s recipient, particularly in the case of a Prisoner of Zion or his or her

80. Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 80; Levanon says these payments began in March 1971; Levanon, *Codename Nativ*, 391. For the February 17, 1967, decree of the Presidium of the USSR of that emigrants to Israel are considered to have forfeited Soviet citizenship from the moment of their departure from the USSR,” see chapter 6 in the present volume, “Behind the Scenes,” by Edith Frankel.

81. Beizer, “Assisting the Jews,” 231–32.

82. Taratuta’s testimony to the author.

83. Information received by the author from Aba Taratuta, February 20, 2011. There seem not to have been many such cases, for Buwalda states that the Israeli and the U.S. governments “decided against providing the enormous sums of money that would have been needed”; Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 94. For the diploma tax, see chapter 6 of this volume.

family. This work was without doubt the most difficult and dangerous, and the most vulnerable to prosecution by the authorities, because the aid was intended for “criminals” and involved illegal transactions with formidable amounts of money.

The position of a fund custodian required a strong will, absolute self-control, and the ability to function under extreme stress. All decisions regarding the distribution of funds had to be made by one and the same person—the custodian—and in total secrecy. Natasha Khasina’s husband “neither knew where the money came from nor where it was kept. To him, this information was totally unnecessary.” The KGB “tried to pry him,” but “eventually was obliged to realize that he really did not know.”⁸⁴ Some custodians, however, consulted their most trusted friends and relatives.⁸⁵

The custodian-distributor was not accountable to anyone within the USSR. The obvious downside was the custodian’s vulnerability to allegations and accusations of improper management of funds or even fraud. Once marked, the custodian had no way of clearing himself or herself of the allegations, because disclosing the nature of his activity was clearly out of the question.

A purported “friend” of Khasina, a photographer who sold cameras received from the United States on her behalf, turned out to be a KGB informer. At a certain point, he circulated an insinuating letter in Jewish circles accusing Khasina of pocketing the money earned from selling the cameras. “I know for a fact how many cameras you sold last year. Where is the money, I ask you?” demanded the letter. Alik Yoffe, a mathematician refusenik, suggested to Khasina that they write an open letter and clear her of all allegations. “We know you are an honest woman and that you are sending the money to prisoners,” he insisted. But she refused categorically.⁸⁶

Although not accountable to anyone within the Soviet Jewish movement, those responsible for administering large funds were answerable to Nativ. Their reporting was inevitably sporadic and not particularly detailed, yet they provided a full accounting of their actions. As Khasina recalls, “I never received uncontrolled funds. If I requested large amounts, the request had to be justified. Sometimes a Nativ representative would visit and request a report. So I sat down and wrote a brief list of what was spent and

84. Interview with Khasina.

85. E.g., Prestin consulted frequently with his brother-in-law, Pavel Abramovich’ interview by Ann Komaromi with Pavel Abramovich.

86. Interview with Khasina.

how, and my report would be sent to Israel via the Dutch Embassy.”⁸⁷ Prestin also reported to Nativ. He does not recall receiving specific instructions as to how the money should be used or ever being reprimanded for using funds in one way or another.⁸⁸

The Regime’s Reaction to the Jewish Movement’s Financial Activities

Any financial activity inside the Jewish movement, whether internally or externally generated, was an aggravating circumstance from the authorities’ point of view. They were particularly exacerbated by the collection of membership fees which, among others, “proved” the existence of an underground organization. The indictment at the second Leningrad trial in May 1971 contained a scrupulously detailed enumeration of how many rubles each of the accused paid in membership fees, although the sums were not large—Hillel Butman, 129 rubles; Solomon Dreizner, 129; Lassal Kamin-sky, 82; and so on. Every contribution to support the needs of the movement was also investigated at the Riga trial in the same year (see above). Collecting membership fees also constituted incriminating evidence against the two Leningraders who were tried in Kishinev. At the Kishinev trial, too, the prosecution gathered every iota of evidence regarding the clothing parcels that the defendants had received from abroad and subsequently sold to pay for their activities. These facts were used to stiffen their sentence.⁸⁹

The consequences of foreign aid could be even worse. If the authorities were able to “prove” “profiteering” on foreign aid or claim that the aid was nothing more than “a fee for services rendered,” for example, “disseminating slander” against the Soviet social order, or engaging in anti-Soviet propaganda, not to mention gathering classified information for foreign intelligence services, gifts could damage or even ruin the lives of recipients rather than provide relief.

