

## VISIT TO JEWISH COMMUNITIES

IN

## UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA

April-May, 1994

*This report covers a visit to Jewish communities in Ukraine and Moldova from April 22 to May 5, 1994. The first segment of the trip was as a participant in a 'mission' of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to communities served by that organization. The second segment was an independent journey to central/eastern Ukraine after conclusion of the JDC mission; most of one week was spent in Dnepropetrovsk (which the writer has visited on three previous occasions), but side trips were made to Donetsk and Pavlograd.*

*As reported in Western news media, **Ukraine** has been in political and economic crisis since its declaration of independence on August 24, 1991. A country of 52 million people (of whom Ukrainians constitute 73 percent and Russians 22 percent), Ukraine inherited much of the former Soviet Union's best farmland and strongest industrial base. However, its political leaders lack the strength to initiate vital economic reform—and hyperinflation tears at the economic and social fabric of the state. Ukrainian nationalism is a troublesome factor in western Ukraine, and Ukrainian-Russian tension is potentially explosive in eastern regions and in the Crimea.*

*No definitive study of Ukrainian Jewish demography exists. Most informed observers believe that approximately 500,000 Jews live in Ukraine - perhaps forty percent of the Jewish population of the entire former Soviet Union. According to a 1993 survey by the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut), major Jewish population concentrations are in Kiev (110,000), Dnepropetrovsk (55,000), Kharkov (47,000), and Odessa (45,000).<sup>1</sup> Emigration of Jews from Ukraine is greater than that from Russia, both in actual figures and proportionately, and is increasing.*

*Important differences exist between the Jewish populations of Ukraine and Russia. First, Ukrainian Jews are closer to their Jewish roots because the Holocaust affected them much more directly — nearly every family lost many of its members because all of Ukraine was occupied whereas no major Russian city was captured by German troops — and Ukrainian Jewish migration from smaller towns to larger, more cosmopolitan cities often occurred one generation later than did Russian Jewish migration. Second,*

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<sup>1</sup> See Baruch Gur, *The Jewish Population of the Former Soviet Union: An Empirical Analysis as of Mid-1993*, Situation Paper No. 6 (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency for Israel, 1993), pp. 4-7. Unless otherwise indicated, the Gur study is the source for Jewish demographic statistics that appear in this report.

*although many Russian Jews strongly identify with the dominant Russian culture and are reluctant to leave a milieu in which they feel comfortable, far fewer Ukrainian Jews identify with Ukrainian culture. In fact, the mother tongue of most Ukrainian Jews is Russian, and many speak no Ukrainian at all. Third, economic reform in Ukraine lags behind that in Russia. Fourth, while prevalent in almost all areas of the former Soviet Union, popular antisemitism is stronger in Ukraine than in Russia.*

**Moldova** was known during the post-war Soviet period as Moldavia. Until 1940, the area was part of Romania and was called Bessarabia. It came under Soviet rule in 1940 as a consequence of the 1939 secret pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Moldova declared independence from the USSR on August 27, 1991.

*Slightly larger in territory than the state of Maryland, Moldova share borders on its north, east, and south with Ukraine, and with Romania to its east. Its population is 4.3 million, of whom two-thirds are Moldovans, who are ethnically related to Romanians, and 14 percent Ukrainian, 13 percent Russian, and 1.5 percent Jewish (perhaps 40,000 to 45,000 individuals.)*

*Shortly after the old Soviet Moldavian government proposed in the late 1980s that Moldavian be the official language of the republic, Russians and Ukrainians clustered on the right bank of the Dneister River began agitating for autonomy from Moldavia. Slavs, who constitute about two-thirds of the Dneister area population, proclaimed their own state, which, though recognized by no foreign government or international organization, is known as Pridnestrovia (Transdneister) in 1990. Bloody ethnic fighting erupted in the area in 1992. Transdneister remains a Slavic enclave under the protection of the 14th Russian Army and enjoys a relationship with Russia.*

*The largest Jewish population concentrations are in Kishinev (30,000 Jews), Beltsy and Tiraspol (3,000 each), and Bendery and Rybnitsa (1,500 each). Tiraspol and Bendery are in Transdneister.*

## I. JDC MISSION TO UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA

1. Eleven people participated in the April 1994 JDC 'mission' to Ukraine and Moldova; nine were lay people, of whom seven were members of the JDC Board of Directors and four were members of the JDC Former Soviet Union Area Committee.<sup>2</sup> Ted Comet,

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<sup>2</sup> Neither the chairman of the committee nor any of its six co-chairmen participated in the tour. (The chairman had intended to go, but canceled for health reasons; one of the co-chairman had expressed interest, but subsequently decided to go on another JDC mission that includes one of the former Soviet republics in its itinerary.)

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Associate Executive Vice President of JDC, and Shoshana Comet accompanied the group. Asher Ostrin, Stuart Saffer, and Charles Hoffman of the JDC Former Soviet Union Area staff were with the group for segments of the tour.

2. Several weeks prior to the beginning of the trip, each participant received a comprehensive briefing book containing information about all of the communities to be visited and about the JDC program and budget for the post-Soviet successor states. Additional written information on local Jewish populations was provided in Odessa and Kishinev (but not in Bendery, which the group visited only for a few hours, or in Kiev).

3. The group convened in Vienna for a direct flight to Odessa on Austrian Airlines. The itinerary was Odessa - Bendery - Kishinev - Kiev. (Odessa and Kiev are in Ukraine; Bendery and Kishinev are in Moldova.)

## Odessa

4. Although many observers accept the Jewish Agency estimate of the Odessa Jewish population of 45,000, some other responsible specialists believe that as many as 70,000 Jews live in the city. Prior to World War II, the then Odessa Jewish population of approximately 180,000 (one-third of the population of the entire city) was engaged in various crafts, wholesale and retail trade, grain export, banking, and the liberal professions. Odessa was an important center of Jewish education, Zionism, and Hebrew literature.<sup>3</sup>

Anti-Jewish pogroms occurred in 1821, 1859, 1871, 1881, and 1905; approximately 300 Jews were killed in the most severe attack, in 1905. Perhaps 80,000 to 90,000 Jews managed to escape Odessa during World War II, some fleeing by sea, but more than 100,000 were murdered, many by Romanian troops working with German forces.

5. Recent Jewish emigration from Odessa has been substantial. A large proportion of Odessa Jewry reflects the dominating cosmopolitan nature of this international seaport and prefers to remain in the city or to resettle in the United States or Germany rather than in Israel.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Between 1880 and 1917, the Odessa Jewish population was the second largest in tsarist Russia, following Warsaw, which was then within Russian borders.

6. A JDC delegation visited Odessa in 1988, identifying the city as one of its primary development sites. Stuart Saffer became resident director of JDC operations in Odessa in 1991, the first JDC resident representative in the post-World War II (former) Soviet Union. He has since been succeeded by Beata Dorin. The JDC representative in Odessa is responsible for JDC operations in all of southern Ukraine.

In an introductory meeting for the JDC mission group, Mr. Saffer reviewed the **scope of JDC activities** in the post-Soviet successor states. The mandate of the agency is to “work with the [Jewish] community in four areas to help them help themselves” -- Jewish religious observance (all denominations), Jewish education (from preschool through university and adult classes), Jewish culture, and welfare. Additionally, JDC assists local Jews in reclaiming Jewish property (such as synagogues, hospitals, etc.) seized by Soviet authorities.

7. The 1994 JDC mission visited a number of programs supported by JDC noted below. Additionally, the group saw the JDC office and warehouse, a site for a future Jewish (Chabad) kindergarten, the remnants of the one functioning synagogue in the city,<sup>5</sup> and the Jewish Agency office. Igor Merkoulenko led a tour of Jewish Odessa, the group enjoyed a Shabbat meal with Jewish community leaders, and the Migdal Or musical theater staged a presentation for the delegation. The JDC group heard about: the summer and other camps operated by the Jewish community, a Tali day school that may open in the near future, a Jewish dance seminar held in the city, and efforts to reclaim Jewish communal property that had been confiscated by Soviet authorities.

8. A clear effort has been extended to re-connect Odessa Jewry with its pre-revolutionary history. Wherever applicable, contemporary organizations have assumed the names of predecessor groups, such as the **Gemilus Chesed** society, the **Beseda** [Conversations] club, and **HaMelitz**, a Jewish newspaper.

9. The **Jewish Cultural Society**, headed by Felix Milshtein, holds title to a community center building that houses the Jewish Cultural Society, the Israel Information Center (Lishkat haKeshet), the Migdal Or Jewish Musical Theater, the Ghetto Survivors and War Veterans Association, classrooms, and a community library.

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<sup>4</sup> Two Jews from Odessa -- Eduard Hurwitz and Volodymir Plotkin, both representing the Inter-Regional Bloc of Reform -- are among the four Jews recently elected to the 450-seat Rada, the Ukrainian parliament.

<sup>5</sup> The major portion of the structure collapsed in June 1992.

A restaurant is currently under construction in the courtyard of the Jewish community center building. It will operate as a commercial facility in the evening and as a free dining room for needy elderly during daytime hours.

10. The **Gemilus Chesed** society, directed by Vladimir Goldman, began operations two months previously as a consolidation of several smaller welfare groups that had worked within the Jewish Cultural Society. The organization assists approximately 200 homebound elderly through visits by nurses and paraprofessional social workers. It has distributed 300 JDC food parcels and given vouchers for free meals to ninety individuals. It sponsored a welfare seminar for physicians, nurses, paraprofessional social workers, and others. The Joint Distribution Committee is its principal benefactor; it has also received donations of cash, food, and furniture from local Jews.

11. The **Migdal Jewish supplementary school** meets on Sundays and three times during the week. It currently enrolls 150 children and is directed by Kira Verkhovskaya. Parents of students constitute the primary membership group of **Beseda**, a club for Jewish 'intellectuals' that meets periodically to discuss Jewish cultural topics.<sup>6</sup> Igor Merkoulenko directs this organization.

12. No Jewish **day school** exists in Odessa, an anomalous situation for a post-Soviet city with a sizable Jewish population. The primary factor in the absence of such an institution to date is probably the lack of a respected Orthodox rabbi in the city until very recently who might have organized such a school. The cosmopolitan outlook of much of Odessa's Jewish population may also be a deterrent to day school education.

Reports have circulated about the projected opening of a day school affiliated with the Tali schools in Israel, an effort of the **Masorti** (Conservative) movement. However, supporters of this venture are encountering difficulties in obtaining suitable premises.

13. The **Migdal Or** Jewish musical theater was established in 1991. Its repertoire includes music in both Hebrew and Yiddish. Sponsored by JDC, the group has performed in Ukraine, Moldova, Europe, and Israel. Kira Verchovskaya directs the theater. Migdal Or was the host organization for a **Jewish dance seminar** in late 1993 that attracted sixty teachers and students from various regions of the former USSR.

14. Ishaya Gisser, the Chabad spiritual leader in Odessa, is a native of the city who settled in Israel some years ago and returned to Odessa to lead its synagogue, most of which collapsed in ruins in 1992. Mr. Gisser is not a qualified rabbi and suffers recurring health problems. Rabbi Pinchas Vishetsky of Chabad has arrived recently to

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<sup>6</sup> 'Intellectuals' or 'intelligentsia' are terms broadly used in (post-) Soviet society to describe individuals who have completed an undergraduate education and work in science, humanities, or a profession.

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assist Mr. Gisser in several areas. Shimon Chichelitsky, an Israeli, is president of **Shomrei Shabbos**, the Chabad congregation.

Shlomo Baksht, an Israeli rabbi affiliated with **Aguda**, arrived in Odessa in December 1993. He and a group of older men are attempting to recover the main synagogue in the center of the city, which is now used as a sports hall. (Rabbi Baksht was out of town during our visit.)

15. The **Israel Information Center** (Lishkat haKeshet) in Odessa is directed by Dr. Philip Slobodsky. In common with similar centers in other cities, the Odessa unit offers a Hebrew ulpan (for 300 students who study in courses of two to three months duration), a Russian-language Judaica library, computers programmed with information about Israel, and holiday commemorations. Dr. Slobodsky reported that relations between the Center and the local JAFI office are good, that the two groups coordinate their activities, and that enough work exists in Odessa for both organizations.

16. Zvi Killiman, who previously directed the **Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI)** office in Kishinev, now heads **JAFI** efforts in Odessa. JAFI operates an ulpan with approximately 600 students, an Israeli dance group, holiday celebrations, a youth club, a summer camp, and other activities. It supervises the departure to Israel of 250 to 300 immigrants from the region each month (120 from Odessa itself), Mr. Killiman finds that local Jewish young people are very assimilated “because their parents are very assimilated” and thus are difficult to reach. According to Mr. Killiman, the Jewish Agency “works in harmony” with the Israel Information Center and with JDC.

17. A periodic Jewish newspaper, **HaMelitz**, which adopted the name of a pre-revolutionary Jewish newspaper that began publishing in 1861, has recently printed its third issue. Its sponsors are the Jewish Cultural Society, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency, and the Jewish Religious Society (Chabad).

18. Spurred by an existing “**sister-city**” relationship between the municipalities of Odessa and Baltimore, the Jewish communities of the two cities have established their own partnership. Baltimore-area Jews have sent three shipments of food parcels to needy Jewish families in Odessa, and Baltimore participants in the Wexner Heritage program have prepared a collection of Judaica items (candlesticks, talitot, seder plates, tzedakah boxes, etc.) for educational use in Odessa. A chupah sent by Baltimore Jews has been used in several local Jewish weddings. JDC has played a major role in this project.

## Bendery (Moldova)

19. Although its Jewish population is small (1,500 to 3,000), the Bendery Jewish community receives a large amount of attention — simply because it is located on the main highway between two much larger Jewish population centers, Odessa and Kishinev. Bendery is split by the Dneister River and is a major city in Pridnestroviya (Transdneister), the self-declared independent republic that has seceded from Moldova and has a political and military relationship with Russia.

20. Notwithstanding the area's political secession from Moldova, the Bendery Jewish community submits its budgetary requests to the **Moldovan Vaad**, which discusses such matters with **JDC**. JDC provides nearly the entire annual Jewish community budget of \$3,600.

21. Jewish communal life centers around the **synagogue**, which also accommodates the offices of the **Bendery Jewish Religious Association**, the **Bendery Jewish Cultural Association** (which includes welfare services), and a **Sunday school**. The building, whose outer walls still bear bullet holes from the 1992 fighting, contains a sanctuary, library, classroom, and activities room. All groups work closely together.

22. In common with many other small Jewish communities in the post-Soviet successor states, the majority of Bendery Jews are elderly. **Welfare activities** are extensive, directed by two volunteer physicians. The major problem encountered in welfare work is acquisition of medicine, especially insulin. Admission to hospitals is usually contingent upon the patient supplying his/her own medications. The welfare program serves more than 100 people.

23. The **Sunday school** enrolls 126 children between the ages of six and sixteen. They meet in four groups according to age for classes and a broad range of youth activities.

24. A **Hebrew ulpan** attracts about 100 individuals. Participants are assigned to one of one of three groups for instructional purposes.

