

Eileen and I were in Moscow and Leningrad from March 20-26. Between us we have made 5 trips to the USSR since 1977. This time we took our children (aged 13 and 16). Taking our teenagers was a very important and significant element and motivation for this particular journey. We wanted them to experience at first hand an issue they have heard discussed at home, at religious school and through the twinning of their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. We also felt it important to encourage direct contact between the new generation of refusenik children and their Western contemporaries. We think in both respects we were successful. We were impressed by the deep and meaningful discussions the children had. We also believe the presence and interest of our children during our truly "family" visits were most welcomed and meaningful to all members of refusenik families we saw. This sort of contact should be strongly encouraged, with proper guidance. The following is a summary of our observations on the general situation.

The Jewish community is in transition. Many of the long-term activists have now left. Those who are still in Russia seem to be regarded as authority figures, given their knowledge of the movement and the Soviet responses to it over time.

Leadership in activity is now passing to new people, many of whom are barely known yet. Some are relatively long-term refuseniks who were either quietly active, or not active at all: others seem to be recently refused applicants: there is even a small group of non-refuseniks who have not applied to leave who play a supportive role.

This transition places new burdens on leadership in Moscow and Leningrad. Nobody is sure how many refuseniks there still are, or how to keep them in touch with activity. Women's groups in both cities have reestablished the effort to compile lists and support networks. There is a list of scientists who attend the seminar. The publication by Leningrad Pravda of the street address of an apartment where cultural seminars are held actually served the purpose of bringing in new people. The newsletter now being issued in Moscow has occasional ads for Hebrew classes, but the document circulates primarily within the known group only.

A Hebrew teacher in Leningrad is waiting for Simchat Torah next fall to display ads at the synagogue to attract new pupils.

The creation of a Jewish Culture Club is still up in the air, but this could go a long way to solving the contact problem. All this seems to underscore the superficiality of glasnost as it impacts on Soviet Jewry. It became obvious that many refuseniks still prefer to take the quiet route. In fact we even learned of the existence of a number of prisoners who have chosen this option and are unknown in the West..

The lack, in some cases, of a close relationship between a new refusenik leader and the Soviet Jewry movement in America is a mixed blessing. One Moscow refusenik was bitter at what he called the "star" system, where people work for an individual, to the inevitable exclusion of others, so we should try to spread our resources more evenly, not only to insure that as many people as possible get publicity, but that the movement as a whole is both the focus and beneficiary of our efforts.

The new people have new ways of doing things, which we need to adapt to. One "new" method is the development of "focus groups." Women's groups, second-generation groups, elderly groups, groups of people refused because of similar reasons, be it secrets, or relatives refusing to give permission, scientific and cultural groups, Israel citizens etc. Each group is developing its own approach: for example, people whose relatives won't give permission recently demonstrated outside the workplaces of several of those relatives, forcing them to admit to their co-workers that they have family in refusal. There is also evidence of "coalition" amongst the groups, as well as the occasional factionalization.

The effectiveness of these techniques has yet to be demonstrated. But demonstrations in a limited sense are being allowed, at least in Moscow (similar actions in Leningrad in March drew 10 or 15 day hooliganism sentences; and we heard some Leningrad leaders counsel that travel to Moscow to meet with authorities there was a much more effective method of protest.) One possible result of glasnost has been the replacement of much of the overt violence (physical beatings, dispersal of demos) by psychological violence: cat and mouse games about permission, inconsistencies in the treatment of seminars and some of the more open activities people engage in. In several cases the authorities seem to have a very accurate understanding of an individual's strengths and weaknesses, and are playing on them. But neither glasnost nor perestrioka have done anything significant to ease the lot of refuseniks.

Jews still are faced with the basic dilemma of the Soviet system. There may be published regulations governing some aspects of emigration - but these are liable to be disregarded by the authorities when it suits them - in some cases favorably to Jews, in others against them. New reasons for refusal are being advanced. Old reasons are being revived. There is still no defined process, no refusals are being given in writing, and the committee ostensibly set up to review refusals is not functioning in any meaningful or regulated way. New "regulations" (both the ban on issuances of permission to boys over 16 and the inconsistent responses to family members seeking emigration as individuals) are making life especially difficult for families with older children, many of whom applied to leave when the children were either not yet born or very much younger. There is no evidence of any humanitarian attitudes towards refuseniks. There is a quasi-judicial appeal process in existence through the committee on "citizenship" of the Supreme Soviet, but no one knows how it functions. There are differences of practice and of principle between OVIR offices in Moscow and Leningrad - is this policy or accident?

The situation is giving rise to an intensification of the legal activities we saw some years ago - only this time engaged in preparing suits against government bodies like OVIR and the Supreme Soviet committee on citizenship. People are beginning to use the slight improvement in access to work with the Soviet legal code: now that they know which committee of the Supreme Soviet is dealing with the issue, they can then challenge the authorities by referring to that committee's published terms of reference.

Amidst the transition, some things don't change. There is a lot of hope riding on the spring summit and the Party Congress this summer. Such "windows of opportunity" seem to be essential to maintain optimism and sanity. There is still bitterness at American attitudes to Soviet Jews emigrating to America. There seems to be little interest amongst the activists we saw in providing Jewish institutions to serve the Jews who stay behind: as one would expect from activists, the view is that emigration is the only answer. Not even Pamyat and the threat of anti-semitism is seen as a means to keep Jewish life in being. Yet curiously even amongst the aliyah activists we visited the current situation in Israel was not of great concern nor focus of discussion.

To a very great extent the overall feeling of our trip was

a series of visits with old and very dear friends. This is both wonderful in its intimacy and exceptionally depressing to see these long time activists, some for the third and fourth time over an eleven year period. We found it less significant than in the past to bring out messages or to undertake requests for specific needs. We were impressed that the refusenik leadership has extensive telephone contacts with the West that can supply information almost faster and more directly than the conduit of returned travellers. Moreover it was obvious that these leaders can plug in other refuseniks as and when needed. It was also interesting to learn that they value not only regular, established telephone links, but also those which allow them to communicate most easily, i.e., in Russian. As for our friends of longstanding, we could not help but note some indication of "tiredness" with the length of their struggle and the occasional twinges of despondency. For them as well as for others the ultimate and overwhelming importance of travel remains the support and encouragement provided through the human contact in visiting. There is no question that travel must be encouraged, whether by a well-briefed first time visitor, a "veteran" tourist and as we so proudly observed by informed and sensitive teenagers.

Finally, Soviet claims that the issue either does not exist, or is in the process of being solved, are patently untrue. Repression of refuseniks and Jewish activists is essentially unchanged from 10 years ago: only the means of repression have changed.

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