In 1974, Sender Levinzon of Bendery and his wife Tsilya, who was then pregnant with their second child, were both fired from their jobs and left without a means of survival. It was a punitive measure for their struggle for

87. Ibid.

88. Interview with Prestin.

89. *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soyuze (1969–1971)*, 1:322, 323, 324, 342, 383, 385, 389, 390, 609. Kosharovsky, *My snova evrei*, 2:69.

aliya. In this difficult situation, Sender started to receive parcels and money transfers from abroad. On receiving “ruble certificates,” he would purchase pieces of fashionable synthetic textiles (*crimplene*) or stockings at a Vneshposyltorg store, cut them into smaller pieces at home, and sell them at black market prices. “We had no other way out,” Tsilya Levinzon told the court when her husband was arrested and tried—and subsequently imprisoned—for profiteering.⁹⁰

The foreign organizations that aided Soviet Jews faced a dilemma: Was the gain greater than the risk? As the flow of aid continued, one can only conclude that most benefactors solved the dilemma affirmatively, calculating that the cost a few Soviet Jews had to pay could be justified by the far greater benefits the aid provided to the movement.

The authorities found it very difficult to discontinue the flow of parcels or presents brought by tourists. Both avenues were completely legal under international law. In many cases, the Soviets tried to intimidate the recipients of aid—either by applying direct personal pressure or by incitement in the press—into rebuffing their “unwanted benefactors.” Newspaper articles proclaimed that Western “handouts” were an offense to the honor of a Soviet citizen, that sending parcels was a cynical plot and a provocation by Cold War-mongers. Where a typical *Homo sovieticus* was involved, this intimidation could work. A number of such cases are documented in the JDC Archives in Jerusalem and are reflected in contemporary Soviet propaganda articles.⁹¹ However, such pressurization had little effect on the refusenik activists. For instance, Yuli Kosharovsky was brought to the Sverdlovsk KGB office in mid-1971, where he was informed that foreign currency remittances had arrived for him and it was suggested that he reject them. “Do you think, I’ll insult them by a rejection?” responded Kosharovsky. As a result, he received the 450 ruble certificates and was fired from his job.

Despite the intended secrecy of the RIT program, at least as early as 1971 the KGB knew who was paying for most of the parcels to Soviet Jews. According to the bill of indictment at the second Leningrad trial, “substantial sums of money were secured from selling clothing parcels which arrived for the members of the organization and for those closely connected to them from foreign Zionist circles through the British firm ‘Dinerman

90. “Sender Levinzon’s Trial, May 27–28, 1975,” in *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soyuze (1972–1975)* (Anti-Jewish Trials in the Soviet Union; Russian), edited by A. Rozhansky (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry, 1984), 3:294–98.

91. Beizer, “Assisting the Jews,” 231. JDC Jerusalem, sh. Geneva 1, b. 59B, f. 10.

and Company.’ The ‘Joint’s’ subsidies served a source of funding for the firm.”⁹² However, it took a very long time until the JDC was openly mentioned in the Soviet press in this regard, probably because this information derived from intelligence sources that could not be disclosed.

By the beginning of the 1970s, the authorities realized that more and more parcels were being sent to activists. When the U.S. Congress enacted the Jackson-Vanik and Stevenson amendments in December 1974, the Soviet government’s retaliation included blacklisting the leaders of the Jewish movement—Veniamin Levich, Aleksandr Lerner, Taratuta, and others—and intercepting parcels to them. On March 28, 1975, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party took the trouble to point out that parcels from abroad were “used by foreign Zionist propaganda as a means of inciting emigration tendencies among the Jewish population.”⁹³ Party committees from Kiev, Odessa, Lvov, and Chernovtsy oblasts were subsequently instructed to “develop and implement measures to limit or prevent delivery of parcels from abroad, enhance propaganda and ideological operations,” as well as “individual work” on the recipients of “despicable foreign handouts.”⁹⁴

Import taxes on merchandise included in the packages were doubled and tripled. Private money transfers were either abolished altogether or charged exorbitant fees—leaving almost nothing for the recipient. Instead of ruble certificates, transfers would be provided in regular rubles, at a ridiculous exchange rate.⁹⁵

In April 1981, the wife of the activist Viktor Brailovsky, who had been imprisoned on trumped-up charges of slandering the Soviet state and social system, was not given a foreign parcel containing warm clothes addressed to her husband. Nor was she granted the opportunity to obtain her husband’s written permission to receive the parcel. This was the way the investigator punished her for refusing to be questioned about her husband’s case.⁹⁶

From time to time, foreign visitors were followed and intercepted by police or security agents on their way to the homes of refuseniks, and their

92. “Second Leningrad Trial,” in *Antievreiskie protsessy v Sovetskom Soyuze* (1969–1971), 1:323.