25. Because of its small size, the community has no rabbi or resident representative of any Israeli or other foreign group. A local individual does repatriation work on behalf of the **Jewish Agency**, and other organizations serve the community from their Kishinev offices.

26. A relationship with a Miami synagogue has yielded some assistance for welfare and educational programs. **JDC** has supplied the community with a Russian-language Judaica library, ritual items, educational materials, supplemental food parcels for needy elderly, and access to seminars and training courses for lay and paraprofessional leaders.

27. **JDC, JAFI**, and the Israeli government assisted Jews in Bendery, Tiraspol, and other cities/towns in the Transdneister region during the severe armed conflict in summer 1992. Many chose to make aliyah during this period, and others evacuated temporarily to Odessa or Kishinev.

### **Kishinev (Moldova)**

28. **Kishinev** is the capital of newly independent Moldova. Approximately 30,000 Jews live in the city (of a total city population of 700,000). Kishinev achieved notoriety early in the twentieth century as the site of two devastating pogroms in 1903 and 1905; the most severe was the first, resulting in forty-nine deaths and nearly 600 injuries as well as extensive damage to Jewish property. The violence generated substantial Jewish emigration to the United States.

29. The principal Jewish umbrella organization in Kishinev is the **Jewish Cultural Association**, which includes a women's aid group, the **Ezrat Holim** medical assistance service, a youth group, and a **Maccabi** sports group.

30. A **synagogue**, under Chabad direction, is led by Rabbi Zalman Abelsky.

31. Two **day schools** operate in Kishinev. A Chabad school enrolls 180 children from ages seven to seventeen. A secular day school sponsored by the Lishkat haKeshet Maavar program has about 300 students. Separate **kindergartens** are affiliated with each day school.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The JDC delegation visited the secular day school and kindergarten.

32. A large and well-equipped **State Jewish Library and Museum** is located in the center of town. Directed by a staff of fourteen, headed by Anna Yakovlevna Batzmanova, this facility has won national recognition as the best library in the country; with several rooms and a small theater, it serves as a major focal point for the Jewish population. Its daily operations are supported by state funding. JDC allocations have covered extensive renovations, equipment (such as a computer for cataloging books and tapes and a television/VCR), and a recent seminar at the building for Jewish librarians from throughout Moldova and Ukraine.

33. Other **Jewish cultural institutions** include the **Lilach** folk dance troupe, a Jewish musical theater group, the **Nash golos** (Our Voice) newspaper, and Jewish-content radio and television programs.

34. The **Moldovan Vaad**, led by Semyon Shochet and Semyon Weisman, is an active national Jewish governing body that works closely with the various local organizations and with outside funding groups (principally JDC) in planning and budgeting. Mr. Weisman represents Moldovan Jewry in various international Jewish organizations.

35. The **Department of Judaica, Jewish History, and Jewish Literature at Kishinev State University** began to offer university-level courses in Bible, Hebrew, Yiddish, Jewish literature, general Jewish history, and history of Bessarabian Jewry during the 1992-93 academic year. Seven students, not all of them Jewish, are currently enrolled in a five-year undergraduate degree course; in response to questions, the students said that they hoped to pursue careers in teaching, translation, and research. Faculty members readily acknowledged a lack of qualified faculty, an inadequate teaching environment, and insufficient funding for desired travel to Israel and other countries. They hope that Israeli sources will provide instructors for subjects in which Moldovans lack competence.

JDC has donated textbooks, resource material, a Russian-language Judaica library, and audio materials to the program; ten cassette players with headphones from this stock appear to have been diverted to general university use.

36. The recently-established Jewish Department of the Moldovan **Academy of Sciences**, under the direction of Professor Isyaslav Ilyich Levit, has begun research on various Jewish topics, such as the role of Jews in Bessarabian history. The Academy prepared materials for the recent commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of the 1903 Kishinev pogrom. In collaboration with JDC, Professor Levit edited a Russian-language book on the tragedy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Levit, I. I., ed. *Kishinevskiy pogrom [of] 1903*. Kishinev: LIGA, 1993.

37. The **Joint Distribution Committee**, which initially served Moldova from its Odessa office, recently assigned a separate representative to the country. Vera Krizhak, an Israeli woman born in the former Soviet Union, supervises an extensive program supporting welfare (a seminar for Jewish communal workers in various Jewish population centers, distribution of 700 supplemental food parcels to needy elderly; provision of welfare-related equipment and supplies); education (educational material for both day schools; financial support for children attending Jewish summer camps; support to the Judaic studies program at Kishinev State University); religion (supply of ritual items, siddurim, and other materials to synagogues; support for holiday celebrations); and culture (sponsorship of a seminar for librarians; support of Jewish music and folk dance groups; collaboration in publishing ventures).

38. The JDC group met with Moshe Brillon, director of the **Jewish Agency for Israel** office in Moldova. In common with many other JAFI emissaries in the Soviet successor states, Mr. Brillon was born in the former USSR and came to Israel as a child. He views his major responsibility as presenting an accurate vision of Israel to Moldavian Jewry, especially Moldavian Jewish youth, so as to encourage aliyah. Thirty-eight adolescents from Moldova are in Israel now on the *Aliyah 16* program (Aliyah HaNoar; high school in Israel), but Mr. Brillon is concerned about future participation in this program because the educational system has deteriorated to such an extent in Moldova that many youngsters find it difficult to meet Aliyah 16 entrance requirements; only about thirty percent of the applicants successfully completed necessary examinations. JAFI is considering offering special courses to help youngsters upgrade their skills. The *kibbutz ulpan* program for people between the ages of 18 and 35 is proving very popular. He is also promoting the *First Home in the Homeland* program, which settles families on kibbutzim for ulpanim and initial absorption.

JAFI operates its own ulpan in Kishinev, enrolling 400 individuals from age four through seniors. The Agency also sponsors a successful youth club and will operate a summer camp for six hundred youngsters between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Brillon reported that 2,170 individuals emigrated to Israel from Moldova in 1993; he said that 185 others settled in the United States and 61 went to Germany. He anticipates a significant reduction in emigration in 1994 because: (1) recent peaceful elections have encouraged hope for democracy and stability in Moldova; (2) proposed legislation requiring fluency in Moldovan for a large number of positions has been delayed;<sup>10</sup> and (3) the crisis over Pridnestroviya, although not resolved, has eased. Mr.

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<sup>9</sup> The number of sessions in this camp in 1994, as in other JAFI summer camps in the post-Soviet successor states, will be curtailed because a strike of Israeli university faculty this winter has forced extension of the Israeli academic year into mid-summer, thus limiting the availability of Israeli university students as counselors.

Brillon said that his office works well with the Israel Information Center operated by the Lishkat haKeshet in Kishinev.

39. The **Lishkat haKeshet**, represented by Della Kleymen, operates an Israel Information Center in Kishinev. We did not meet with anyone from this office.

40. As evidence of the good relations between Moldovan Jewry and the government of Moldova, JDC arranged for the JDC delegation to meet with Mircha Snegur, the President of Moldova. Mr. Snegur's opening statement stressed that Moldovan state policy requires the observance of human rights. Because thirty-five percent of Moldovan citizens are of non-Moldovan ethnic background, he cannot agree with the philosophy of Moldovan nationalists. Sixteen different ethnic groups have established their own institutions in the country; among the most recent of these, he said, are Ukrainian and Bulgarian schools and an Armenian church. Jews have the right to study Jewish languages. He himself helped to open a synagogue. He recognized that the Jewish community had certain problems, such as finding adequate space for Jewish schools and preparing people for careers in Judaic fields.<sup>11</sup>

John Colman of Chicago, an officer of JDC and the senior member of the delegation, responded on behalf of JDC. Mr. Colman said that the delegation was very favorably impressed with the progress of Moldova as an independent country. He admired the courage of Mr. Snegur and others in protecting the health and welfare of Jews and other ethnic groups in the country; he asked that Mr. Snegur and his government consider JDC a partner in protecting the welfare of Jewish citizens in Moldova. Mr. Colman then made several specific requests on behalf of the Jewish community, each of which had been discussed earlier with government officials. First, JDC would like to develop a prewar Jewish hospital not yet returned to the Jewish community into a residential facility for elderly Jews unable to live in dignity independently. Second, JDC would like to be recognized as an American voluntary organization entitled to official status in Moldova. Third, as part of its eightieth anniversary celebrations, JDC would like to erect a plaque in Moldova—as JDC is doing in fifty other countries in which it is active. After wishing peace and prosperity to the Moldovan people, Mr. Colman then presented a mounted *shofar* (ram's horn) to President Snegur; Mr. Colman explained that the *shofar* is used to call the Jewish people to “a life of justice and holiness” at the beginning of each new year.

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<sup>10</sup>In Moldova, as in other former Soviet republics, most Jews are much more competent in Russian than in other languages. Imposition of laws or policies favoring native speakers of another language has been a major concern for local Jews.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. Snegur may have been referring to a request from the Moldovan Academy of Sciences for government funding to send individuals to Israel for advanced training in Judaic studies. See section #36 above.

President Snegur closed the session by commenting that the Moldovan government would be pleased to work in partnership with JDC and that JDC need not be concerned about its specific requests. The entire session was videotaped; excerpts appeared on local television that evening.

## Kiev<sup>12</sup>

41. **Kiev**, the capital of Ukraine, is a city of three million people, of whom Ukrainians constitute seventy-three percent and Russians nineteen percent. Perhaps 100,000 to 110,000 Jews live in Kiev, the second largest Jewish population center in the former Soviet Union (after Moscow).

Exclusionary laws and persistent persecution severely limited the number of Jews living in Kiev throughout the tsarist period. Nonetheless, exemptions accorded extremely wealthy families (such as the Brodskys, well-known sugar merchants) or exceptional professionals (such as the ophthalmologist Max Emanuel Mandelstamm<sup>13</sup>) and widespread evasion of residential statutes by others led to a Jewish population of more than 81,000 by 1913. Refugees from World War I and from pogroms devastating smaller centers boosted the population to 175,000 (twenty percent of the total city census) by 1939.<sup>14</sup> Under official Soviet sponsorship, Yiddish culture flourished in Kiev from 1917 to the mid-1930s; most Jewish institutions were liquidated during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s and their leaders sent into exile or murdered.

The majority of Jews living in Kiev were slaughtered during the Holocaust, a large number of them at **Babi Yar** on September 29-30, 1941, barely one week after the city fell to the German army. Babi Yar subsequently became a symbol of Soviet antisemitism as Soviet authorities refused repeated pleas to construct a monument at the site. When a memorial was finally constructed in 1976 it minimized the fate of Jews. A specifically Jewish memorial was built only in 1991 (in observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre) at a site some distance from the original structure, but adjacent to the ravine in which the extermination took place.

42. Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, a Karliner-Stoliner hasid from New York, arrived in Kiev in mid-1990 and quickly became the dominant figure in post-Soviet Kiev Jewish life. Now

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<sup>12</sup> Information on Kiev appearing in this section derives from the 1994 JDC mission and from other sources. The writer visited Kiev twice in 1993 and once in 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Mandelstamm was also a leading political Zionist.

<sup>14</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Kiev."

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the Chief Rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine, he is closely associated with numerous Jewish institutions in the city and beyond, including the largest synagogue in Kiev, day schools, the Kiev Jewish Community, Ezrat Avot welfare society, a matzot factory (that supplies all of Ukraine and Moldova), and the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine. He presides over the last-named group, an association of some fifty-two orthodox congregations throughout Ukraine. Rabbi Bleich receives significant funding from abroad, most notably from the Reichmann family of Canada. The JDC group met with Rabbi Bleich on several occasions.

43. Rabbi Berel Karasik, a Chabad hasid from Israel, also claims to be Chief Rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine, having received that designation from a different Ukrainian government ministry than that which had earlier conferred the titles upon Rabbi Bleich. Rabbi Karasik presides over the former Brodsky synagogue, a centrally-located facility that still serves as a municipal puppet theater in which Chabad has access to several rooms. Rabbi Karasik is also associated with a day school, welfare society (Ezrat Achim), and an organization of Chabad rabbis in Ukraine. Rabbi Karasik is perceived as ineffective by many observers, including individuals affiliated with Chabad. The JDC group had no scheduled meetings with Rabbi Karasik; however, he saw the mission group at Babi Yar and spoke briefly with us. A supporter in his party boarded the JDC vehicle and asked the JDC delegates for funding, much to the discomfort of all in the JDC mission.

44. The **Hatikvah Congregation**, affiliated with the World Union of Progressive Judaism (Reform), is the third synagogue in Kiev. Rabbi Ariel Stone, an American, was the spiritual leader during 1993-94; she has returned to the United States and is unlikely to resume her responsibilities in Kiev. Hatikvah, which attracts from sixty to well over one hundred people to Friday night services, is attempting to acquire the former Karaite synagogue as its permanent home. Undeniably one of the more successful Reform efforts in the post-Soviet successor states, the Hatikvah Congregation was weakened during 1993 by the emigration of several of its most effective lay leaders. Further, the appointment of a woman rabbi may have been inappropriate, considering the sexist views of even the most progressive elements of post-Soviet society.

45. The **Kiev Jewish Community** was established in October 1993 by a broad spectrum of organizations and individuals as an encompassing community-wide Jewish organization. Rabbi Bleich is its acting president, and Alexander Zevelev (who was in New York during the JDC visit) serves as administrator. An elected council of fifty individuals and an executive committee of ten people establish policy. Its major priorities are education, youth activities, religion, and welfare. Among its direct service agencies are/will be: a women's group, Makor, a Jewish press agency, a club for 'intelligentsia', and Ezrat Avot. (See below for additional information on some of these agencies.)

46. The **Kiev Jewish Cultural Society**, led by Ilya Levitas as president and Arkady Monastirsky as administrator, focuses on social events related to International Solomon University (see below) and on Babi Yar memorial commemorations. Some of its activities overlap those of the Ukrainian Jewish Congress, also headed by Ilya Levitas. (See below.)

47. The **Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities in Ukraine** is an umbrella association affiliated with the Vaad. Its president is Yosif Zissels and its vice-president is Boris Bashin, who is also a member of the Kiev City Council. Mr. Zissels frequently represents Ukrainian Jewry in various international Jewish fora. Its agenda is quite broad, addressing issues in Jewish education, Jewish history (including preservation of Jewish sites, monuments, and landmarks), recovery of Jewish communal property, welfare, leadership training, and services to small communities. This organization is strongly service-oriented, more so than the post-Soviet Vaad, with which it is associated. It works well with Rabbi Bleich and with JDC, and has received funding from Ukrainian Jewish donors and from outside foundations. The JDC group met briefly with Mr. Bashin in a setting that did not encourage substantive discussion.

48. The **Ukrainian Jewish Council**, established in October 1992 at a Congress of Ukrainian Jewry, has a much more limited agenda. Its president is Ilya Levitas, and its vice-president is Arkady Monastirsky. The JDC delegation met Mr. Monastirsky in circumstances unfavorable to serious deliberations. Among the projects of this organization is a Holocaust documentation effort co-sponsored by JDC and Lohamei Hagetaot Museum in Israel. It also maintains a data base on Jewish cultural organizations in Ukraine. This group is nominally competitive with the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities in Ukraine, but generally less service-oriented and less successful in attracting political and financial support.

