

PRIME MINISTER

ORTHODOX JEWISH COMMUNITY

Can I come back to you once more, please, on the subject of seeing representatives of the Orthodox Jewish Community before you go to Moscow.

As I said in my earlier note, you have already agreed to see a very large number of people before you go. The diary is under pressure. I have just persuaded the Board of Deputies of British Jews to put in their views in writing rather than send a deputation to see you. Can we not ask Mr Lobenstein and his colleagues to do the same?

*Yes not*

*CDP*

C D POWELL

16 February 1987

File

GR'S

085

bc: PC

MR. BOOTH

ORTHODOX JEWISH COMMUNITY: JO LOBENSTEIN MBE

The Prime Minister has considered your note of 11 February suggesting that she should see Mr. Lobenstein and a delegation from the Orthodox Jewish Community before her visit to Moscow. She takes the point that it would be awkward for her to see the Board of Deputies of British Jews and not representatives of the Orthodox Jewish Community. She has therefore decided to see neither, and has asked that both groups put their views in writing before her visit. The Board of Deputies have accepted this. I should be grateful if you would so inform Mr. Lobenstein.

Charles Powell

17 February 1987

PRIME MINISTER

11 February 1987

ORTHODOX JEWISH COMMUNITY - JO LOBENSTEIN MBE

The Orthodox Jewish Community are desperately keen to have a very short meeting with you before you go to Russia. They want to talk about freedom of religion and religious persecution in Russia. A delegation of 3 Rabbis and 3 lay leaders would be led by Jo Lobenstein who you know. Jo, as you may recall, is a towering figure in East End politics and to many in the East End of London he represents the Conservative party. We strongly support this application by Jo who undoubtedly is the senior political figure in the Orthodox community and also represents the Agudas Israel Organisation. We feel that a short meeting would have considerable political significance. Moreover, if the Orthodox Community hear about the visit of the Board of Deputies, which is likely to be in the Jewish Press, the Orthodox Jews will be upset!

HB.

HARTLEY BOOTH

I'm afraid I

shall have to

say Yes.

mb

MR BEARPARK

CSP  
I'm sure dealing with this.

10 February 1987

JO LOBENSTEIN MBE

Diary Meeting Note

The Orthodox Jewish Community are desperately keen to have a very short meeting with the Prime Minister before she goes to Russia. They want to talk about freedom of religion and religious persecution in Russia. A delegation of 3 Rabbis and 3 lay leaders would be led by Jo Lobenstein who the PM knows. Jo, as she may recall, is a towering figure in East End politics and to many in the East End of London he represents the Conservative party. I strongly support this application by Jo who in this context assures me that he represents the Orthodox community and the Agudas Israel Organisation.

JLB.

HARTLEY BOOTH

MR BOOTH

I really don't think the Prime Minister can take this on. She is already seeing the Chief Rabbi and a delegation from the Board of Deputies of British Jews who have undertaken to represent the views of all the Jewish community here. The list of applicants from the Jewish community to see her before her visit to the Soviet Union is almost endless. Could he be persuaded to see the Foreign Secretary, who will also be going to Moscow, instead?

CDP

CHARLES POWELL  
10 February 1987

CDP has put  
letter in box

SPW

26 February 1987

I know that the Prime Minister will be very grateful to you for sending the briefing document on the plight of Soviet Jewry. I shall make sure that she sees this very soon and she will certainly want to take it with her on her visit to Moscow. Its arrival today is very timely as we are having a discussion of her visit tomorrow.

(C. D. POWELL)

Dr. Lionel Kopelw~~it~~itz, J.P.

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The Board  
of Deputies  
of British Jews

CCF/ECPC  
②  
CCFCO

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

25th February, 1987

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON SW1

Prime Minister  
You will wish  
to see before  
Kronau's seminar.  
C.D.P.  
26/2.

