

POWER OF PROTEST: THE MOVEMENT TO FREE SOVIET JEWS

The stories of American Jewish activists and Soviet Jews, known as refuseniks, are brought to life in this new traveling panel exhibition created by the National Museum of American Jewish History.

Developed especially for smaller or non-museum spaces, the exhibition **Y K N N G Z R N Q T G V J G U K I P K 1/2 E C P E G Q H Y J C V** The At called “the most successful human rights campaign of our time.”

Power of Protest is small-scale, exible, and composed of durable and easy-to-install free-standing panels intended for installation in a variety of venues such as galleries, libraries, synagogues, Jewish community centers, university campuses, and historic societies. Through text, imagery, and media, it expands upon the compelling history of activists, refuseniks, and the legacy of the movement in America today.

The Museum will provide venues with custom curricula, a programming guide, marketing templates, and suggestions for how borrowing organizations can supplement the exhibit with stories from their own communities.

DESCRIPTION

The movement to free Soviet Jews provides a fascinating example of how American activists have played, and continue to play, significant roles in promoting religious liberty at home and abroad. Drawing on 1960s-era social protest movements, they responded to the restrictions forced upon *refuseniks* by staging public demonstrations, holding a massive rally in Washington D.C., and calling for politicians at all levels of the government to speak out against Soviet oppression. The exhibition will serve as a reminder of the unique promise of religious freedom in America and our continuing responsibility to preserve and protect that freedom. **This dramatic, risky, international human rights movement brought together organizations, student activists, community leaders, and thousands of individuals—and reached the highest echelons of the American government.**



Cleveland youth group rally, ca. 1968. The Cleveland Council on Soviet Anti-Semitism Records. Western Reserve Historical Society.

The exhibition combines first-hand accounts, historical images, and film to explore the effective use of protest across all levels of society. The movement to free Soviet Jewry arose during a period of international protest, linking Jewish activists in U.S., Israel, and the U.S.S.R. Moreover, it took place, and was influenced by, the worldwide protest movements that began in the 1960s and continued throughout the following decades. Inspired by the American civil rights movement, it took cues from the international women's rights, antiwar, anti-nuclear, and free speech movements.

Power of Protest provides examples of how the movement to free Soviet Jews also had a religious dimension. For some activists, the movement offered a new and profound connection to Judaism. For others, it became an extension of their previously established religious commitments. The exhibition will show these connections—such as the “twinning” program in which American adolescents celebrating their Bar or Bat Mitzvah adopted a Soviet Jew forbidden to perform this rite of passage, an empty chair on the synagogue *bimah*, and a “Matzah of Hope” added to the Passover *Seder* in recognition of the persecution of Soviet Jews.

The exhibition also features voices from the generations of Jews from the Former Soviet Union who came to the United States and their children. Not only does this offer a new dimension on American Jewish identity from the perspective of recent immigrants who came long after the era of mass migration, it illustrates how these identities change across generations—a process that all immigrant groups have undergone throughout history.

This new exhibition is supported, in part, through a Museums for America grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a government agency dedicated to advancing innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement.

PROTEST GOES MAINSTREAM



WASHINGTON, D.C., 1984

Holocaust-survivor Elie Wiesel wrote in his 1966 book *The Jews of Silence* that “the condition of the Jews in the Soviet Union is at once more grievous and more hopeful than I had imagined.” A visit to the Soviet Union had revealed both state-sponsored repression and grassroots efforts to keep Jewish culture alive. Wiesel’s message inspired Jewish readers and reached activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., Boston’s Richard Cardinal Cushing, and Sister Ann Gillen of the Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry. Both the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry were founded in 1971 and that same year, hundreds of delegates from 38 countries gathered in Brussels for the first World Conference on Soviet Jewry.

1971
 The Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry was founded in 1971. It was the first of many conferences that would be held across the United States to raise awareness and funds for Soviet Jewry. The conference was held at the Waldorf Astor Hotel in New York City and was attended by over 100 delegates from 38 countries. The conference was a landmark event in the history of the Soviet Jewry movement.



1986
 “We shall kindle our candle and lift it on high united in strength and fierce determination that you will soon emerge from the darkness of suffering to the light of freedom.”
 Linda Fleishman, Moscow National Board Member, 1986

ПРОТЕСТ СТАНОВИТСЯ ВСЕОБЩИМ



REVOLUTIONARY HOPE, FEW CHANGES

РЕВОЛЮЦИОННЫЕ НАДЕЖДЫ, СКУДОСТЬ ПЕРЕМЕН

The Russian revolutions of 1917, first in February and then the Bolshevik coup in October, abolished ghettoization within the “Pale of Settlement” and ended Tsarist economic and political restrictions, including permitting Jews to live and work in Russia’s capitals, Moscow and Leningrad (St. Petersburg). Jewish culture thrived following the Revolution, but vicious pogroms during the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921 left nearly two hundred thousand Jews dead. Then, in the 1930s, Russian dictator Joseph Stalin targeted and murdered Jews, first during his “Great Purge” and then again following World War II. Soviet Jews carried internal passports that marked them as Jews, suffered discrimination in academia, employment, and across Soviet society.