49. **Makor - the Centre for the Support and Development of Jewish Youth Activities** coordinates the Kiev Jewish Youth Council, which includes Beitar, Bnei Akiva, Shahr (sponsored by the Jewish Agency), Hatikvah (sponsored by the World Union of Progressive Judaism), and two Jewish student unions. It provides programmatic services to these organizations and also sponsors activities for unaffiliated youth. It supplies technical equipment and services (such as photocopying, computers, electronic apparatus) to the entire Jewish community. It receives funding from British and American sources, including JDC. Rabbi Bleich supports its endeavors. Its director is Alik Shteinsvet.

50. Established as a welfare service for Jewish elderly in 1992, **Ezrat Avot** serves approximately 6,000 Jewish seniors and other needy individuals throughout Kiev. The JDC group was briefed on Ezrat Avot by Charles Hoffman, the JDC director in Kiev, and

later met senior staff members Ella Shishko and Lazar Shabshaikes as well as several paraprofessional social workers.

Ezrat Avot employs sixteen paraprofessional social workers, each one responsible for a specific city district. These workers ('inspectors') assess the requirements of people within their districts and coordinate appropriate services, such as household cleaning, shopping, financial subsidy, intervention with housing authorities, medical care, medicines, government entitlements, socializing opportunities, etc. Each inspector controls some funding resources and supervises five or six home care workers.

In small groups, each member of the JDC mission visited three clients of Ezrat Avot. Reports to the larger delegation indicated that all of the clients were elderly, most lived alone with little or no family support, many resided in communal apartments (sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities with three or four other tenants, including entire families), most were housebound (many were mobile within their units, but lived on upper floors in buildings without elevators), many lacked access to necessary medications, and all had suffered some degree of impoverishment due to rampant inflation and erosion of pension benefits. Many of the clients and 'inspectors' had developed mutual affections, and all of the clients were effusively grateful for the support provided by Ezrat Avot. Most seemed aware that JDC is a primary sponsor of Ezrat Avot, probably because Ezrat Avot has distributed JDC supplemental food parcels in packaging bearing the JDC logo and containing messages of JDC sponsorship.<sup>15</sup>

JDC is working with Ezrat Avot to strengthen its staff—to engage additional personnel and to enhance their professional training. Inspectors and some home care workers participate in seminars of the local Institute of Gerontology and also benefit from consultations by visiting Israeli specialists.

JDC believes that many more Jews in the city—perhaps as many as 20,000 -- require some services from Ezrat Avot. Research has shown that elderly individuals account for approximately twelve percent of the population in most western countries, but about eighteen percent of the Ukrainian population is past retirement age (according to the Institute of Gerontology). JDC estimates that an even greater proportion of the Ukrainian Jewish population—twenty-five to thirty percent—is elderly, and that this percentage may grow to fifty to sixty percent as younger Jews continue to emigrate. The existing social service network in Kiev is weak and deteriorating; it cannot possibly meet all of the needs of the local elderly population.

51. Three Jewish **day schools** operate in Kiev:

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<sup>15</sup> Subsequent to these visits, several in the JDC group expressed frustration at the failure of JDC to notify them earlier of the great needs of elderly Jews in Ukraine. Had they been so informed, the tour participants would have brought clothing and other goods for Ezrat Avot.

- The Jewish Gymnasium, closely associated with Rabbi Bleich, enrolls approximately 600 students, none from observant families, ages seven through seventeen in separate facilities for boys and girls. All pupils participate in three Judaic classes daily and a strong general studies program. They study four languages - Hebrew, English, Russian, and Ukrainian. The JDC group visited the girls school and found it well-equipped and thriving. The school has a good computer laboratory with about twelve stations.
- The Israeli Maavar school enrolls about 200 youngsters ages six through sixteen. The school is managed by the Lishkat haKeshet in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Education. Because it shares premises with a public school, its flexibility is limited.
- The Chabad movement sponsors a day school enrolling about 200 students between the ages of eleven and sixteen. It also shares premises with a public school.

52. Four organizations sponsor **Sunday schools** in Kiev: Rabbi Bleich's synagogue (approximately 100 pupils); the Lishkat haKeshet Mechina program (100); Jewish Cultural Society (45); and Congregation Hatikvah (20).

53. Both Chabad and Rabbi Bleich operate **pre-schools**. The Chabad school enrolls about one hundred children; Rabbi Bleich's pre-school enrolls twenty children this year and will accommodate sixty next year.

54. Chabad and Rabbi Bleich sponsor **yesheivot** enrolling approximately ten and twenty-five students respectively.

55. The **International Solomon University** is unique in the Soviet successor states. Unlike the Jewish University of St. Petersburg, which focuses on Judaic studies, the Kiev institution is conceived as a broadbased university under Jewish auspices; currently in its first year of operation, it is offering four-year undergraduate degrees and two-year masters' degrees in humanities, Judaic studies, engineering, and natural sciences, and graduate programs in medical technology and law. In a meeting with the JDC group, senior faculty stated that the aim of the university is twofold: (1) to revive Jewish culture in Ukraine, and (2) to provide educational opportunities for Jews who face severe antisemitic discrimination in Ukrainian institutions of higher education. Three hundred students are enrolled in this initial year, half of whom are Jews and half of whom are Russian or Ukrainian. Because it is dependent upon visiting professors for some courses, it requires that entering students speak English.

The JDC group met with Grigory Useem, Vice-President for Administration, Dr. Yochanan Petrovsky, Acting Chairman of the Judaic Studies Department, several other faculty members, and a number of students. The University is the only private university in Ukraine; tuition is \$120 annually, a major sum in that country. When asked why non-Jews would pay tuition to study secular subjects in an unproved institution, faculty and students offered the following reasons: (a) many Russians and Ukrainians believe that Jews are more intelligent than others and, therefore, that a university under Jewish auspices would provide a superior education; (b) a private university is deemed better than a public university; and (3) novelty.

The University lacks its own premises; its classes meet in a public high school after high school classes end for the day and in other buildings. It also lacks computers, teaching and laboratory equipment, textbooks and a library for the secular curriculum, and office space and supplies. It receives financial support, textbooks, library books, equipment, and training for its Judaic studies program from JDC. It also receives some funding from the Rich Foundation and the Ukrainian Jewish Council.

Rabbi Bleich teaches a course in Jewish tradition at the university, but it is very difficult to find qualified instructors for other Judaic courses. Because the current economic climate has forced other institutions to constrict their operations, the university has been able to attract some excellent professors in secular subjects. (Students with whom the JDC delegation spoke offered varying evaluations of instructor competence.)

56. The **Jewish Collection and Archive** in the **Vernadsky Library** of the **Ukrainian Academy of Sciences** includes 160,000 books, journals, manuscripts, volumes of communal history, and other written material (in several languages) that were confiscated during the Soviet regime. Political conditions now permit a staff to be assembled that is sorting, classifying, and attempting to preserve this material. The Joint Distribution Committee has arranged for staff to study Yiddish and is providing other assistance in this project. The JDC mission visited the library collection, meeting with Irina Sergeevna, director of the Collection/Archive, and with Oleksei Onishenko, the head of the Vernadsky Library.

57. The **Department of Jewish History and Jewish Culture** in the **Institute of Ethnic Relations and Political Science** of the **Ukrainian Academy of Sciences** is conducting research on various topics. JDC has provided reference books and equipment, and subsidized the first publication of this unit, proceedings of a conference on Jewish life during the Stalin era.

58. The **Joint Distribution Committee** office in Kiev is responsible for JDC activity in northern Ukraine, an area that includes Kiev, several smaller but still significant Jewish population centers in western and central Ukraine, and a number of small Jewish

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communities inhabited by fewer than one hundred souls. The organization is active in several fields. In *Jewish education*, it provides pre-schools, day schools, and other educational institutions with cash grants, Russian-language Judaica libraries, textbooks, equipment, and teacher training opportunities. In *Jewish culture*, it assists artistic groups (such as Jewish dance ensembles), Jewish newspapers, and Jewish cultural institutions. It also provides libraries and equipment to the Jewish Agency and Israel Information and Cultural Center installations in Kiev and to summer camps operated by JAFI and other groups.

Responding to the large number of elderly Jews in need of assistance, JDC has made a major commitment to *welfare services*. It is a principal sponsor of the Kiev Jewish welfare association, **Ezrat Avot** (see above), and has arranged for the Jewish Braille Institute of New York to provide “talking books” (in Russian and Yiddish) to elderly Jews in Kiev and Lviv (as well as in Moscow and St. Petersburg) who encounter difficulty in reading. Holding a 25-year lease on a building in Kiev currently being remodeled to serve JDC needs, JDC is developing a facility whose primary daytime use will be as a day center for Jewish elderly. The center will accommodate approximately 150 seniors at a time, and will offer socializing opportunities, lectures, health-enhancement activities, and hot, nutritious meals. Its facilities will permit operation of both a meals-on-wheels service to the homebound and a medical equipment loan program. The building will also accommodate a pre-school, kosher restaurant, community library, and meeting rooms. It is anticipated that the center will serve the broader Jewish community in the evenings.

In addition to serving the elderly in Kiev, JDC has mounted emergency winter relief operations to assist Jews living in smaller towns and villages in central and western Ukraine. Most such Jewish populations are overwhelmingly elderly as younger Jews have departed to seek greater opportunities elsewhere. JDC has organized distribution of supplemental food parcels, gas balloons, and/or coal to thousands of needy Jews living in small towns and scattered settlements where supply of food and fuel is irregular at best. Where possible, JDC has worked with existing municipal or regional Jewish organizations. It has also provided some humanitarian aid on behalf of local Jewish communities to hospitals and other institutions affected by the Ukrainian economic crisis.

JDC also works with local Jewish communities in *recovery of Jewish communal property* confiscated by Communist authorities and in repairing and remodeling such structures after their return. The Ukrainian government has been more cooperative in such matters than several other post-Soviet governments.

JDC *develops partnerships* with other funding sources that assist the Kiev Jewish community. For example, it supervises projects supported by the Rich Foundation (International Solomon University), Community Development Fund (Makor, Ezrat Avot, welfare operations in smaller population centers), Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago (renovation of a community library), and the Jewish Braille Institute (“talking books’ program).

The JDC Kiev office appears to be somewhat less active than other JDC stations in fostering *community-building* initiatives, such as leadership training courses and collaborative ventures involving several different organizations or institutions. This limitation may reflect: (1) a conviction within JDC—shared by many others as well—that most of the Ukrainian Jewish population will emigrate in the foreseeable future; (2) deferral to the dominating presence of Rabbi Yaakov Bleich; and/or (3) the professional style of Charles Hoffman, the director of the JDC Kiev office.

A skilled journalist by training and vocation, Charles Hoffman is unusual among JDC post-Soviet area directors in that he does not speak Russian. He commutes between Jerusalem and Kiev, relying on an older full-time Russian-speaking resident assistant, Zev Sali, to manage day-to-day affairs and to communicate with local Jews on a regular basis. Handicapped by language barriers and perhaps also maintaining a journalistic ethic of detachment from local politics, Mr. Hoffman often hesitates to interact with community leaders. Believing that Mr. Sali is a mere “messenger” for Mr. Hoffman, many local leaders consider the approach of the Kiev JDC station to be remote and indifferent; they are aware that JDC directors in other post-Soviet cities communicate easily with local Jews in a consultative manner and attempt to engage them in collaborative planning efforts. Some JDC staffers elsewhere arrange programs that bring contentious community groups together for a common purpose. (Such discomfort with the professional style of the Kiev office does not diminish the gratitude of local Kiev Jewish leaders for the material support and other services that JDC provides.)

Given the professional approach of the Kiev JDC station, it is understandable that the agenda for the JDC mission group in Kiev included only superficial meetings with community leaders. Further, the Kiev office did not provide mission members with the type of written information about the community that had been presented to each in Odessa and Kishinev.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Mr. Hoffman’s approach to community work may be unusual, his journalism skills have generated a number of exceptionally lucid reports about JDC activity in Kiev and the surrounding area. Appropriately, some have been distributed to JDC board and committee members.

59. As it does in other cities, the **Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI; Sochnut)** installation in Kiev focuses on promoting aliyah. It sponsors Hebrew classes, seminars for students and adults, a pedagogical center, youth clubs (Shahar), summer camps for adolescents, counseling on aliyah, and technical services related to emigration. JAFI organizes aliyah flights from Kiev every week for Jews from various points in Ukraine;

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<sup>16</sup> Much of the information about Jewish community structure in Kiev and Ukraine that was included in the JDC briefing book for tour members is inaccurate. When a tour member asked Mr. Hoffman about the number of Jewish organizations in Kiev, Mr. Hoffman responded that JDC has never made a “comprehensive survey” of Jewish organization life in the city.

about 200 olim are on each flight. According to Shifra Safra, an education specialist at the JAFI office with whom the JDC group conferred, the Israeli ambassador to Ukraine, Zvi Magen, organizes monthly meetings of representatives from JAFI, the Lishkat haKeshet, and JDC to exchange information and coordinate activities.

60. The JDC delegation did not meet with any representative of the **Israel Information and Cultural Center** in Kiev, which is operated by the Lishkat haKeshet. These units usually offer Hebrew classes, a JDC-supplied Russian-language Judaica library, and a computer facility programmed with information about Israel.

61. Three **Jewish newspapers** are published in Kiev: *Hadashot* (Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine), *Evreiski vesti* (Kiev Jewish Cultural Society), and *Vozrozhdenie* (independent). Each is distributed throughout Ukraine, although not always in a systematic manner. (A Yiddish newspaper, *Einikeit*, ceased publication recently when its editor emigrated.)

62. Several Jewish song and dance ensembles have been organized in Kiev.

63. A “twinning” or “sister-city” relationship exists between the Kiev Jewish population and the **Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago**. To date, the only substantive outgrowth of this relationship is a commitment by the Chicago federation to contribute \$5,000 toward renovation of a Jewish community library. The contribution is being channeled through JDC. A ‘mission’ of the Chicago **Jewish United Fund** (the campaign arm of the federation) visited Kiev in April 1994.

## II. Independent Travel

### Dnepropetrovsk

64. Betsy Gidwitz left the JDC group on its last evening in Kiev to travel to Dnepropetrovsk in eastern Ukraine by overnight train. Because of a communications failure between JDC and Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky of Dnepropetrovsk, JDC and Rabbi Kaminetzky each arranged travel plans for Betsy Gidwitz. Uncharacteristically, the JDC proposal included security measures of a dubious nature so Betsy Gidwitz chose to

utilize the procedures initiated by Rabbi Kaminetzky and departed for Dnepropetrovsk without incident.

65. **Dnepropetrovsk** (known until 1926 as Ekaterinoslav) is a city of some 1.2 to 1.3 million people in east central Ukraine. Its Jewish population of approximately 55,000 is the fourth largest in the post-Soviet Union, following Moscow (200,000), Kiev (110,000), and St. Petersburg (100,000). Most international Jewish organizations consider Dnepropetrovsk their administrative center for a region including at least four other cities with Jewish populations: Krivoi Rog (15,000), Zaporozhe (7,000), Dneprodzerzhinsk (2,000), and Pavlograd (500).<sup>17</sup> Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhe, and Dneprodzerzhinsk are all situated on the shore of the Dnepr River. Krivoi Rog is inland to the west, and Pavlograd is inland to the east.

