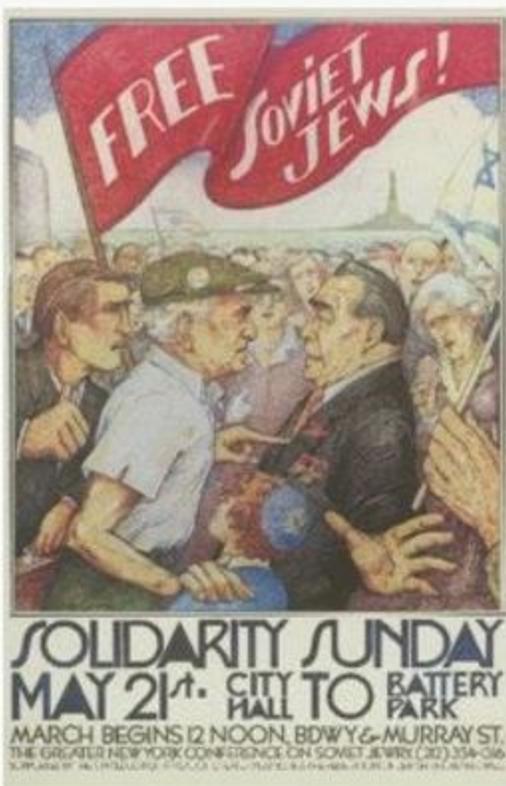




Soviet Jewry Movement Explored In Panel Exhibition, Opens 12/6

by BWW News Desk Dec. 1, 2017



Poster, Solidarity Sunday, New York, 1978.
National Museum of American Jewish History.
Gift of New York Coalition for Soviet Jewry.

The National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) presents Power of Protest: The Movement to Free Soviet Jews, a new exhibition exploring one of the most successful human rights campaigns to date. The panel exhibition showcases Americans' efforts in the late 1960s through 1990 to free refuseniks—Jews who lived in the Soviet Union and were denied the rights to live freely, practice Judaism, or leave the country due to their religion. It is on view at NMAJH December 6, 2017 through January 15, 2018, and will then travel to a number of venues across the country.

Ivy Barsky, NMAJH's CEO and Gwen Goodman Director, states, "The successful movement to free Soviet Jews has compelling connections to modern-day advocacy, highlighting how grassroots efforts can have an enormous impact. This exhibition serves as a reminder of how individuals can help preserve, protect, and expand America's unique promise of religious freedom, even for individuals on the other side of the world."

Power of Protest: The Movement to Free Soviet Jews walks visitors through the human rights campaign that took place on behalf of Soviet Jews, one that brought together organizations, student activists, community leaders, and thousands of individuals—and reached the highest echelons of the American government. Americans staged public demonstrations across the country, held massive rallies, and called for politicians to speak out. The exhibition celebrates the

struggles and successes of this movement, as well as the experiences of Jewish emigrants from the U.S.S.R. who came to the United States and have contributed in countless ways to American society and culture. Their stories of courage offer meaningful opportunities for conversations and activism surrounding immigration, the reception of refugees, and the continuing limits on political and religious freedom placed on minorities around the world.

The exhibition opens on the 30th anniversary of "Freedom Sunday," a momentous rally that took place on December 6, 1987, the day before Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's historic summit meeting with President Ronald Reagan. Roughly 250,000 people gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to call for the Soviet leader to extend his Glasnost (or "openness") policy to Soviet Jews and allow them freedom to worship and travel freely. This unprecedented display of Jewish solidarity, and the President's statements on human rights during the summit, resulted in visas that brought nearly a million Soviet Jews to Israel and the United States.

Power of Protest: The Movement to Free Soviet Jews highlights stories of everyday Americans who performed extraordinary acts of bravery to help Soviet Jews, from Philadelphians Elaine and David Ravich who smuggled out tape recordings of conversations during their 1978 visit to the Soviet Union, to Leslie Schaffer of Reno, Nevada who used gum wrappers to discreetly transport information about refuseniks in 1982, to Constance and Joseph Smukler of Philadelphia who helped several well-known Soviet Jews win their freedom. Visitors will learn about individual refuseniks, from human rights activist and Israeli politician Natan Sharansky to Google co-founder Sergey Brin. The exhibition features a number of powerful graphics, rather than physical artifacts. A handbill advertising a performance by musician Mary Travers-of Peter, Paul, and Mary-at a 1984 rally for Soviet Jewry represents the singers, musicians, and artists who raised their voices in protest. A 1981 letter written by Sheryl Sandberg (now COO of Facebook) to her bat mitzvah "twin" exemplifies the thousands of American children who "twinned" their Jewish coming-of-age ceremonies with Soviet peers denied that experience. Inspired by protest buttons popular across movements around the world, visitors can take home a pin featuring the hashtag #PowerofProtest to celebrate the exhibition, commemorate the historic milestone, and highlight the contemporary significance of fighting for one's beliefs.

Power of Protest: The Movement to Free Soviet Jews is a small-scale, free-standing exhibition consisting of 11 panels designed to travel-giving small galleries, libraries, synagogues, Jewish community centers, universities, and historic societies across the country the opportunity to revisit and raise awareness of this important movement. Following NMAJH, the exhibition will be presented at Ohev Sholom - The National Synagogue in Washington, D.C. during February 2018; additional venues will be announced at a later date.

NMAJH was awarded a generous \$150,000 grant by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support the exhibition's development. The grant is part of IMLS's Museums for America

program, which backs projects that strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public. The grant aided NMAJH's development of the exhibition's various components to help increase public understanding of the movement and further stimulate study and programming around this subject nationally.

The exhibition is organized by NMAJH's Chief Curator, Director of Exhibitions and Interpretation Josh Perelman and content coordinator Yigal Kotler. The exhibition's advisory committee includes Gal Beckerman (historian, journalist, and author), Sandra Cahn (Co-Founder, Limmud FSU), Margy-Ruth Davis (Founder and Chair, Perry Davis Associates; Former Executive Director, Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry), Marina Furman (Regional Director, Jewish National Fund), Zvi Gitelman (Preston R. Tisch Professor of Judaic Studies, University of Michigan), Jerry Goodman (Founding Executive Director, National Conference on Soviet Jewry), Malcolm Hoenlein (Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; Founding Executive Director, Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry), Pamela Nadell (Patrick Clendenen Chair in Women's and Gender History and Director of the Jewish Studies Program, American University), Jonathan Sarna (NMAJH's Chief Historian; University Professor and Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University), Roman Shmulenson (Executive Director, Council of Jewish Emigre Community Organizations), David Shneer (Louis P. Singer Endowed Chair in Jewish History, University of Colorado), Lance Sussman (Rabbi at Congregation Keneseth Israel), and Beth Wenger (Moritz and Josephine Berg Professor of History and Chair of the History Department, University of Pennsylvania).

For more information, visit NMAJH.org/sovietjews.

Power of Protest is created by the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia. The 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. Additional support provided by Alkemy X and the Charlestein Family in memory of Malvina and Morton Charlestein.