93. Central Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAHO), Card Index of Resolutions of the Politburo and Secretariat of the Central Committee. The author thanks Mikhail Mitsel (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York) for this reference.

94. Beizer, “Assisting the Jews,” 233.

95. *Ibid.*, 233–34.

96. F. Austin, “Dissident’s Wife Charges Soviet Offered Deal for Her Testimony,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1981.

effects were confiscated or looted; sometimes they even took a beating in a dark street or corner. Simultaneously, the Soviet press lashed out fiercely at the Jewish emissaries. The “chase” continued throughout the 1980s. This is how *Leningradskaya pravda* described two Americans who tried to deliver much-needed relief to Aba Taratuta, under the heading “Peddlers of Zionism” (1984):

Phyllis Pacheko and Blanche Narbie, of New York City, were making their way to the taxi stand, bent under the weight of their huge rucksacks. Peering about nervously the whole way, they rolled into a remote city district, turned down the taxi driver’s offer of help, hauled up their heavy packs and disappeared into the darkness. . . .

Understandably suspicious, the taxi driver notified the police. It did not take long to track down the strange foreign “guests” and to enquire about the nature of their business and the content of their bags. And what a spread there was! From underwear to the most modern foreign-made cameras, even at first glance the “goods” carried by the “tourists” were clearly worth at least a four-digit amount. . . .

So this was another case of sneaky emissaries of international Zionism posing as innocent tourists—those who artificially cultivate the so-called Jewish problem and try to brew a petty nationalistic mood among Soviet citizens of Jewish ethnicity. With humiliating handouts, they try to encourage and entice the allegedly “oppressed,” those who became caught up in the bait of Zionism. This time, the emissaries were dispatched by the infamous, decidedly anti-Soviet Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry, with its headquarters in Washington.

One Lynn Singer, who acts as president of this ill-reputed organization, recruited Phyllis Pacheko and Blanche Narbie to carry yet another batch of “aid” to their addressee in Leningrad. The gentleman in question is Mr. A. Ya. Taratuta, a former engineer, who preferred to forgo his research in astronomy in order to become a stoker at a public bath and laundry enterprise—so he could better pose as an “unjustly oppressed” and “desperate victim.”⁹⁷

The “hostile” activity of the Joint received special attention. In 1981, the Minsk newspaper *Sovetskaia Belorussia* published an article headlined “Charity with a Dirty Trick” by the well-known anti-Zionist writer Vladi-

97. “Korobeinitsy ot sionizma,” *Leningradskaya pravda*, August 4, 1984.

mir Begun. The author wrote his article in the form of an answer to a reader who had purportedly inquired whether the Zionist organization, the “Joint,” known at the beginning of the 1950s “for its activities on behalf of the enemies of peace,” still existed. Begun showed how the receiver of charity became dependent on the donor, who would always demand a quid pro quo, “let’s say to find out something from somebody.” Begun went on to quote an Israeli Polish-language newspaper, which allegedly wrote: “The time has not yet come when all the details of the ‘Joint’s’ activities in various countries can be told,” explaining that these untold details “relate to the ‘Joint’s’ political and espionage activities.”⁹⁸

In the early 1980s, the KGB carried out a major crackdown against the dissident movement, aimed especially at the custodians and distributors of the Russian Relief Fund to Aid Political Prisoners. Valery Repin of Leningrad, an undercover worker of the Relief Fund, was arrested in December 1981—and forced to surrender lists of aid recipients. Sergei Khodorovich, who had been in charge of the Relief Fund since February 1980, was arrested in April 1983.⁹⁹ Simultaneously, the KGB ran a major operation designed to eliminate the Jewish movement’s financial resources.¹⁰⁰

The police showed up with search warrants five or six times at the Khasins. Prestin’s apartment was searched three times, and Taratuta’s once or twice. Every member of Khasina’s family—she, her husband, and their daughter—were subjected to round-the-clock surveillance. Their telephone was tapped, and their home was full of listening devices. Finally, in January 1985, the Moscow activist Dmitry Shapiro was arrested, and while in prison was forced to make a TV statement written for him by the KGB, wherein he made accusations against Khasina, Kosharovsky, Fulmakht, Aleksandr Kholmyansky, and Yuli Edelshtein. The statement was broadcast on July 26, 1985, a month after he received a suspended sentence and was released.¹⁰¹

Finally, there were cases when the police or security agents simply robbed the activists and pocketed the money. Tzilia Raitburd-Mengeritsky was once mugged—a bag with 80,000 rubles was grabbed out of her hand.

98. V. Begun, “Blagotvoritel’nost’ s podvokhom,” *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, March 3, 1981.

99. Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 380.