Despite its large Jewish population, the area is less well known even to the informed Jewish public than are many other regions in the Soviet successor states with significantly smaller Jewish population concentrations. Indeed, two large international Jewish organizations—the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel—established representations in Dnepropetrovsk only within the last year, long after opening offices in other areas with fewer Jews. Several factors may explain this anomaly: (1) because of its many military industries, Dnepropetrovsk was a “closed city” under the Soviet regime, becoming accessible to foreigners only in 1990; when cities are inaccessible, their existence is often forgotten; (2) the area is fairly remote, not on any conventional tourist itinerary; (3) whereas the name of Ekaterinoslav is familiar to many Jews whose family roots are in that city, the Soviet name of Dnepropetrovsk is much less well known; and (4) many non-Russian speakers find the name of Dnepropetrovsk difficult to pronounce.

The economy of the entire area derives from local deposits of iron ore, manganese, and coal, and is based on mining and heavy industry (metallurgy, armaments, machine tools, chemicals, and equipment for mining, construction, and transportation). Environmental degradation is wide-ranging.

Easiest access to the region is from Kiev by overnight train or by air. Until recently, fuel shortages had limited the regularity of air service, but Air Ukraine is now offering reasonably dependable flights five to six days each week in both directions between the two cities.

Jews have lived in the area, part of the old Pale of Settlement, since the late eighteenth century. Ekaterinoslav/Dnepropetrovsk (whose Jewish population was 62,073 in 1926) was a center of both Zionism and the Chabad movement. Jewish losses during the Holocaust were severe, but somewhat less devastating than those in Soviet cities

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<sup>17</sup> All demographic figures are from Gur, *op. cit.*. A fifth city, Nikopol, also has a small Jewish population, but is not listed in the Gur study. Nikopol is south of Zaporozhe, on the Dnepr River.

further west because many Jews were evacuated to the east along with the military industries in which they worked.

66. The Soviet Jewry Committee of the **Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston** decided in 1991-92 to consider development of a “**sister-city**” or “twinning” relationship with the Jewish population of the Dnepropetrovsk region. In an attempt to explore such a relationship, Betsy Gidwitz and Judy Wolf first visited the area in May 1992 as an extension of a National Conference on Soviet Jewry ‘mission’ to the then Soviet Vaad conference that had convened in Odessa. Dr. Gidwitz subsequently visited the area with Simon Klarfeld (then a Brandeis Hornstein student doing fieldwork at the Boston JCRC) in January 1993, and with a small group from **Action for Post-Soviet Jewry** (Waltham, MA) in October 1993. The Boston effort, still in an exploratory phase, lacks direction as well as sensitivity to the legitimate interests of other institutional stakeholders in welfare and Jewish education issues concerning post-Soviet Jewry.

67. Sixty percent of the **population** of Dnepropetrovsk is Ukrainian and most of the remainder is Russian. Unlike several other cities in eastern Ukraine with significant ethnic Russian populations (such as Kharkov and Donetsk), **Russian nationalism** is muted in Dnepropetrovsk. **Economic hardship** is an increasingly important factor as heavy industry in the area is unable to adjust to changed political circumstances; according to Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky of Dnepropetrovsk, seventy percent of local industry has closed and some people suffered from hunger during the recent winter. Periodic disruptions of heat and hot water are almost daily occurrences. Streets are riddled with potholes. Although many elderly Jews are seriously affected by rampant inflation that has reduced the value of their monthly pensions to less than ten dollars, other Jews have profited from new opportunities in business. Rabbi Kaminetzky reports heightened **antisemitism** as frustrated and angry citizens search for scapegoats; his own front door was smeared with excrement in April 1994.

68. Prior to the arrival of Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky, a Chabad hasid, in June 1990, the Jewish population of the region had been without a rabbi since 1954 when Rabbi Yehuda Leib Levin (1894-1972) left Dnepropetrovsk to become Chief Rabbi of Moscow. Rabbi Kaminetzky is young, energetic, politically astute, charming, and respected by all—even by those not sympathetic to the Chabad movement. He has developed very productive ties with municipal and *oblast* (region) officials. A native of Israel who has studied in the United States, Rabbi Kaminetzky is strongly Zionist in his outlook. He perceives no enduring future for Jews in any of the Soviet successor states. His wife Chana was raised in the United States and is also held in high esteem. They have two young daughters, Yehudis and Chaya Mushka. The Kaminetzkys say that they have made a long-term commitment to Dnepropetrovsk, intending to remain “until the last Jew leaves.” They themselves hope to settle in Israel someday.

Shmuel Kaminetzky has brought two additional Chabad rabbis to Dnepropetrovsk. Rabbi Chaim Ber Stambler administers and teaches in a small Chabad yeshiva (see below) in the city. Additionally, he has recently assumed responsibility for managing a small **construction company** that Chabad has formed to (1) plan and implement major additions to the summer camp that is owned by the (Chabad) synagogue, and to (2) plan and implement extensive renovations to the large choral synagogue that Rabbi Kaminetzky has recovered from a factory that was using it as a warehouse. (Both of these projects are described below.) Chaim Ber Stambler is from a wealthy family, works in Dnepropetrovsk without salary, and has provided financial support for several Chabad projects in the city. Rabbi Meir Stambler, a nephew of Chaim Ber, teaches in the local yeshiva high school (see below) and performs various other tasks.

In addition to the Stamblers, Rabbi Kaminetzky has asked Rabbi Chaim Greenberg of Great Britain to open a **synagogue** in the *Pobeda* (Victory) district of the city, an area in which many young Jewish families reside. Rabbi Greenberg has arrived in Dnepropetrovsk, has an apartment in the Pobeda district, and is looking for synagogue premises there.<sup>18</sup>

Rabbi Kaminetzky is a “strong rabbi,” comparable to Rabbi Yaakov Bleich of Kiev in many ways. Each is a hasid (Kaminetzky is Chabad and Bleich is Karliner-Stoliner), each is twenty-nine years old, each is politically astute and has developed close working relations with political authorities in his city, each realizes that few contemporary Jews in the post-Soviet successor states will ever feel comfortable in synagogue and thus has encouraged the establishment of various secular Jewish institutions that might encourage Jewish identification as well as address substantive needs, and each is the dominant Jewish presence in his city. Kaminetzky has stronger Zionist sympathies, and Bleich appears to be more tolerant of other philosophies of Judaism.

Rabbi Bleich is more prominent internationally and has been more successful in outside fundraising. He derives significant advantage in both areas from his position as Chief Rabbi of Ukraine and Kiev; Kiev is a frequently visited national capital that is well-known in the Jewish world. Each Jewish community has a “sister-city” relationship with an American Jewish community, but neither relationship is well-developed (although the Dnepropetrovsk-Boston relationship does enjoy the commitment of a small number of dedicated activists in Boston).

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<sup>18</sup> Rabbi Kaminetzky describes Rabbi Greenberg as “modern Orthodox.” However, it is possible that Rabbi Kaminetzky’s interpretation of that term is different from that usually understood among American Jewry. Rabbi Kaminetzky has opposed efforts of Bnei Akiva, a modern Orthodox youth group, to establish itself in the city, apparently finding them threatening. Betsy Gidwitz has not met Rabbi Greenberg.

69. As noted above, the large **choral synagogue** has finally been restored to the Jewish community after several years of legal wrangling with the factory that has been using it for decades as a warehouse for its manufacture of clothing. With the acquiescence of Rabbi Kaminetzky, the departure of the factory from the synagogue is progressing at a moderate pace; Rabbi Kaminetzky hopes to mitigate their anger as the owner of the factory has already said that he will not permit the synagogue to utilize the electricity and water connections that pass through the factory to the synagogue.

Rabbi Kaminetzky has expansive dreams for the synagogue, hoping to use it not only as a sanctuary for worship, but also as a community center that would include activity and meeting rooms as well as a small cafe. JDC has already agreed to assist in the extensive repair and renovation work that will be required. No firm plans have yet been developed.

Rabbi Kaminetzky has offered the current, much smaller synagogue to JDC for use as a senior adult center or some other community service facility. JDC has not communicated its intentions regarding this building.

70. Rabbi Kaminetzky reported some confusion within the local Jewish population caused by the occasional visits of Rabbi Alexander Eisenshtadt, a militantly anti-Zionist rabbi allied with Rabbi Eliezer Shacht of Israel and financed by Rabbi Soloveichik of Zurich. Rabbi Eisenshtadt attempts to recruit Jewish students to an anti-Israel yeshiva that he has established outside Moscow, offering them fifty dollars (in addition to transportation and tuition costs) simply to attend a seminar at his yeshiva and then fifty dollars a month thereafter to study at the yeshiva. The offer of American currency is enticing in the current economic environment and few students are sufficiently sophisticated to understand the ramifications of Rabbi Eisenshtadt's proposal. In general, the visiting rabbi has not been successful; Shmuel has heard that the yeshiva can accommodate up to three hundred students, but no more than forty have ever been enrolled. Shmuel was so alarmed by Rabbi Eisenshtadt's recruiting efforts that he placed advertisements in several Dnepropetrovsk newspapers, urging students to consult with him before making a commitment to any yeshiva program.

71. The Dnepropetrovsk **Jewish Council**, whose development into a representative decision-making community organization has been urged by Bostonians active in the sister-city relationship, is generally perceived as ineffective. Whereas both Bostonians and JDC had hoped that it would be a unifying and representative force, the major activity of the Council appears to be squabbling over irrelevant issues. The organization lacks direction and support. Local observers noted that its only real champion is its president, businessman Boris Pessin, who, some believe, is interested more in his own image than in the well-being of the larger Jewish community. Whatever his motives, Mr. Pessin has committed his own funds for the rental of a two-room office, subsidy of the newspaper *Shabbat Shalom* in the name of the Council (see below), and several

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specific Council projects. Betsy Gidwitz met with a small 'leadership group' of the Council in its new office.

The Council's *Shaarei Chesed* welfare society, with whom a Boston group met last October, is now associated with the new Joint Distribution Committee office. A smaller group of welfare activists remains with the Council. The Council asked Betsy Gidwitz that all medical aid sent by Boston Jewry to the city be directed to their office; when asked if any physicians served on their welfare committee, they responded that an (obviously elderly) individual who had trained as a psychiatrist but had retired from another profession some years ago was a member of their general governing body. The Council did not mention that Dr. Alexander Friedkis, chief of surgery at a local hospital and also vice-president of the synagogue, holds occasional office hours at the Council premises. Mr. Pessin commented that "some people" in the Jewish community believe that the entire container (of welfare items, including a large amount of medicine and medical goods) then enroute to Dnepropetrovsk from Boston be delivered to the Council. Dr. Gidwitz avoided telling the group that the container was addressed to Rabbi Kaminetzky (at the suggestion of JDC), but did give the Council a small portion of the over-the-counter medicines, clothing, and food that she had brought to the city in duffel bags. A secretary recorded the receipt of each item, asking Betsy Gidwitz for explanations of unfamiliar articles.

Dr. Gidwitz attempted to initiate a discussion about the goals and objectives of the Council. Those present seemed more interested in the mechanics of establishing a North American-style large-city federation and soliciting large sums of money from recalcitrant wealthy individuals. After considerable effort, Betsy Gidwitz elicited the following as goals and objectives of the Council: (1) raise the level of Jewish culture in Dnepropetrovsk; (2) combat antisemitism; (3) expand their welfare activities; (4) work collaboratively with other Jewish organizations; and (5) increase the circulation of *Shabbat Shalom* so that it is read in every Jewish home in the region. Designation of the last objective led to a discussion of *Shabbat Shalom*, which is summarized below.

In an earlier discussion with Shimon Strinkovsky, the JDC representative in Dnepropetrovsk, Mr. Strinkovsky expressed exasperation with the Council, which he has been attempting to nurture. He noted its inability to focus, its lack of direction, its domination by Mr. Pessin, its endless bickering, and its lack of support and influence within the larger Jewish community. Similar views were later expressed by Aharon Nechushtan of the local Jewish Agency office.

Despite these concerns, which she shares, Dr. Gidwitz believes that further effort should be directed toward developing a representative governing council that will serve the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish population. As noted in a previous report:

In common with many other voluntary structures in the post-Soviet successor states, the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish Community Council is constrained by the legacy of the

Soviet era; individual initiative, civil debate, tolerance of differing political and spiritual views, consensus-building, planning and priority-setting, and accountability are attitudes and skills notably lacking in the experience of most post-Soviet Jews. The development of the Council into a pro-active representative, and credible decision-making community organization will require substantial time.<sup>19</sup>

72. Prior to the commitment of funds to ***Shabbat Shalom*** by the Jewish Council (with a generous contribution from Boris Pessin), the newspaper was published irregularly, whenever financial resources permitted. Since its inception, the newspaper has been edited by Mikhail Karshenbaum who, observers note, lacks any professional qualifications for such responsibilities. Less a chronicle of ongoing events in the Jewish world than a collection of (1) reprints of lengthy chapters from books on Jewish history, antisemitism, or some other generic topic, and (2) reprints of brief handouts from the Jewish Agency or Lishkat haKeshet, *Shabbat Shalom* is tedious and generally uninteresting. Many post-Soviet Jewish newspapers share such characteristics; good editors -- and good business managers—are difficult to find in contemporary Russia and Ukraine. Further, as readers in other countries can attest, high-quality journalism on Jewish topics often seems elusive in more developed Jewish communities as well.

After a discussion of the shortcomings of the newspaper, which Mr. Karshenbaum acknowledged, he asked Betsy Gidwitz to send in some Jewish newspapers from the West. Dr. Gidwitz complied, preparing a packet of Jewish papers (including the *Boston Jewish Advocate*, the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, the *Forward*, *The Canadian Jewish News*, the *London Jewish Chronicle*, and others) for the group from Boston that went to Dnepropetrovsk in mid-May.

73. A new Jewish organization in Dnepropetrovsk is the **Association of Jewish Intellectuals of Dnepropetrovsk (AID** - pronounced ah-eed). Frustrated by the paralysis of the Jewish Council, Shimon Strinkovsky of JDC has focused attention on this group. To date, its major activity has centered on discussion of JDC-supplied videos and Russian-language Judaica books, but it is looking ahead to a lecture series and formation of a section for pensioners. Many in the group—its size is not clear to the writer—are enrolled in courses at the local Open Jewish University. JDC organized a Pesach seder and also a commemoration of Jerusalem Day for groups of AID members. Mr. Strinkovsky has managed most of the logistical matters for AID and is encouraging AID members to be responsible for governance issues.

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<sup>19</sup> See Betsy Gidwitz, *Dnepropetrovsk Kehilla Project: Background Information* (Cambridge, MA: the author, 1994), p. 6.