1917

In February 1917, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated (smiled) national chaos. Instability continued under a weak Provisional Government and on October 25, 1917, the Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace and staged a bloodless coup.

Historical photo: Peter the Great, Russia / Collection of American Jewish Historical Society.



1922-1939

The Soviet government, opposing all forms of religious expression, forced synagogues and churches to close. At first, it openly courted Jewish support by promoting Yiddish culture. But, in the 1930s, it clamped down on all expressions of Jewish life.

Historical photo: Peter the Great, Russia / Collection of American Jewish Historical Society.



1941-1945

Half a million Jewish soldiers fought in the Soviet Army during World War II and 40,000 were killed or wounded. After Nazi Germany invaded the U.S.S.R. in June 1941, more than two million Soviet Jewish civilians perished in the Holocaust.

Historical photo: Peter the Great, Russia / Collection of American Jewish Historical Society.



1948-1953

A campaign against “reactionary cosmopolitanism” swept up Jews, during the “Night of the Murdered Poets,” August 11, 1952, thirteen Jewish composers were shot in the notorious Lubyanka prison. Only Shostakovich survived. Only Shostakovich survived. Only Shostakovich survived.

Historical photo: Peter the Great, Russia / Collection of American Jewish Historical Society.



1967

In June 1967, the heavily censored Soviet press reported Israel’s imminent defeat at the hands of Russian-supported Arab countries. When news of Israel’s triumph in the Six Day War became known, Soviet Jews celebrated. But authorities pushed back and authoritarianism reigned once more.

Historical photo: Peter the Great, Russia / Collection of American Jewish Historical Society.



THE AMERICAN CAMPAIGN

КАМПАНИЯ В АМЕРИКЕ

Haunted by memories of the Holocaust and inspired by 1960s social protest movements, American Jews joined with *refuseniks*, Israelis, and human rights activists around the world in the struggle to save Soviet Jewry. They marched, protested, and lobbied the American government to exert pressure. National organizations raised the alarm and community leaders organized local advocacy efforts. New national organizations arose dedicated to the cause. Some people went on secret “missions” to visit persecuted Soviet Jews, while sons and daughters from across the religious spectrum “twinned” their bar and bat mitzvah celebrations with Soviet youths denied the opportunity to celebrate.

Major Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Committee (AJC), American Jewish Congress, World Jewish Committee (WJC), B’nai B’rith, Anti-Defamation League, Hadassah, and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council made freeing Soviet Jews a top priority. AJC spent three decades leveraging political ties in Washington D.C., Europe, and Latin America. In 1971, WJC co-sponsored the first World Conference of Jewish Communities on Soviet Jewry in Brussels, Belgium. And Charlotte Jacobson, national president of Hadassah, met with *refuseniks* and faced Soviet officials.



WASHINGTON, D.C., 1973

INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPHY



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SPECIFICATIONS

FEES: Available with no rental fee. Fully refundable deposit required to reserve time slot. 1-way shipping paid by venue.

SHIPPING: Borrowing organizations will pay for one-way shipping to their venue and provide proof of insurance coverage.

SIZE: 400 square feet recommended, minimum of 50 linear feet required. Multiple display options available.

STRUCTURE: Modular system of 11 double-sided, free-standing panels; includes AV hardware for two media presentations.

- (3) panels 93”H x 75”W
- (8) panels 93”H x 39”W

CRATES: Two (2) wooden crates with wheels each 35 3/4” wide x 52 7/16” tall x 98” long and 1000lbs when packed. Two (2) TV monitor cases (travel on top of wooden crates) each 44” x 32” x 12”.

PLEASE CONTACT

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UPCOMING VENUES

Milton & Betty Katz Jewish Community Center Margate, NJ: November 21 - December 31, 2019

Valley Beth Shalom Encino, CA: December 15, 2019 - March 22, 2020

Osher Marin Jewish Community Center San Rafael, CA: June 1, 2020 - August 10, 2020

Peninsula Jewish Community Center Foster City, CA: September 1 - November 30, 2020

PREVIOUS VENUES

National Museum of American Jewish History Philadelphia, PA

Ohev Shalom—The National Synagogue Washington, DC

Fielder Hillel at Northwestern University Evanston, IL

State Historical Museum of Iowa Des Moines, IA

Mandell JCC & JHS of Greater Hartford West Hartford, CT

Rider University Multicultural Affairs Lawrenceville, NJ

Oregon Jewish Museum and Holocaust Ed. Center Portland, OR

Memphis Jewish Community Center Memphis, TN

BBYO International Convention Denver, CO

Jewish Funders Network San Francisco, CA

Washington State Jewish Historical Society Seattle, WA

Arthur M. Glick Jewish Community Center Indianapolis, IN

Mandell Jewish Community Center of Cleveland Beachwood, OH

San Diego Center for Jewish Culture La Jolla, CA

Jewish Community Center of Youngstown Youngstown, OH

CUNY of Staten Island Hillel Staten Island, NY



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AMERICAN JEWISH
HISTORY

A Smithsonian Institution Affiliate

NMAJH.org/SovietJews

Front Cover: SSSJ activists heading to a rally at the Statue of Liberty, September 29, 1968. Photo by Yona Zaloscer. Yeshiva University Archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Records.

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