Jews' Rights Mission

THE PLIGHT OF SOVIET JEWRY

You will recall that when you received me, together with Mr. Edgar Bronfman, on Monday January 12th, I suggested preparing a briefing document prior to your visit to the Soviet Union.

I now have much pleasure in enclosing this document, which I trust you will find helpful.

Yours sincerely,  
Lionel Kopelowitz

(Dr.) Lionel Kopelowitz JP

THE PLIGHT OF SOVIET JEWRY

The tragedy of the Jews of the Soviet Union lies in the fact that while they are unable to live as Jews in the USSR, free from fear and on an equal basis with the other peoples of that multinational state, they are at the same time, prevented from leaving it.

The following facts are indicative of their plight :

- There are approximately 400,000 Jews in the USSR, who in recent years have expressed their desire to leave for Israel, their ancestral homeland, by requesting from relatives in that country invitations required by the Soviet authorities to initiate the emigration process. Yet the emigration of Jews has been virtually halted. In 1984 a mere 896 Jews managed to leave; in 1985, 1140 and in 1986 - only 914. (Over 51,000 Jews left in 1979). Despite public Soviet assurances to the contrary, the number of Jews leaving the USSR has not increased significantly in recent weeks.
- Personal data is available regarding nearly 12,000 Jews known to have been formally refused permission to leave, though undoubtedly the number of refuseniks is far larger. The refuseniks live as outcasts from Soviet society and have no legal redress against their harassment and victimization. More than 300 families have been refused exit visas for more than 10 years and some for over 15 years. In recent days a number of veteran refuseniks, including such well known persons as Yuli Kosharovskiy, Alexander Lerner and Vladimir Slepak, have had their applications refused once again.
- In some cases the Soviet authorities have meted out to refuseniks long terms of imprisonment and exile on trumped-up charges, when their only real "crime" has been their assertion of their rights and their identity as Jews. At the present time there are eight of these "Prisoners of Zion" : Yosif Berenshtein, Yuly Edelshtein, Evgeny Kolfman, Yakov Levin, Vladimir Lifshits, Aleksei Magarik, Mark Nepomnyashchy and Leonid Volvovsky. The physical condition of several of these prisoners - Berenshtein, Edelshtein and Nepomnyashchy - is a source of grave concern.
- Jews are the only recognized nationality among the more than 100 nationalities in the USSR who are deprived of the possibility of studying their national language, Hebrew, and of transmitting their own cultural heritage and traditions to their children.

- Jews are the only religious denomination in the USSR which has no central organization, no theological seminary and no facilities for regular contacts with co-religionists abroad.
- Anti-Jewish discrimination and anti-Semitic propaganda (camouflaged as anti-Zionism) are continuing features of Soviet life.
- Over the past year there have been a few welcome cases of the release of individuals after tremendous and sustained pressure. However, these isolated gestures have left the basic situation of Soviet Jewry unchanged. New Soviet regulations relating to emigration, the adoption of which has been widely publicized by the Soviet government, codify and even extend the existing highly restrictive practices. They limit the right of emigration to those having immediate relatives abroad (a limitation having no foundation in international law) and even within this category arbitrary refusals abound based on bogus national security considerations. Tens of thousands of Jews are denied even the possibility of applying to leave because their invitations come from relatives deemed insufficiently close. The new regulations thus deny the right to leave to the vast majority of those Soviet Jews seeking to live in their historic Jewish homeland.





[The body of the document contains several paragraphs of text that are extremely faint and largely illegible due to the quality of the scan. The text appears to be a typed document, possibly a report or a letter.]

Soviet Union: Jewry PT 2.

COUNCILLOR H. J. LOBENSTEIN MBE

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HJL/JY

R26

Prime Minister

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The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher,  
FRS., MP.,

The Prime Minister,  
10, Downing Street,  
London, S.W.1.

Some useful  
points: but I  
don't think you  
can mix them  
in detail

25th February, 1987.