74. The **Open Jewish University** continues in its first year of operation, offering courses to about 130 adults in Jewish tradition, Jewish history, Jewish music, and other topics. This institution is also trying to develop a response to increased activity by Christian missionary groups targeting local Jews. JDC provides audio-visual equipment for its classes, helps obtain the high-quality Russian-language Judaica books that it needs, and is arranging consultations with specialists in adult education who will assist the university in charting its future. Professional assistance in planning seems essential; faculty members meeting with a small group from Boston in late May requested funding for vastly increased programming, including expansion of the curriculum to include courses in computer technology and business management.

Currently meeting in evenings and on Sundays at the day school, the university has received requests to offer courses in several other cities, including Dneprodzerzhinsk, Pavlograd, Zaporozhe, Krivoi Rog, and Nikopol. Some lectures have indeed been given in other cities, but logistical and financial problems deter expansion. According to Rabbi Kaminetzky, operation of the university costs “several hundred dollars” every month.

75. Rabbi Kaminetzky reports that he has begun to offer **weekly classes** in Jewish tradition to small groups of Dnepropetrovsk Jewish businessmen in their offices. He notes with some satisfaction that the businessmen themselves have requested that he teach such classes.

76. Rabbi Kaminetzky has also organized classes for students in the local university and other post-secondary schools. Informally referred to as **Yeshiva University**,<sup>20</sup> the classes meet once weekly in the synagogue from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. Thirty young men are enrolled in the cost-free program.<sup>21</sup> They study Hebrew and tradition during the first hour, listen to a lecture on Judaic topics during the second hour, and study English (often using English-language Judaic texts) during the third hour. Instruction during the first and last hours is in small groups of two to five students to permit participation at appropriate ability levels. The teachers are rabbinical students from the main Chabad seminary (in Morristown, NJ) who are in Dnepropetrovsk for a work-study program. (See below.) Enrollment is attracted through advertisements in Dnepropetrovsk newspapers; Rabbi Kaminetzky readily acknowledges that the principal appeal of the program is instruction in English. Despite the early evening meeting hours, no refreshments are served. Betsy Gidwitz visited the classes (which were meeting in small groups around tables in various areas of the synagogue) and spoke with five or six students in the program; they represented a variety of academic majors and all

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<sup>20</sup> Well aware of the existence of Yeshiva University in New York City, Rabbi Kaminetzky regards his appropriation of the name with great humor and hopes that the larger and older Yeshiva University feels the same (if it is even aware of its Dnepropetrovsk namesake).

<sup>21</sup> Separate classes for young women are taught on Sunday mornings by female student teachers from a Chabad teachers seminary in Israel.

seemed quite pleased with the curriculum. In addition to classwork, the program includes holiday celebrations and social evenings, including dances.

77. Ten students from the Rabbinical Seminary of America in Morristown, NJ, are participating in a **work-study program** supervised by Rabbi Chaim Ber Stambler; eight of the young men are in the first year, and two had been invited to remain for a second year. They usually learn in the morning, teach in the yeshiva high school (see below) in the afternoon and in 'Yeshiva University' in the early evening, and also plan and implement special events. (When Betsy Gidwitz was in the city, she participated in a Lag B'Omer festival at the day school that the Morristown students had organized.) The majority of students are Americans, but Dr. Gidwitz has also met Britons and Swiss in the program.

Rabbi Kaminetzky enlists the young men himself, relying on recommendations from the current group to establish a roster of candidates for the following year whom he himself interviews in Morristown. He looks for students who work well both collectively and on their own initiative under less-than-ideal conditions (long winters with uncertain supply of heat and hot water, extended separation from family members, etc.). He also seeks to assemble a group of students with complementary skills and interests that enhance his various programs in Dnepropetrovsk; in every group, at least one student will be skilled in music, another in drama, several in working with children, etc. He excludes any young man deemed to be "fanatic"—which he defined as being publicly vocal in support of the 'Moshiach now' faction within Chabad. He spoke with some bitterness about "surprises" on this issue, i.e., a student who conceals his views on the question until after his arrival in Dnepropetrovsk and then agitates among other students or insists on erecting 'Moshiach now' banners in the day school or elsewhere. In response to a question, Rabbi Kaminetzky said that prominent individuals within Chabad sometimes attempt to persuade him to accept a particular candidate whom he feels is unsuitable; however, he controls the eventual selection because it is he who arranges visas, plane tickets, etc. Most of the students arrive in Dnepropetrovsk immediately before or after Sukkot and remain during the summer to serve as counselors in the Chabad camp.

76. In addition to the rabbinical students from Morristown, groups of **four young women student-teachers** from a Chabad teachers seminary in Israel are in Dnepropetrovsk on practice teaching assignments. One group is in Dnepropetrovsk from October through January, the second from February through May. They teach most of the Judaica classes at the day school and also teach classes to local young Jewish women on Sundays. Their supervisor is Chana Kaminetzky, Rabbi Kaminetzky's wife.

77. The **Dnepropetrovsk Jewish Day School** appears to be thriving, enrolling more than 650 students in grades one through eleven. Early registration figures for 1984-1985 indicate that the school will educate 800 pupils next year, the maximum number

that can be accommodated in its current facilities. Construction still under way when a Boston group visited the city in October 1993 has been completed. A large, well-equipped **kosher kitchen** (with some equipment provided by JDC) serves over one thousand meals every day, more than seven hundred to pupils and staff at lunch and more than two hundred at breakfast. Rabbi Kaminetzky believes that this kosher dining facility is the largest in all of central and eastern Europe. In addition to a spacious dining room for students, several smaller rooms accommodate groups of more modest size. The cost of maintaining this service is a major burden; the Ukrainian government pays for the lunches of children in the first four grades, but older pupils must buy their own meals—and many families cannot afford to give their children lunch money. For now, the school provides all students with lunch, but Shmuel is not sure that the free lunch program can continue indefinitely. He would like a Boston sister-city relationship to consider an ‘adoption’ program in which Boston-area Jews would ‘adopt’ a needy student, paying a small monthly sum that would cover lunches (approximately fifteen cents each day) and certain other expenses.

The second, smaller building that was serving as construction materials warehouse during our October visit has also been completed. It now houses a large and small auditorium, an activities room, a large and small gymnasium, a library, a book storage room, and classrooms for the **yeshiva high school**, the program for approximately thirty boys that offers an extended day with much more religious instruction than is provided in the regular day school.<sup>22</sup>

Rabbi Kaminetzky expressed disappointment with his inability to obtain **computers** for the school. He had hoped that JDC would supply computer equipment, but that agency has so far evaded his request. He is pursuing other potential sources (which he did not identify).

Betsy Gidwitz was present at (and addressed) a “**directors’ day**” at the school, a meticulously planned event in which directors (principals) of several dozen schools in the city as well as municipal and regional education officials attended a day-long program at the school. The fifty visitors viewed both secular and Judaic studies classes in the elementary and secondary divisions, heard explanations of the school’s goals and objectives, discussed curriculum and other issues with day school teachers, ate lunch (doubtless the best school lunch in the city) in the new dining room, and watched/listened to a performance of Jewish songs (most in Hebrew, some in Yiddish) and dances by groups of pupils ranging in age from first to eleventh graders. Following the musical presentation, different guests stood to comment on what they had seen; without exception, the remarks were positive, sometimes adulatory. The visitors praised the high caliber of teaching, the breadth of curriculum, the visible happiness of the

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<sup>22</sup> This program is described in two previous reports, *Visit to Jewish Communities in Ukraine and Moscow and Related Meetings in Jerusalem* (Cambridge: the author, October 1993) and *Dnepropetrovsk Kehilla Project: Background Information* (Cambridge: the author, February/March 1994).

children,<sup>23</sup> and the pride the children felt for their Jewish heritage. Several of the speakers acknowledged prior antisemitic prejudice, apologized for their bigotry (which, they said, had been based on ignorance); now that they had learned more about Judaism, Jewish history, and the importance that Jews attach to education and sound upbringing,<sup>24</sup> they would no longer tolerate anti-Jewish bias. Each visitor was given a menorah and candles (provided by JDC).

Rabbi Kaminetzky reported that nine attendees called on the following day to ask if one or more of the day school choirs would perform at their schools and/or if a day school teacher or Rabbi Kaminetzky himself would visit their school to teach about Judaism. An education official in the *oblast* (region encompassing Dnepropetrovsk, several other large cities, and a number of towns and villages) also called, asking if the program could be repeated for teachers in the *oblast* outside Dnepropetrovsk as some of them were even less informed about Judaism than those who lived and worked in Dnepropetrovsk itself. Rabbi Kaminetzky and the day school principal, Semyon Isaakovich Kaplunsky, were delighted at the response. The program had been initiated at the suggestion of the chief education inspector of the *oblast*, a non-Jewish woman who has been assisting the school in upgrading its secular curriculum.<sup>25</sup> Rabbi Kaminetzky and Mr. Kaplunsky had readily agreed, realizing that school principals could influence teachers and pupils in their attitudes about Jews.

78. A delegation from the **Lishkat haKeshet** has recently visited the city to explore possibilities of opening a second **day school** (under the Lishka Maavar program).<sup>26</sup> This group, which included Zvi Gruman, the director of the Israel Cultural Center in Dnepropetrovsk, attempted to gain permission for such a school from municipal education authorities and from the deputy mayor of the city by declaring to them that the religious orientation of the existing day school is so overpowering that it offends many parents and that the existing day school is biased in that it does not accept children of mixed marriages.<sup>27</sup> The second charge is blatantly false and the first

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<sup>23</sup> One commented that children were *ordered* to smile for visitors during the Soviet period, but the smiles that she had seen that day were undeniably natural and heartfelt.

<sup>24</sup> The speakers used the Russian word *vospitaniye* for which no English equivalent exists. *Vospitaniye* encompasses the concepts of moral education, cultivation of skills in community life, exemplary social conduct, etc. Use of this word (and many others) was corrupted during the Soviet era to mean upbringing according to communist ideology.

<sup>25</sup> The inspector is close to retirement age. After she leaves her current position, she will join the day school faculty as a consultant in teaching methodology and (secular) curriculum planning.

<sup>26</sup> The Lishkat haKeshet sponsors or co-sponsors eleven day schools (Maavar schools) in the post-Soviet successor states (including one in nearby Zaporozhe) and 125 Sunday schools (Mechina schools). It works closely with the Israeli Ministry of Education in this effort. The schools vary widely in quality.

appears to be equally untruthful because (a) the Judaic component of the curriculum is deliberately limited in scope so as not to alienate parents whose outlook has been shaped by decades of forced secularization under Soviet domination, and (b) persistently high enrollment figures suggest strong parental satisfaction with the school. The aggressive and fallacious Lishka approach angered municipal education officials and the deputy mayor who have their own stake in the success of the school because they have worked with it since its inception, have encouraged city financial support for it, and have developed strong relations with Rabbi Kaminetzky, Principal Kaplunsky, and others associated with the school. The officials were also embarrassed by the spectacle of bellicose Jews denouncing other Jews.

Flustered, the officials mentioned that a particular school building might become available in the near future. The Lishka delegation subsequently entered the still-operating school without invitation, “inspected” the facility, and informed its startled principal that the Lishka might operate it in the future. The unauthorized exploratory tour caused an uproar in the school and generated a hostile report in a small newspaper in Dnepropetrovsk. When Rabbi Kaminetzky heard that a larger, more respected newspaper was investigating the matter and intended to publish an equally critical article, he intervened with the newspaper’s editor to prevent its publication. As of mid-May, the Lishka attempt to open a Maavar school in Dnepropetrovsk remained unfulfilled.

79. Betsy Gidwitz also visited the **Jewish preschool**, which has finally relocated to larger quarters that can accommodate about forty children between the ages of three and six. The school has its own kosher kitchen and a fence-enclosed playground. Chani Kaminetzky and the wives of Rabbis Chaim Ber Stambler and Meir Stambler are all involved in its management as are other women. Rabbi Kaminetzky would like to open additional preschools in other areas of the city.

80. The **Chabad summer camp** expects to enroll 160 children between the ages of ten and sixteen during each of three 22-day sessions. Because the camp is one of very few in the post-Soviet Union actually owned by the Jewish community (rather than leased),<sup>28</sup> the **Joint Distribution Committee** is seriously considering developing it into a facility that can be used the entire year for seminars, winter camping, etc. A city-owned construction company (*Dneprograzhdanproyekt*) has organized plans for winterizing current buildings and erecting new structures; if approved by JDC in Jerusalem, work may begin in August or September. The camp property covers fifty-five hectares

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<sup>27</sup> Day schools in the post-Soviet successor states that are sponsored by religious movements differ in their policies on accepting children of mixed marriages. Whereas the Dnepropetrovsk school has always accepted such children, drawing no distinction between children whose mother or whose father is Jewish, Rabbi Bleich’s day school in Kiev gives clear preference to children from endogamous Jewish marriages and next to children whose mother is Jewish, effectively restricting enrollment to children who are halachically Jewish.

<sup>28</sup> The legal owner of the property is the governing board of the Chabad synagogue in Dnepropetrovsk.

(approximately twenty-three acres) and is located on the Samara River in Novo-Moskovsk, an easy drive from Dnepropetrovsk.

81. The new **Jewish Agency** station in Dnepropetrovsk will also conduct a **summer camp** in 1994. Located in the same general region as the Chabad camp, the JAFI facility is leased from a formerly successful factory that operated it as a Pioneer camp for the children of its employees.<sup>29</sup> The camp will accommodate 200 youngsters between the ages of ten and seventeen in each of three two-week sessions<sup>30</sup> Individuals who have seen both the Chabad camp and the JAFI camp describe the latter as significantly larger and in better condition. The leased JAFI property has two swimming pools. Campers will be drawn from Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe *oblasts*. Local counselors for this camp and for another JAFI camp near Kharkov will be trained at the Dnepropetrovsk-area camp in a common pre-camp training session.<sup>31</sup>

82. The **Joint Distribution Committee** has recently opened an office in Dnepropetrovsk from which it serves Jewish population centers in Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe *oblasts*. Shimon Strinkovsky, who previously served the area through monthly visits from a base in Moscow, is now living in a Dnepropetrovsk hotel until more conventional housing can be arranged.<sup>32</sup> The JDC office itself consists of one room that

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<sup>29</sup> The Pioneer organization was a more-or-less compulsory youth group for Soviet schoolchildren. It was directed by the Komsomols, the young adult division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>30</sup> As noted earlier, all JAFI camps will be operating short seasons in 1994 because a strike by university professors in Israel during the winter is forcing Israeli universities to extend the academic year into the summer, thus reducing the amount of time available to Israeli students for camp counseling.

<sup>31</sup> When Rabbi Kaminetzky was informed that the Jewish Agency would also operate a summer camp in the Dnepropetrovsk region, his response was, "Ten camps are not enough. There can never be enough Jewish summer camps."