100. Interview with Khasina.

101. *Ibid.*

She filed a complaint, but the attackers were never found. The money disappeared forever into the pockets of police officers.¹⁰²

The Impact of Foreign Aid on the Refusenik Community

In the early years, until the end of the 1960s, aid from abroad was basically welfare assistance to those in need; Jewish activists were not yet receiving meaningful overseas support, apart from what was channeled through the Israeli Embassy (before June 1967, when relations were severed). In those years, the effect of parcels was most dramatic when they reached people who had hardly any other source of income. Eighty-two-year-old Sheine Lerner wrote from Vilnius in 1964: “My dear Jews, dear friends, . . . I have lost my entire family. I can no longer work. I have a monthly pension of sixteen rubles for my son who fell at the front. This is very little. But, thank God, every year I receive a present from you, so I have something for Passover and can somehow manage throughout the year.”¹⁰³

When large-scale *aliya* began, the parcels became an additional stimulus for many immigrants. Apart from the material benefit, they demonstrated Jewish solidarity. Foreign gifts embodied the promise of familial treatment and, it was hoped, support after emigration. As the Leningrad physicist Boris Rubinshtein put it in 1975 in his interview with *Maariv*, “This feeling that many kilometers away there were Jews who had never seen me and whom I had never seen, who cared about my fate and considered my struggle to be their struggle—was a healing drug.”¹⁰⁴

There is no doubt that without material aid from abroad, the struggle of Soviet Jews would have been far more painful and protracted, and far less effective, and would have demanded greater sacrifice—and possibly, claimed human lives. Nonetheless, it was just *aid*. There are no grounds for claiming that the struggle of Soviet Jewry was “ordered” or “paid for” by Israel or the West. Rather, the aid eventually found those who were making a stand for their rights. As one of the tourists said to the author when still in Leningrad in 1983, in response to my gratitude for the presents he brought: “Don’t mention it. You are on the front line; we are only suppliers.”

Foreign aid, at the same time, entailed certain negative consequences.

102. Interview with Raitburd-Mendzheritsky.

103. Quoted by Beizer, “Assisting the Jews,” 226.

104. *Ma’ariv*, July 26, 1974.

When, at the beginning of the 1970s, the movement's original leadership was mostly replaced by the succeeding generation, the transfer of control did not pass without a struggle for its financial resources—"inheritance disputes," so to speak. Those enjoying the trust of foreign organizations were able to add new names to the list of parcel recipients. They had the power to redirect the flow of foreign visitors from one refusenik to another.

These internal struggles gnawed at the movement from within. Aba Taratuta recalls that more than once he was approached by people who suggested either "doing justice," that is, taking from those who were receiving major assistance and redistributing aid to those who really needed it, or establishing a committee to supervise the distribution of foreign gifts. There were even instances of physical violence over the distribution of foreign aid.¹⁰⁵

Many interviews recorded in Israel claim that some Jewish activists used foreign public funding for personal gain.¹⁰⁶ A former Leningrad Prisoner of Zion, Yevgeny Lein (who was arrested in 1981), points to a group of "quiet profiteers" who drew a part of the tourist flow to themselves, and thus consumed the funds intended for the struggle:

The situation was worse with "quiet profiteers." They were quiet only when dealing with the menacing authorities, but they were deadly adversaries to Jewish activists. One of them, Lev Gandin, presented me with an ultimatum: "Either you stop seeing any foreign visitors and send them to me, in which case you will get your share of what they bring here, or we will pull the plug on you": We will tell everybody that it is unsafe to visit you.¹⁰⁷

In fact, a determined group could easily "cut" a person off from foreign aid by labeling him "an informer" (*stukach*) in the visitors' ears. Such a move inevitably demoralized and weakened the movement. Realizing this, the KGB seldom persecuted people with such designs for "speculation," preferring to exploit their "weak point" in order to recruit informers or "reliable" court witnesses.