CDP  
26/2

ml

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for the message which you kindly passed on to me via Hartley Booth, that you are pleased to receive a memorandum from me - on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish Community - in regard to the plight of Soviet Jewry, and that you will use this as background information during your forthcoming meeting with Mr. Gorbachov in Moscow.

I now have pleasure in submitting the enclosed memorandum on behalf of the Agudas Israel Organisation of Great Britain, and would point out that I have purposely kept it as brief as possible in order not to impose unduly on your very valuable time.

Should there be any further information that you require on this subject, please be assured that I am always available. I shall be grateful to hear from you upon your return.

Meanwhile, please accept my best wishes for a successful journey and safe return.

Yours sincerely,

Joe [Signature]

P.S. The Agudas Israel Organisation of Great Britain is the British branch of the Agudas Israel World Organisation which, for the past 75 years, has been actively engaged in the protection of religious rights of Jews throughout the world.

אגודת ישראל באנגליה

כ"ה

# AGUDAS ISRAEL ORGANISATION

OF GREAT BRITAIN

(AFFILIATED TO THE AGUDIST WORLD MOVEMENT)

THE UNION OF UNIVERSEALLY ORGANISED INDEPENDENT ORTHODOX JEWRY

97, STAMFORD HILL,  
LONDON, N.16

*In your reply please quote*

1

## MEMORANDUM TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MRS MARGARET THATCHER THE PRIME MINISTER

RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS IN THE USSR

FEBRUARY 1987

### INTRODUCTION

It is our contention that under both the Helsinki agreements and Russia's own constitution, Jews wishing to do so should be free to practice every aspect of their religion without interference. Essential religious requisites and foods should be easily available, and present restrictions on their sale or despatch by post should be lifted. Furthermore, the religious infrastructure - places to pray, study and practice their religion - should be available without distinction or hinderance. Jews should not be forced to attend work, college or school on Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath). Finally, besides repatriation and reunification of families, Jews should also have the right to migrate to wherever they can study and practice their religion fully.

### BACKGROUND

Before World War I, Russian Jewry was the largest Jewish community in the world. For centuries until the 1917 Revolution the Jews were cruelly persecuted under the Tsar's antisemitic policies. Nevertheless religious communal life and institutions flourished and many religious leaders in England as elsewhere were educated there. The subsequent Communist regime has virtually destroyed the former religious life and organisation of the Jewish communities. After the Second World War these same policies were extended to Lithuania, Latvia, and other eastern countries.

Recent spokesmen - official and unofficial - have alleged that Jews are being adequately catered for in both cultural and religious fields and claimed that "Hebrew can be studied in the U.S.S.R. ... and is also studied at religious schools and synagogues of which there are about one hundred in the Soviet Union ...". Unfortunately, even these minimal claims are not substantiated by the facts.

#### HEBREW STUDY

Though the Hebrew alphabet is fundamental to Jewish prayer, the only known place where Hebrew is officially taught is to a few hand-picked students at the Moscow Central Synagogue. In fact the study of Hebrew in the U.S.S.R. is treated as an "anti-Soviet activity" as shown in the persistent K.G.B. harassment of unofficial Hebrew teachers and students - even leading to their imprisonment (usually now on transparently trumped up criminal charges). Mr Gorbachev has not broken with the Andropov doctrine that the Communist Part's aim is to merge the nations of the U.S.S.R. which indicates a strong assimilationist or Russification policy. On average one Jew per month has been imprisoned since Mr Gorbachev came to power - 70 per cent of those jailed for studying Judaism were incarcerated in the last two years.

#### RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Whereas other major religions - Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Islam and Buddhism - each have central co-ordinating bodies; Jews have no central organisation nor even a federation of congregations. Effectively there is no Jewish community in the formal sense.

Islam has four training centres, the Orthodox Church has two academies and eight seminaries but the Jews are allowed only one single Talmudic College in Moscow with five to ten students.