<sup>32</sup> While in Kiev, the JDC group in which Betsy Gidwitz participated encountered a Jewish physician from Florida who had just come to Kiev from Dnepropetrovsk. The physician had met Mr. Strinkovsky there and was quite upset to discover that he was residing in "luxury hotel accommodations" that, according to the physician, cost \$68 per day. The physician was aware that JDC is funded by UJA -- and he clearly viewed this expenditure as misuse of UJA money. He subsequently recorded his ire over this circumstance in a written report that has been circulated in the Union of Councils [formerly the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews] network. In a conversation in Kiev, Betsy Gidwitz told the physician that Mr. Strinkovsky had been living in the hotel for a few months while trying to find a suitable rental apartment -- and that such apartments are not readily available. Further, the hotel is hardly luxurious. The physician was not interested in hearing another view, as his anger then and his subsequent written report prove. While in Dnepropetrovsk, Betsy Gidwitz met with Shimon Strinkovsky in his office and in the hotel suite, the latter consisting of two very standard Soviet-era rooms that could not reasonably be termed luxurious. If JDC is actually charged \$68 a day for this suite -- Betsy Gidwitz did not check the figures -- that price is consistent with charges for other accommodations (for foreigners) in the same hotel. Both Rabbi and Chana Kaminetzky and the Nechushtans of JAFI lived in hotels for several months after their arrival in Dnepropetrovsk.

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accommodates Mr. Strinkovsky, several local staff (including Jan Sidelkovsky, an exceptionally competent local man who has long been engaged in Jewish communal work), and various equipment and supplies. Because of overcrowding, the atmosphere is often chaotic; when Mr. Strinkovsky is present, the chaos is accompanied by a thick cloud of cigarette smoke that never dissipates.

JDC works in its four standard fields in the area -- in Jewish education, Jewish culture, welfare services, and support of Jewish religious institutions—as well as community-building and reclamation of Jewish communal property confiscated by the Soviet regime.

In *Jewish education*, JDC has supplied the Jewish schools in the region with Judaica libraries, Jewish-studies textbooks, and equipment, and has helped arrange for teacher training. It has also secured specialized consulting services for schools when necessary, e.g., for the Open Jewish University in Dnepropetrovsk and the day school in Zaporozhe. It appears to be inviting a conflict with the new JAFI office in that Jan Sidelkovsky is offering Israel-related curriculum consulting from the JDC office when that responsibility is usually undertaken by the Jewish Agency; indeed, the local JAFI mission intends to open a Zionist-oriented pedagogical center in the near future. (See below.)

JDC invited fifteen youngsters to participate in the *March of the Living*, the program that takes high school students to Auschwitz and then to Israel. However, a number of the invitees encountered bureaucratic problems in obtaining Ukrainian passports and only six were able to complete the necessary paperwork in time to participate.<sup>33</sup>

Mr. Sidelkovsky, who is a skilled youth worker, has organized various social events for Jewish adolescents and young adults and is encouraging Jewish students to contribute volunteer service to the Jewish community. One result has been the involvement of medical students in community welfare efforts (as described below).<sup>34</sup> JDC also sponsored a Purim disco that was attended by 500 young people.

As noted previously, JDC has been the primary sponsor of the new Association of Jewish Intellectuals of Dnepropetrovsk and has provided various institutions with Russian-language Judaica libraries. In supporting the renovation of synagogues in

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<sup>33</sup> According to Jan Sidelkovsky, obtaining passports is often a ten- to twelve-week process and JDC in Dnepropetrovsk received the invitations only four to six weeks before the *March of the Living*. It was not clear who issued the original invitations.

<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Kaminetzky believes that Jan Sidelkovsky is so effective in Jewish youth work that he should be doing it full-time -- under the auspices of an organization that would allow him freedom to plan and implement activities on his own initiative. He feels that Mr. Sidelkovsky was “smothered” in an earlier position at the Israel Cultural Center. Mr. Sidelkovsky is qualified to teach Hebrew and also is a skilled musician (both as a vocalist and a pianist).

Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe into multi-purpose synagogues/community centers, it will increase opportunities for *Jewish culture*.

JDC became involved in *welfare activities* in the area when Mr. Strinkovsky was visiting Dnepropetrovsk periodically from his then base in Moscow. It was during this period that he supervised the purchase of contents for and the assembly of 700 supplemental food parcels that were distributed to needy Jewish elderly in Dnepropetrovsk and surrounding towns in 1993. JDC is currently sponsoring free hot lunches for 120 Jewish seniors at the day school on alternate Sundays (with extra fresh fruit supplied so that guests can take some home with them) and is negotiating with municipal authorities for a site in the center of town that would serve as an elderly day center; Mr. Strinkovsky perceives such a facility as offering various services, such as elderly day care and rental of medical equipment. It would also be the central office of the community welfare agency. It might include a restaurant and a center for a talking books program for the vision-impaired, a service currently offered by JDC and the Jewish Braille Institute in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, and Lviv.

Betsy Gidwitz met separately with Jan Sidelkovsky and four welfare workers<sup>35</sup> who explained the current operations of the *Shaarei Chesed* welfare program operating from the Dnepropetrovsk JDC office. Similar to the JDC welfare program in Kiev, the Dnepropetrovsk service has now been organized to conform with existing city districts so that services offered by the program can be coordinated with those provided by different districts. A paraprofessional is assigned to each of the eight districts in the municipality; they visit clients in their district, assess needs, and recommend the services of other workers, such as: ten 'patronage sisters'<sup>36</sup> (including four qualified nurses) who clean, prepare meals, and shop; seventeen volunteers who do not actually work in the residence, but visit clients twice weekly, bring food (including homecooked meals), and maintain daily contact by telephone when advisable; and/or a physician. An affiliated Physicians Council<sup>37</sup> has ten physicians as members (including specialists in cardiology, respiratory diseases, and cancer), and can call on other physicians when necessary, including specialists in non-traditional medicine.<sup>38</sup> The service works with four hospitals and a geriatric clinic. When they receive medicine from abroad, they usually give some of it to these institutions.

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<sup>35</sup> Present were Sasha Grabova, who was clearly the group leader, Olga Nemirovskaya, and Drs. Sima Miller and Ludmilla Romanenko. Ms. Grabova and Ms. Nemirovskaya were among those with whom a Boston delegation met in October 1993.

<sup>36</sup> The Russian word *patronazh* means 'home visiting'; a 'patronage sister' can be a visiting nurse (the Russian word for nurse is *medsestra*) or a paraprofessional 'health visitor' without certification in nursing.

<sup>37</sup> In Russian, *Lechebnaya konsultatsionnaya kommissiona*.

<sup>38</sup> Non-traditional medicine, e.g., the use of herbs in treatment, is fairly widely accepted in most of the post-Soviet successor states as a valid medical response.

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In efforts to interest young physicians to consider careers in geriatrics and to promote intergenerational bonds within the Jewish community, the Physicians Council is including three Jewish medical students in its work. One such student with whom Betsy Gidwitz spoke said that she had always been interested in gerontology and was very grateful for the opportunity to assist experienced physicians in attending the Jewish elderly. She accompanies a senior doctor on house calls twice weekly and now understands that older people need much more than medicine; loneliness may be a “more pressing problem” than the physical aspects of aging. The student intends to become a specialist in care of the aged.<sup>39</sup>

In all, the welfare service has 400 elderly Jews on its rolls. Approximately 200 of these are hungry or “on the edge” of hunger. They may be able to buy food or medicine, but are rarely able to afford both. All medicines are expensive; the cost of antibiotics is especially “astronomical.” Most of all, they need antibiotics, vitamins, insulin and other diabetes-related medicine, and medications for heart disease, hypertension, and arteriosclerosis.<sup>40</sup> Detailed records are kept on each client, including medical history and record of medications given, family and friends in the area and abroad, clothing and shoe sizes, etc.

When Betsy Gidwitz was in the JDC office, she was called outside because “someone wants to speak with you.” The individual was Misha Burtman, a diabetic in his thirties who, upon hearing that Dr. Gidwitz was there, made a special trip to the office to thank her for medicine (specifically, *Augmentin*, a common topical antibiotic) brought to the city by Boston Action for Post-Soviet Jewry activists during their October 1993 visit. Application of this ointment to a serious leg infection had healed the infection and prevented amputation of his leg. Mr. Burtman later sought out Dr. Gidwitz at another site to thank her for the insulin she brought on the current trip. He was quite emotional on both occasions.

Both Mr. Sidelkovsky and the welfare workers expressed gratitude for the \$500 given to their service by Action for Post-Soviet Jewry during its October 1993 visit. As they had done previously in a thank-you letter faxed to APSJ in January 1994, they enumerated the items purchased with the money (bedding, underwear, socks and stockings,

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<sup>39</sup> The Physicians Council assigns students to semi-retired physicians who are no longer practicing full-time so that the physicians have time for mentoring.

The medical student commented that fewer young people want to become physicians now because conditions of practice are so difficult. It is almost impossible to find necessary equipment and medicines, and it is equally difficult for a student to complete medical school with the stipends provided by the state.

<sup>40</sup> Betsy Gidwitz brought in 120 bottles of insulin (contributed by Burton Orland, a Boston-area pharmacist), the receipt of which was contested by several physicians. *Cardizem*, a common heart medication in the United States, and diabetes-testing equipment (second-hand) and supplies also generated particular excitement.

slippers, fruit and cookies for one hundred people at Chanukah and Tu B'Shvat, and funeral expenses for one person who had no relatives or close friends. They emphasized that they had purchased fabric in bulk for the bedding and then cut and hemmed one-hundred individual sheets and sewed fifty pillowcases themselves in order to save money. When they presented these items to clients as gifts from Jews in Boston, some recipients cried; they found it difficult to believe that other Jews who lived so far away felt responsible for them.

JDC tries to obtain furniture and clothing from those who emigrate to Israel for distribution to other Jews in need. It also brings Russian-language Jewish newspapers and other reading material to the homebound and arranges for repair of apartments, refrigerators, etc. Birthday cards and gifts are provided as well.

JDC also provides welfare assistance when necessary to Jews who are members of the *Memorial* society, an organization for “those who were repressed,” i.e., individuals who were imprisoned under the Soviet regime. Many such individuals were seriously weakened by their experiences.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to providing health and home care services, the welfare group has organized various socializing opportunities for elderly clients. The twice-monthly Sunday lunches at the day school include holiday celebrations, singing and dancing, and time for visiting. JDC has also sponsored an evening gathering at the day school for Holocaust survivors, some of whom had not realized that others whom they had known in childhood had lived through the *Katastrofa*. The gathering featured an artistic program that was received very well by the participants. JDC provided transportation for those who needed it; one individual who requested such service is ninety years old.

When asked about his priorities for JDC in the near future, Shimon Strinkovsky listed three major capital projects. He attaches greatest importance to renovation of the recently returned synagogue in Zaporozhe “because nothing else exists there.” The Lishka day school in the city is considered problematic and there are no premises in which large numbers of Jews could gather. (Zaporozhe is discussed below.) Next on his list is renovation and upgrading of the Dnepropetrovsk synagogue summer camp into a year-round facility. His third priority is renovation of the choral synagogue in Dnepropetrovsk. Mr. Strinkovsky did not include any expansion of *services* among his priorities [although completion of the various capital projects would facilitate service expansion].

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<sup>41</sup> *Memorial* should not be confused with *Memory (Pamyat)*, the strongly antisemitic Russian nationalist organization.

83. The **Jewish Agency for Israel** (JAFI, Sochnut) opened a station in Dnepropetrovsk in December 1993. Aharon Nechushtan, assisted by his wife Hadase, is its director. An older couple from Kibbutz Hagoshrim, both Nechushtans were born in Poland, lived in the then Soviet Union during World War II, returned to Poland after the war, and came to Israel in 1950. A major factor influencing their decision to work with post-Soviet Jewry was the positive experience of one of their daughters who had worked for the Jewish Agency as a youth worker in St. Petersburg several years earlier. Prior to the arrival of the Nechustans, Tamara Lvovna Israelit, a local woman, worked for JAFI as an aliyah coordinator for the area; she remains on the JAFI staff as the Nechushtans and others consider her very competent.

While they continue to search for adequate office and program space in the center of Dnepropetrovsk, the Nechushtans work from their rented apartment most mornings (because they have a telephone and fax machine there) and from a small room in the Israel Cultural Center in the afternoon (where they have no telephone, thus requiring them to use the phone of the Israel Cultural Center).

Aharon Nechushtan perceives the major mission of JAFI in the Soviet successor states as promoting aliyah. He also believes that JAFI has a role to play in preventing further assimilation of post-Soviet Jews. Having arrived only within the last six months as the first JAFI representative in the city and not yet possessing adequate office or program facilities, the Nechushtans are still (1) exploring the local Jewish and general political landscapes, and (2) beginning to plan a specific JAFI agenda. They have not yet been able to implement many programs.

Mr. Nechushtan jokingly referred to himself and Hadase as “non-conformists” --- because they get along with everyone. The fact that their temporary office is in the Israel Cultural Center of the Lishkat haKeshet shows that the two organizations cooperate in Dnepropetrovsk. JAFI will not open an ulpan in the center of the city because it would only compete with the Hebrew classes offered by the ICC. However, the Agency is considering development of a small ulpan on the other side of the river, where a substantial minority of the Jewish population resides, including a well-qualified Hebrew teacher. Aharon is also assisting Hebrew teachers from the ICC, day schools, and Sunday schools in the area to attend JAFI seminars for Hebrew instructors. He believes that they must constantly replenish the supply of trained Hebrew teachers because many of them emigrate to Israel.

Mr. Nechushtan would like to establish a **pedagogical center** in Dnepropetrovsk similar to those that JAFI operates in Moscow and Kiev. He has already found a qualified director and suitable site, receiving some assistance in the latter from Boris Pessin of the Jewish Council. Such a center would offer more structured assistance to Jewish day and Sunday schools in teaching Hebrew and Israel-oriented subjects than the Nechushtans have been able to provide. He had been led to believe that JDC would supply the center with various equipment, a Russian-language Judaica library, and

some Hebrew textbooks, but an approach to Shimon Strinkovsky on this issue has proved unproductive.<sup>42</sup>

He has worked with the **youth club** established in the city by the Lishka in October, but he believes that this endeavor requires substantial improvement. First, he would like to engage a trained JAFI youth leader on a longterm basis. The only Israelis working in the club are two young women from the kibbutz movement who come to the Israel Culture Center for two months, then leave, and are replaced by another two post-army young women who also stay two months and leave. However noble their motives, none speaks Russian and few have had any training in youth work. He has sent one local Jewish youth with leadership potential to JAFI seminars in Moscow, Kharkov, and the Crimea, and another to a seminar in Israel. He has also sent additional local Jewish young people to other seminars. Whatever the progress of local people, he believes that a qualified Israeli with a commitment to stay a year or more should be the primary leader of a Zionist-oriented youth club. A second problem of the current local youth club is that it is located in an unpleasant area of the city, thus deterring participation. Necessary security is both expensive and offending. Mr. Nechushtan believes that JAFI and the ICC should open a jointly-run youth club in a better area.

Mr. Nechushtan noted that JAFI and the ICC collaborate fully in sponsoring **community holiday commemorations and celebrations**. They share costs and offer a single program (in contrast to a number of other cities in which each organization may sponsor its own mass festival observing the same event).

JAFI will operate a **summer camp** accommodating 200 youngsters ages ten through seventeen in each of three two-week sessions. They are leasing a former Pioneer camp from a large factory that no longer possesses the resources to provide a summer camp experience for the children of its employees. (See sections 80 and 81 above for more information on summer camping in the area.)