Postfactum, some activists contend that superfluous foreign aid served

105. Interview with Aba Taratuta, November 2008.

106. Pinkus, *National Rebirth and Reestablishment*, 639 n. 21.

107. Evgeny Lein, *Lest We Forget: The Refuseniks' Struggle and World Jewish Solidarity* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing Center, 1997), 130.

to demoralize the movement.¹⁰⁸ Certainly, one disadvantageous side effect of massive financial aid was the creation of dependence and loss of motivation to work. In their memoirs, several well-known refuseniks reflect the fact that they had a problem finding “fictitious” employment (which was essential, given that being unemployed was a criminal offense in the USSR), while the problem of sustenance is seldom discussed. Tsiliya Mengeritsky expressed a similar sentiment:

Had there been no material assistance, refuseniks, on the verge of desperation, would have acted more decidedly and bravely. An excessive amount of aid pouring in, when unemployed refuseniks lived much better than before filing their emigration request, had a debilitating effect on many—especially on those who lived like that for several years.¹⁰⁹

One might suggest that foreign aid had a long-term negative impact as well. First, some well-known activists found it psychologically difficult to take up regular employment on arriving in Israel after having been sustained for long periods by public funding. Second, the second and third generations of activists in the Soviet Union inherited a tradition of dependency on foreign aid. Furthermore, some “professional Jews” in Russia and Ukraine may have felt—and may still feel—that foreign funding organizations have a greater interest in Jewish activity than the Jewish population itself, and so should be expected to pay for it. In light of the contemporary financial crises (toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century), such an approach is a mortal threat to the existence of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union. One longtime refusenik, the Hebrew teacher Nelly Shpeizman, went so far as to suggest that the Soviet authorities kept so many refuseniks for years in refusal because they laid “golden eggs,” in that they drew foreign currency and goods into the Soviet Union.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Underground Zionist activity in the 1960s existed on a very meager internal budget. In the 1970s, the Soviet Jewish movement became linked to

108. Author’s interview with David Maayan (Chernoglaz), November 2007.

109. Interview with Raitburd-Mendzheritsky.

110. Author’s interview with Nelly Shpeizman, October, 2008.

sources of foreign support, first and foremost the JDC-cum-Nativ, but also other Jewish organizations that mobilized to secure the rights of Soviet Jewry, especially the right of emigration. Aid was provided in the form of postal parcels, money transfers, and presents brought by tourist-emissaries, as well as significant amounts from Soviet Jews who transferred their savings to trust funds and received reimbursement in foreign currency in Israel (or the United States).

Material aid from abroad provided much-needed relief, sometimes saved the lives of Prisoners of Zion, allowed refuseniks who were thrown out of work to lead a dignified life, and served as a stimulus for the more fearful. It was also a clear promise that should something go wrong, refuseniks and their families would not be left to suffer alone. Moreover, financial support helped spread Jewish knowledge and awaken Soviet Jews' ethnic and religious identity.

At the same time, "shadow" financial operations, in the absence of adequate accountability and transparency, as well as some degree of competition among Western Jewish organizations for "celebrity" refuseniks, created conditions in which dishonest ends could be pursued with relative ease. As a result, some individuals lived well at the movement's expense. Glenn Richter observes:

Our sending of material aid wasn't always benign. Since refuseniks and prisoner families were human beings, as the rest of us, there were jealousies and accusations that certain persons were getting too much, or using items for personal gain rather than distributing them. But looking back, it was far better that we collectively sent in material aid than not.¹¹¹

In the early stages, the Soviet government, perhaps hoping that it would obtain favorable trade terms with the United States, reacted halfheartedly to foreign support of Jewish activists. Later, when its hopes went up in smoke, its official position became much more severe—but the stream of aid pouring in from the entire Jewish world could not be stopped.

111. Glenn Richter's email to the author, November 2007.

Friends Abroad: How the Western Campaign for Soviet Jews Influenced Activists in the Soviet Union

Sarah Fainberg

This chapter reexamines the moral, political, and strategic significance of Western advocacy and activism on behalf of Soviet Jewry for the Jewish activists and refuseniks within the Soviet Union starting in 1971. First, I present a new synthetic overview of the history of the Western campaign for Soviet Jews, drawn from English, Hebrew, and Russian sources. Second, I argue that despite the prevailing image of an ideal friendship between refusenik activists and Western supporters, divergent—and often conflicting—interests, goals, and strategies animated the different actors and defined the particularly intricate nature of their “partnership.” I also contend that for all the psychological, material, and political assistance provided by the West, it was ultimately Soviet Jews’ ability to simultaneously embrace this support, while at times distancing themselves from their Western supporters, that made the campaign particularly successful.

The influence of Western assistance on the refuseniks’ struggle has not been addressed as a separate subject of scholarly attention. Previous scholarship has focused on either the international mobilization movement on behalf of Soviet Jews in Israel, North America, Europe, and Australia or exclusively on the Jewish activist movement alongside other opposition movements within the Soviet Union from Brezhnev’s period of “stagnation” to Gorbachev’s era of “perestroika.” Little has been said about the complex and changing nature of the collaboration between the two sides, which began in 1952–53, with the creation of the Israeli “Liaison Bureau,” better known under its code name “Nativ,” and continued until 1989–91,