Actually there are only seventy-four registered synagogues (less than under Stalin) mostly impoverished and obscure to serve an estimated two million Jews as against one thousand synagogues in 1926. Moreover, these synagogues are often staffed by Party appointees who report regularly to the K.G.B.

The building or repair of ritual baths essential for religious married life are blocked. Since 23-5-75, in a move apparently custom-designed against Jews (who have to rely heavily on minyans/quorums in private flats) special permission is required for each occasion "a religious service is held in the apartments or houses of believers". These rules also apply to prayers at the

flat of a mourner (who should stay at home during the seven days shiva) or attending a circumcision ceremony. Private religious study circles are regularly broken up.

#### RELIGIOUS FULFILLMENT

Despite all the bland official assurances, Matzot, Etrogim, Koehar food, Passover food, door Mezuzot, phylacteries, prayer shawls and tzitzit are not widely available throughout the Soviet Empire. The "People of the Book" are deprived of almost all religious literature and no Hebrew Bible has been authorised since 1917. During the fourth biennial International Book Fair held in Moscow, "fifteen books on Jewish religious holidays in Russian" were banned from the stand of a New York publisher as "inappropriate". Most of the 119 national groups in the U.S.S.R. have their own publishing houses, but Jews - the twelfth largest group - have none.

Groups wishing to study recent and ancient Jewish history have come under attack from the K.G.B.'s Jewish Affairs Department. (The last Jewish history book printed in Russia was in 1930.) Those wishing to celebrate Purim or Passover together have been harassed and warned off" and Jews attending New Year or Simchat Torah at the Moscow Central Synagogue have to face being openly filmed by K.G.B. cameramen to be marked down for possible future harassment.

Nowhere near sufficient numbers are trained as scribes or clergy or in religious animal or poultry slaughter and circumcision to serve two million people spread across a vast area.

#### POSTAL INTERFERENCE

In a selfless humanitarian gesture private individuals abroad have been sending small parcels to relatives and friends. These were primarily to help families who had lost their breadwinner in the Nazi holocaust as well as older citizens now tragically alone with only a small pension. These parcels were also useful in making up shortfalls in seasonal religious articles. A Russian authorised agency operated for this purpose from 1945-84 with the duty being paid in the country of despatch.

However in 1977 the despatch of matzot, prayer books and other religious articles was cruelly banned entirely. Moreover, administrative changes were introduced in August '84 whereby duty now had to be paid by recipients. Nevertheless the despatch and receipt of humanitarian parcels continued.

On 22 August 1986 the situation deteriorated further when the Russian Authorities returned almost all the packages on the pretext that "these parcels were sent by an organisation." In the Prime Minister's constituency of Finchley, hundreds of Jews who sent parcels had them returned.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Soviet Authorities be urged:

1. Not to confine their emigration policy to the limited category of "re-unification of families", but to allow any person who so wishes to emigrate to the country of his/her choice so as to enable them to lead a life conducive to their religious belief.
2. That those Jews who wish to remain in the Soviet Union be provided with facilities to conduct a religious life, such as synagogues, ritual baths, freedom to practice their religion including teaching of the Hebrew language, prayers and religious literature.
3. That as there are no Jewish scribes in the Soviet Union to write Torah scrolls, phylacteries and Mezuzot (small scrolls affixed to the doorposts of Jewish homes) such items shall be allowed to be imported to the Soviet Union free of charge.
4. (a) As there are only very few qualified Shochetim (slaughterers to provide Kosher meat) in the Soviet Union, a rota of qualified Shochetim from other countries shall be allowed to visit the USSR for periods of say six months so that Kosher meat shall be available for Soviet Jews.  
(b) The same applies to Mohelim (i.e. persons qualified to perform religious circumcisions).
5. That Jews in the Soviet Union shall be allowed to receive postal parcels from individuals outside the U.S.S.R. which include:
  - a) Matzot for the Passover festival (as was the rule until 1977).
  - b) General parcels (which were allowed until 1986).
  - c) Religious requisites such as prayer books, Hebrew Bibles, Hebrew literature and appurtenances (which were inexplicably never allowed).
6. Jews shall be exempt from working on the Jewish Sabbath and religious Holy days. Jewish children and students shall be similarly exempt from attending schools and colleges on the Jewish Sabbath and Holy days.