More than 600 Jews went to Israel on **aliyah** from this area during the first four months of 1994. Four hundred forty went by air from Kiev, and over two hundred left by bus for Odessa and then by sea from Odessa to Haifa. The latter route had been popular because emigres were permitted to take more luggage on the ship than is possible on an airplane. No longer operating, the land/sea effort was sponsored by Dutch Christians and, among some individuals, thus controversial.

The Nechushtans would like to engage two more individuals to work in aliyah. They believe that aliyah will continue to increase because of the deteriorating economic situation in the region and because so many Jews from Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe

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<sup>42</sup> Mr. Strinkovsky's lack of enthusiasm for supporting a JAFI pedagogical center may reflect the reality that JDC is operating its own pedagogical center, a circumstance that may have been unknown to Mr. Nechushtan. See Section 82 above.

*oblasts* now have relatives in Israel who provide a support system for new arrivals. JAFI is encouraging its Aliyah 2000 program, which recruits potential olim in specific professions and, while they are still in the former Soviet Union, arranges (further) training and/or employment in Israel, housing, etc. The Nechushtans are also promoting the First Home in the Homeland option, which offers initial settlement and ulpan on a kibbutz for people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five; because they are committed to the kibbutz themselves, this program is especially attractive to them.

A three-day aliyah fair was scheduled for Dnepropetrovsk in late May. Twelve delegations from Israel (six employment programs and six student programs) had rented an entire floor in a local hotel to promote various aliya options. The event was being advertised in newspapers and on television and billboards. Aharon Nechushtan expressed some concern over the timing of the fair, fearing that it might be confrontational so soon after an element within the Ministry of Justice in Ukraine had publicly criticized JAFI for encouraging large-scale emigration from Ukraine of Jews (who, in general, are highly educated and possess skills deemed essential to developing a viable independent Ukraine).

Mr. Nechushtan meets periodically with small groups of **local Jewish intellectuals** in their own homes to discuss Israel, Zionism, Jewish history, and other matters. He also is in frequent contact with the local Jewish Council; although its president, Boris Pessin, has been helpful to JAFI in specific situations, Mr. Nechushtan shares the view of other observers that the Council is ineffective as an organization. Mr. Nechushtan believes that the Council should be a representative and coordinating enterprise among Dnepropetrovsk Jewry; instead, Council members are constantly quarreling among themselves and are unable to initiate any significant collaborative action.

In common with Shimon Strinkovsky of JDC, the Nechushtans find the general atmosphere in Dnepropetrovsk to be comfortable. People are pleasant, even warm, which is not the case in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

Mr. Nechushtan fears that he will not have enough time to implement all of the programs that he believes are essential for the JAFI mission in the area. Their tenure is uncertain; whereas he might want to stay two years, Hadase is eager to return to family and friends in Israel after one year.

Aharon Nechushtan is perceived as a “gentleman,” cultured and well-educated. Though secular, he is at home in Jewish tradition, able to quote widely from Torah and Talmud. Rabbi Kaminetzky refers to him with respect and affection as “Reb Aharon.”

84. The **Israel Cultural Center** in Dnepropetrovsk is one of thirteen such centers operated by the Israel Fund for Culture and Education in the Diaspora, the ‘public’ name

of the *Lishkat haKeshet*, a department of the Prime Minister's office that has long managed Israel government policy toward Jews in the (former) Soviet Union. The Israel Cultural Center occupies recently renovated premises in the center of the city that house an extensive Russian-language Israel information library (including ten computers with Israel-related programs), an activity room, classrooms, and offices. The ICC sponsors: Sunday schools in Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhe, Krivoi Rog, and Dneprodzerzhinsk, and Nikopol; the Zaporozhe day school; a large ulpan offering Hebrew classes at several different levels; an Israeli-focused story hour and a puppet theater for small children; and a Friday evening observance. It is a resource center for Jews throughout Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe *oblasts*. The director of the center is Zvi Gruman, a soft-spoken Israeli of Soviet origin.<sup>43</sup>

Assisting Mr. Gruman and his wife Mina are several local people and teams of two Israeli post-army women who serve in the Center (and Sunday school) for two-month terms.

Unlike the situation in many other post-Soviet cities, the relationship between the Israel Culture Center and the Jewish Agency station in Dnepropetrovsk is productive and friendly. As noted in the preceding section, the two organizations work collaboratively with each other. Although each agency perceives and projects its primary mission as encouraging aliyah, the directors of both are sensitive to other concerns within the local Jewish population.

85. Whereas the **Lishka** and **JAFI** representations work well together, some observers perceive "no harmony" and persistent "underlying tension" between the **Joint Distribution Committee** office in Dnepropetrovsk and the other two organizations. "No public wars" exist (because the heads of each mission know better than to criticize their counterparts in public), but relations between JDC and the aliyah-focused groups are seen as somewhat strained. That JDC engages in community-building, which could be understood as challenging the Zionist missions of the Lishka and JAFI, may be a less important factor than initially imagined; as noted, both the Grumans and the Nechushtans seem to be sensitive to a broad range of concerns within the Jewish population. Instead, the following observations are advanced: (1) the JDC agenda is seemingly never-ending, a perception that is intimidating to others with more specific goals and more limited resources; (2) JDC supplies the other groups with various equipment and materials, thus having the power to proffer and withhold goods, that is, to 'reward' and 'punish' for reasons that it does not seem obligated to explain; (4) JDC provides 'glitzy' equipment and supplies, such as video cassette recorders and single

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<sup>43</sup> Mr. Gruman's name was incorrectly noted as Gorman in previous reports by this writer. Although he was a member of the Lishkat haKeshet delegation that conducted themselves in a coarse manner while attempting to secure permission to establish a Lishka day school in Dnepropetrovsk, some individuals familiar with the episode believe that it was initiated and led by officials from Lishka headquarters and Mr. Gruman was little more than a bystander throughout its duration. See Section 78 above.

titles of glossy books instead of the more mundane items that schools and other Jewish institutions require for basic operations, e.g., school buses and graded series of textbooks necessary for a curriculum progressing from first grade through high school; (5) local JDC representative Shimon Strinkovsky frequently shows frustration, suggesting to some that he has yet to make the transition between dealing with Dnepropetrovsk on periodic visits from Moscow, to which he returned after a few days, and a continuous presence in the city that does not permit respite from quotidian problems.

86. **Global Jewish Assistance and Relief Network (GJARN)** was founded by Rabbi Eliezer (Lazer) Avtson, a Chabad hasid and seminary classmate of Rabbi Kaminetzky, after the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster in 1986. Among the principal donors to GJARN has been the United States government, which has supplied surplus stocks of food for distribution in several post-Soviet successor states. Because it acquires government commodities and also works collaboratively with various secular philanthropies, many GJARN programs extend far beyond the Jewish community. However, it does exert special efforts to reach Jews in need. It has provided weekly deliveries of milk and bread to about one hundred isolated elderly Jews in Dnepropetrovsk. In 1993, GJARN distributed 1,360,000 tons of surplus U.S. butter to 1.2 million Jews and non-Jews as well as numerous institutions throughout Ukraine; a consultant to the U.S. government has issued a favorable report on the GJARN effort and Rabbi Avtson expects to receive another five to six hundred tons of butter for distribution in the near future. He also hopes to win a U.S. government contract for a vaccination program in eastern Ukraine. Rabbi Avtson has been very helpful in the Boston-Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community sister-city effort, carrying artwork by Jewish children in the two cities across the ocean, providing space in GJARN containers for medicine and other humanitarian aid sent from Boston to Dnepropetrovsk, and assisting Boston Jewry in sending an entire container of humanitarian aid (food, medicine, personal care items, clothing, educational materials and supplies, toys, etc.) to Dnepropetrovsk Jewry in April 1994. The GJARN office in Dnepropetrovsk employs eight individuals, including one paraprofessional social worker. Its local director is Mikhail Samoilovich Goldenberg. In addition to providing direct welfare assistance, the office has co-sponsored (with the U.S. Peace Corps, the local Union of Chernobyl Victims, and the Red Cross) several carefully planned and well-attended seminars on the management of voluntary organizations.

Representatives of some other international welfare organizations question the ability of Rabbi Avtson's staff to supervise his extensive operations. One individual stationed in Ukraine referred to the butter distribution as "scandalous," asserting that it lacked sufficient structure to assure that all butter reached only legitimate recipients. Others have noted that Rabbi Avtson has unlawfully included the personal property of certain Chabad workers in U.S. government-sponsored containers authorized only for shipment of humanitarian aid, a charge that Rabbi Avtson acknowledges is valid.

87. In mid-May 1994, an exhibition entitled “**Jews in Dnepropetrovsk: Pages from History**” was mounted at the Dnepropetrovsk Museum of History. According to a Ukrainian-language poster advertising the display, the sponsors were: the Museum of History, the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish Religious Assembly [the governing board of the synagogue], the Main Archive of Dnepropetrovsk Oblast [region], the Dnepropetrovsk Oblast (Office) of the Directorate of Security Services of Ukraine, and the International Organization “Joint”.<sup>44</sup> The exhibit included: manuscripts, journals, communal records, and photographs of Jewish life during the tsarist period, including documentation of pogroms; copies of orders for arrests of Jewish leaders and confiscation of Jewish communal property during the 1920s and 1930s; and documentation related to the Holocaust, including Nazi orders for the confinement of Jews within ghettos and photographic evidence of mass murder. Some of the archival material was compared with (and validated by) related research in Israel.

Almost without exception, foreigners who have seen the exhibition have described it as “surreal,” many acknowledging their disbelief, even as they view the evidence, that the successors to the KGB are displaying such material.<sup>45</sup> Local organizers of the exhibition, especially those affiliated with the SBU, readily acknowledge their desire that it be mounted in the West.

88. In a discussion with Betsy Gidwitz shortly before her departure from the area, **Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky** listed his priorities for the near future. These are: (1) promote Jewish life in surrounding cities; (2) establish a teachers seminary -- in affiliation with a local pedagogical institute -- for the training of Judaica instructors; (3) open four more Jewish preschools in Dnepropetrovsk, each in a different district of the city; and (4) develop the recently returned choral synagogue into a multi-purpose Jewish community center. (See Section #67 above.)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The Ukrainian title of the Dnepropetrovsk office of the Ukrainian security service is *Dnipropetrovs'ke oblasne Upravlinnya sluzhbi bezpeki Ukraini*. It is known by its Ukrainian initials, *SBU*, although many persist in referring to it as the *KGB*. The last named sponsor refers to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

<sup>45</sup> The exhibit, however remarkable, does not include documentation from postwar decades.

A small group from Boston Action for Post-Soviet Jewry saw much of this archival material in October 1993. Betsy Gidwitz viewed the exhibits in early May 1994 just before they were mounted, and a small group from the Boston JCRC attended the opening of the exhibition in mid-May 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Although it may be unfair to question Rabbi Kaminetzky's sincerity, it should be noted that the discussion about his priorities occurred shortly after Betsy Gidwitz expressed to him her concern about the situation in Pavlograd and asked him to undertake certain actions to address problems there. Pavlograd is discussed below.

## Pavlograd

89. Pavlograd is located about forty miles east of Dnepropetrovsk, across the Dnepr River but within Dnepropetrovsk *oblast*. Its general population is approximately 135,000. The economy of the area is based on coal mining, chemicals, foundry machinery for smelting and casting, and brick-making.

According to the 1993 Jewish Agency demographic study, the Jewish population of the city is 500. An official of the local Jewish Cultural Society (see below) said that 630 Jews lived in the city.

90. Betsy Gidwitz visited the city on May 4, meeting with a group from the **Pavlograd Jewish Cultural Society**.<sup>47</sup> Its chairman is Yaakov Lvovich Zats, and its vice-chairman is Raisa Abramovna Pomashnikova. Ms. Pomashnikova appeared to be more active than Mr. Zats. A group of ten Jews had assembled in the Society's office; among them were six elderly people, two middle aged people (the two leaders), a woman in her mid-twenties, and a youth of about sixteen. The age distribution of the 'delegation' probably parallels that of the Jewish population at large.

The office consisted of two rooms, of which the largest is approximately ten feet by twelve feet. Both were unfinished, unfurnished, unheated, and unlit. A chair and small writing table had been acquired for Betsy Gidwitz and thoughtfully placed near the window in the larger room to catch the light of a dreary afternoon. Someone managed to find three additional chairs for the most frail of the elderly. A few people sat on stacks of literature obtained from the Israel Cultural Center and JDC office in Dnepropetrovsk. The teenage boy sprawled on the floor, and everyone else remained standing, some leaning against a wall. All wore coats throughout the hour-long meeting.

Ms. Pomashnikova greeted Betsy Gidwitz warmly and apologized for the condition of the premises. She said that the Jewish Cultural Society was established in 1992 to serve the 630 Jews of the city, the majority of whom are elderly. Many younger Jews have emigrated, most to Israel. They would like a larger meeting place, a center where Jewish activities could be held for children and various groups could meet for classes. They know of an ideal facility, but they cannot afford the rent. It is difficult to pay even for these small rooms; although everyone is poor, everyone "sacrifices" to pay something toward the rent. Their first priority for these rooms is to obtain some chairs. Wiring exists for electrical connections. Someday they would get a telephone.

After a pause, Ms. Pomashnikova continued: "Help us!" They cannot depend on volunteers alone. Working adults are exhausted at the end of the day. Pensioners lack

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<sup>47</sup> The Russian name is *Pavlogradskoye Obshchestvo Evreiskoi Kul'tury*.

the energy to organize activities. They have registered fifty pensioners over seventy years of age who need the support of an organization—and they are certain that their list is incomplete. Some people have gone to the Israel Cultural Center in Dnepropetrovsk for Hebrew classes, JDC has given them a Russian-language Judaica library,<sup>48</sup> and they hold occasional holiday celebrations. However, other than the books and some butter [probably from GJARN], people in Dnepropetrovsk “forget about us.” Ilya Levitas from the Ukrainian Jewish Council (in Kiev) sent them a questionnaire about their community; they filled it out, including the section about their needs, and returned it—but nothing has happened. They have heard that summer camps are operated in Ukraine for Jewish children, but no Jewish child from Pavlograd has ever been invited to a Jewish summer camp.

An older person interjected, saying that even the Jewish cemetery is inaccessible. It has not been maintained and graves cannot be visited because it is surrounded by grazing cows. No space remains in the cemetery for additional burials.

As many as 20,000 Jews lived in Pavlograd before World War II.<sup>49</sup> They had a synagogue and also participated in Jewish cultural programs offered by a nearby Jewish agricultural settlement, *Freiheit*.<sup>50</sup> In response to a question about World War II, no one was able to offer any details about the massacre of local Jews during the Holocaust.

Discussion returned to the needs of the current Jewish population. Most of all, they would like ongoing Jewish educational opportunities, especially for children. If they had a larger facility, they could organize Jewish programs for youngsters. There is nothing for children and young people to do here and no one to organize them.<sup>51</sup> Many young Jews leave the city as soon as they finish school.

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<sup>48</sup> Some or all of the volumes in a JDC library may have been in a few cartons in the back of the larger room.

<sup>49</sup> This number may be somewhat high.