APPENDIX I

EXTRACT FROM CONSTITUTION OF THE U.S.S.R.

(Adopted at the Seventh [Special] Session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. Ninth Convocation, on October 7, 1977.)

ARTICLE 34. Citizens of the USSR are equal before the law, without distinction of origin, social or property status, race of nationality, sex, education, language, attitude to religion, type and nature of occupation, domicile, or other status. The equal rights of citizens of the USSR are guaranteed in all fields of economic, political, social, and cultural life.

ARTICLE 45 Citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to education ..... by the opportunity to attend a school where teaching is of the native language; and by the provision of facilities for self-education.

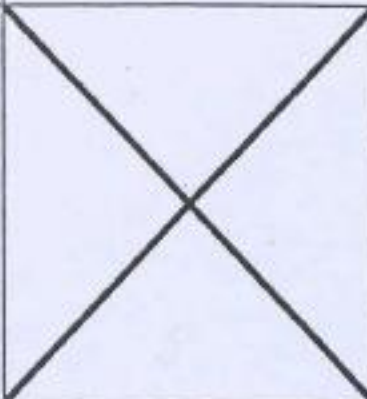

ARTICLE 52. Citizens of the U.S.S.R. are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited.

ARTICLE 56. The privacy of citizens, and of their correspondence, telephone conversations, and telegraphic communications is protected by law.

ARTICLE 57. Respect for the individual and protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens are the duty of all state bodies, public organisations, and officials.

Citizens of the USSR have the right to protection by the courts against encroachments on their honour and reputation, life and health, and personal freedom and property.

# A The National Archives

DEPARTMENT/SERIES <p style="text-align: center;">..... <i>PREM 19</i> .....</p> PIECE/ITEM ..... <i>3186</i> ..... (one piece/item number)	Date and sign
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### APPENDIX III

Repatriation, in contrast to deportation, expulsion and resettlement, is understood in the U.S.S.R. as the voluntary return of ethnic groups and individuals to countries and territories considered to be their homeland. Also, Soviet practice in regard to repatriation has permitted different interpretations of the concept of 'homeland' according to specific situations. 'Homeland' has been defined as a country whose citizenship a given group or individual had held in the past, or is holding at present; it has been defined as the country in which the main ethnic body of a given national minority is bound by emotional and historic ties and traditions.

"From the point of view of Soviet practice, the return to the U.S.S.R. of the so-called 'displaced persons' who found themselves outside its borders as a result of the vicissitudes of World War II was *voluntary repatriation*. In cases of persons officially declared to be collaborators, the U.S.S.R. fought for their forced extradition in order to punish them on their return. However, the resettlement in Soviet Armenia of all Armenians living outside the U.S.S.R., a right granted in 1946, is also considered repatriation by the Soviets. It is significant in this context that Soviet Armenia is viewed as the historic homeland of all Armenians no matter where they are born, where they live, or what citizenship they hold. On July 10, 1957 an agreement came into force for the repatriation from the U.S.S.R. to Poland of persons of Polish nationality, an agreement signed and ratified earlier by the governments of Poland and the U.S.S.R. Such examples can be multiplied by recalling that Spaniards, Greeks and other national minorities living in the U.S.S.R. who moved to their respective countries were also considered repatriates. Therefore, the right to repatriate to Israel, which Soviet Jews seek to realise, corresponds completely with Soviet emigration theory and practice, and from the legal point of view is automatically an aspect of legitimate free choice. This by no means replaces the question of the reunification of families; in emphasis to the national plane.