<sup>50</sup> It is possible that *Freiheit* had been an agricultural colony established by Agro-Joint, a JDC entity established in 1924 with Soviet support to settle Jews on the land. It is also possible that the Jewish cemetery (now surrounded by cows) mentioned earlier is located on or adjacent to the former Jewish settlement that is now a farm under different management.

<sup>51</sup> Before leaving, Betsy Gidwitz gave Ms. Pomashnikova some art supplies for children (crayons, felt-tipped pens, construction paper, paste, etc.) as well as some candy. Ms. Pomashnikova said the children had never had such supplies before. She would organize a party for them to make some “Jewish art.” Several elderly in the group seemed very interested in the plastic bag that contained the art supplies and candy. From Israel Book Shop in Brookline, MA, the printing on the bag shows a menorah and some Hebrew words such as *sefarim* and *matanot*.

# BETSY GIDWITZ REPORTS

Betsy Gidwitz asked the one teenager present what type of Jewish activities he would like. Surprised and uncomfortable at being asked to state his views, he hesitated to answer. After a minute or two with everyone looking at him in expectation of a response, he said he would like a Maccabee sports club and the opportunity to go to a Jewish summer camp.<sup>52</sup>

The Jewish Cultural Society asked the Open Jewish University in Dnepropetrovsk to offer a course in Pavlograd for local Jewish adults, but that institution said it was unable to do so. The woman in her mid-twenties said that Jews in Pavlograd felt very isolated from other Jews everywhere.

When asked about local antisemitism, the consensus response was that no Jew had been attacked, but others distanced themselves from Jews. Some Jews held influential positions in the municipality or the (Communist) Party before or after World War II, but all were “cleared out” into premature retirement in the 1950s and 1960s.

As Betsy Gidwitz was leaving, she was asked by several people not to forget them.

Upon her return to Dnepropetrovsk, Betsy Gidwitz discussed the situation in Pavlograd with Rabbi Kaminetzky (who considers himself the chief rabbi of the entire *oblast*, not just the city). He agreed to visit Pavlograd, determine how he can help Pavlograd Jews, and ask *oblast* officials, with whom he is on good terms, to intervene with Pavlograd municipal officials in an effort to obtain larger communal facilities in the city for local Jews. He will also arrange for Raisa Pomashnikova to visit the Shaarei Chesed welfare society in Dnepropetrovsk to see how they organize welfare activities; perhaps they could help her develop a similar service there. At Betsy Gidwitz’ request, he will find out how many Jewish children and adolescents live in Pavlograd and then see that all who want to do so are enrolled in the Chabad summer camp or the JAFI summer camp. Betsy Gidwitz also contacted the Jewish Agency directly on the camp enrollment issue.

## Zaporozhe

*Betsy Gidwitz visited Zaporozhe in January and October 1993. She was unable to travel to the city in May 1994, but she did hear several points of interest about Zaporozhe Jewish life from others in Dnepropetrovsk*

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<sup>52</sup> Obviously, the boy had heard of Maccabee sports clubs. A small Maccabee group exists in Dnepropetrovsk.

91. Zaporozhe is located about fifty miles south of Dnepropetrovsk on the Dnepr River. With a population of 884,000 to 900,000, it is the administrative center of Zaporozhe *oblast*. Its economy is based on coal (lignite) mining, heavy industry (powered in part by a hydroelectric installation on the river), and food processing. Until June 1994, a local automobile industry produced the *Zaporozhets*, a small boxy car that has been the subject of great derision in the (former) Soviet Union.

92. The Jewish Agency estimates the Jewish population of Zaporozhe as 7,000. Many local Jews believe it is as high as 15,000.

93. The **main synagogue** in Zaporozhe has been returned to the Jewish community in recent months. It is a large building that can be used for multiple functions. The Joint Distribution Committee has developed detailed plans for its renovation, a project that is expected to start in the near future.

94. The Joint Distribution Committee will soon post a modern Orthodox Zionist **rabbi** from Israel in the city. (The city has no rabbi at present.) The responsibilities of this rabbi will cover the entire JDC agenda, including welfare operations, although it is likely that he will work closely with the JDC office in Dnepropetrovsk in this and other areas.

95. The local **Jewish Council**, under the leadership of journalist Boris Serbin, is a functional, representative body that is developing significant credibility in the community. A local Jewish physician works effectively with the Council in coordinating care for the Jewish elderly and handicapped.

96. The Zaporozhe **Jewish day school**, Gymnasium Alef, is operated by the municipality and the Lishkat haKeshet Maavar program. It currently enrolls about 230 youngsters in very cramped conditions. Observers express concern about: (1) overcrowding in the facility, thus limiting programs and possibly endangering pupil safety; (2) the dominant secular culture and lack of Jewish ambiance in the school; and (3) the non-Zionist character of the school.

A senior faculty member of the day school outlined its Jewish curriculum as including three classes weekly in Hebrew and two classes weekly in each of three other subjects -- Jewish tradition, Jewish history, and Yiddish. However, the quality of instruction is low in tradition and history because the teachers of these subjects lack appropriate training. According to this faculty member, the inadequacy of teacher preparation reflects dissension in the larger Jewish community and the school about the role of both Judaism and Zionism in the lives of post-Soviet Zaporozhe Jewry. The principal of the school is secular and feels that the inclusion of more Jewish content in the

curriculum would make a “political statement” with which he is uncomfortable. Another issue is the dearth of textbooks, particularly series of textbooks, that present Jewish tradition according to a “universal” philosophy, that is, an interpretation of Judaism that eschews a denominational approach.<sup>53</sup>

The faculty member continued that a conflict exists within both the local Jewish Council and the day school faculty about the role of Zionism. Some individuals see little role for Zionism, preferring to build a diaspora Jewish community that can exist independently of Israel. They resent the “blue and white” agendas of many of the Israelis who visit their city. It is these “diasporists” who encourage instruction of Yiddish within the day school.

If the new Israeli rabbi who is scheduled to arrive in Zaporozhe under JDC auspices in the near future is skilled in his approach, he may be able to create a more favorable atmosphere in the day school for the teaching of Jewish tradition and history as well as the transmission of Zionist values.

97. The day school faculty member said that thirty-five children are enrolled in a separate **Jewish kindergarten** (which includes both nursery school and kindergarten classes) and that fifty-eight youngsters attend a **Jewish Sunday school**. Two teachers work in the Sunday school and teach classes in Hebrew, Jewish tradition, and Jewish music. Jewish history will be taught in the Sunday school from next fall onward.

98. At least fifty children who began the 1993-94 school year in either the day school or the Sunday school have gone to Israel on **aliyah** with their families.

## Krivoi Rog

*Betsy Gidwitz has visited Krivoi Rog once, in October 1993. The notes below reflect discussions with others about Jewish communal life in that city.*

99. Krivoi Rog is located about eighty-five miles southwest of Dnepropetrovsk within Dnepropetrovsk *oblast*. A forty-mile long fusion of iron-mining settlements, its economic

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<sup>53</sup> Betsy Gidwitz asked if the unified prayer book published by the Jewish Welfare Board for United States military personnel might be an appropriate ‘model’ for the textbooks envisioned by the Zaporozhe instructor. The instructor said that such texts would be ideal. (Note: Because Betsy Gidwitz has not seen the JWB prayer book for some time, her description of it may not have been fully accurate.)

base is focused on production of iron and steel, chemicals, and engineering equipment. The general population of the city is between 713,000 and 730,000.

100. The Jewish population of the city is listed as 15,000 in the Jewish Agency study cited earlier. Some local Jews believe that it is significantly higher. The extreme linear nature of the city impedes organization of its Jewish population and the development of a sense of Jewish identity among them.

101. Visitors from Boston in October 1993 found the head of the local **Jewish Cultural Society**, a failed businessman, to be very difficult. He appeared demanding and repressive, and he clearly intimidated some of the other activists with whom he worked. He is still in charge and is planning to launch a sunflower oil business in September or October, using a JDC loan from an applicable fund as start-up money. Half of the profit will be assigned to Jewish welfare work in Krivoi Rog and half will be distributed among Jewish community organizations in other cities.

According to JDC, very few other people are active in the Jewish Cultural Society.

102. JDC in Dnepropetrovsk reported that the Krivoi Rog Jewish **welfare group** is very active and has enlisted college students to assist Jewish elderly in house cleaning and other chores as volunteers. A **Jewish children's club** has recently been established. A **Jewish Sunday school** sponsored by the Lishkat haKeshet Mechina program, enrolls about fifty children; its former principal has been replaced by someone who is more effective than her predecessor.

## Dneprodzerzhinsk

*Betsy Gidwitz visited Dneprodzerzhinsk in October 1993. She was unable to travel to the city in May 1994, but met with one of its Jewish leaders in Dnepropetrovsk and also spoke with others about Jewish life in the city.*

103. Twenty-two miles north of Dnepropetrovsk, Dneprodzerzhinsk is named after the Dnepr River and Feliks ("Iron Feliks") Dzerzhinsky, the Polish-born founder of the Cheka, forerunner of the KGB. The general population of the city is estimated at 285,000 to 290,000. A massive hydroelectric power station on the Dnepr River and coal from nearby mines fuel an industrial base focused on iron, steel, cement, chemicals, and the construction of railroad cars. Huge smokestacks and vast factories are visible from some distance as one approaches the city, whether by car from the south (from

Dnepropetrovsk) or by train from the west (from Kiev). Dneprodzerzhinsk is considered one of the ten most heavily polluted cities in the former Soviet Union.

104. The Jewish population of the city is estimated at 2,000. The major Jewish organization is the **Jewish Culture Center “Aviv”**, whose leader is Boris S. Dokter. Mr. Dokter is considered very competent and caring, and “Aviv” is regarded as an effective organization.

105 Mr. Dokter himself is the head teacher in a **Sunday school** and the leader of a **youth group**, each of which enrolls about twenty-five members. A **pensioners club** meets frequently in the home of Bassa Moiseyevna Rechter, a pleasant one-story residence with a yard.<sup>54</sup> A **welfare group** organizes delivery of hot meals to the homes of housebound elderly.

106 In common with Jewish activists in other area cities, Dneprodzerzhinsk Jewish leaders avail themselves of Jewish resources in Dnepropetrovsk. Because the small Dneprodzerzhinsk Jewish community is perceived as competent and pleasant, it readily attracts the attention and services of foreign organizations. JDC, JAFI, and the Lishka are all active and supportive of Aviv and its various activities.

## Donetsk

*Betsy Gidwitz visited Donetsk, a city located about 120 miles east of Dnepropetrovsk, for approximately twenty-four hours. The trip required a journey by car of about five hours in each direction.*

107. Donetsk is a large industrial city with a population of 1.2 million people; it is the administrative center of Donetsk *oblast*, which lies immediately to the east of both Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe *oblasts*. The city was established in 1870 by a British citizen named Hughes and subsequently became known as Hughesovka or, in Russian, Yuzovka. It was called Stalino from 1924 to 1961.

Donetsk is the largest city in the *Donbas*, the Donets River Basin, which is the most heavily industrialized region in all of Ukraine. It is a center of Ukrainian coal mining and

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<sup>54</sup> A small group from Boston met with about forty local Jews in Mrs. Rechter's house in October 1993. At that time, Mrs. Rechter said that she enjoys having guests in her home.

heavy engineering (huge metallurgical and chemical plants) with a mass working class severely aggrieved by the economic crisis in Ukraine. Fiscal concerns have been exacerbated by ethnic tension associated with a large Russian population (approximately 45 percent of the total population). Repeated incidents of industrial unrest, usually in the form of miners' strikes, have been reported in the Western press.

108. The Jewish population of the city is estimated at 15,000 to 18,000. Approximately 2,000 more Jews live in the area, perhaps half of them in Makayevka, a city to the east.

109. Jewish communal life in the city has been dominated by a rift within the activist element of the population. In common with many other conflicts, the friction continues even after its immediate cause is no longer present in the city. A **Jewish Cultural Society** established in the early 1990s was directed by a domineering, contentious woman who managed to alienate a significant proportion of its membership. The offended individuals subsequently withdrew and formed their own Jewish cultural society; the two groups -- **Jewish Cultural-Educational Society "Alef"** and **Jewish Cultural Society "Bet"** -- continue to regard each other with bitterness, even though the difficult woman has left the city, emigrating to the United States. Each group sponsors its own adult society and children's Sunday school. The Bet group, which is also known as **Techiya**, is more active, a situation causing some consternation in Alef, which was the original association.

Shortly after Rabbi Chaim Taub, a JDC-sponsored modern Orthodox Israeli rabbi arrived in the city in August 1993, he convened the two groups in an attempt to initiate a peaceful resolution to their conflict. Called out of the room for a few minutes, he returned to find the warring parties engaged in a brawl. ("Men in their fifties and sixties!" exclaimed Rabbi Taub, who is substantially younger, in recounting the event.) Rabbi Taub has since adopted a different strategy in his mediating efforts; he has nominated himself as the head of a non-existent association, the **Union of Jewish Organizations of Donetsk**,<sup>55</sup> in the hope that such a group may come to exist in the near future. He speaks in the name of the Union so that the belligerent parties grow accustomed to hearing about it. He believes that reconciliation will be fostered by the forthcoming aliyah of the leader of one group and a serious illness afflicting the leader of the other. (One doesn't want to speak favorably of another's misfortune, but . . .)

110. **Ezra**, a Jewish welfare group headed by Anna Kuvychko, assists about 250 elderly clients, of whom approximately forty are in serious straits. Rabbi Taub believes that additional elderly Jews require Ezra services. A volunteer physicians council provides some medical expertise, and one physician is compensated by JDC to make house calls. Two young women clean house and bring food to those most in need.

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<sup>55</sup> In Russian, *Ob'yedineniye yudeiskikh organizatsii Donetska*.

# BETSY GIDWITZ REPORTS

The effectiveness of Ezra has been weakened in recent months by the aliyah of three of its most committed volunteers.

Ezra receives assistance from JDC and from the Kiev-based Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (Yosif Zissels), which extends special efforts to reach Jewish population centers in outlying areas. Occasional help is also provided by synagogues in London and in Evanston, IL, which have “adopted” Donetsk Jewry.

Rabbi Taub would like to develop a soup kitchen or similar service, but lacks the facilities to do so. He has investigated the possibility of starting a meals program in the synagogue, but local officials have discouraged him, declaring that the synagogue cannot meet (unspecified) local health requirements. He may try to expand the food services of a new Jewish preschool or a planned day school to accommodate a nutrition program for the elderly, but such possibilities are not yet plans.

111. Other Jewish organizations in the city include: a **Jewish Scientists Club**; a JDC-supplied **Jewish library**; and a **Repatriation Committee**. The Jewish Cultural-Educational Society “Alef” publishes an occasional newspaper, **Alef**.

112. A new Jewish **preschool** opened in Donetsk during Betsy Gidwitz’ visit. A festive opening ceremony was held on a Sunday afternoon and included mezuzah-nailings, speeches, toasts, and ribbon-cutting. Various dignitaries attended, including Boris Adamov, a district mayor and a Jew, who was campaigning for election to the Ukrainian Rada. The event was filmed for local television news.

The preschool consists of two very spacious activity rooms, a nap room, and various service facilities. It is well-furnished and well-supplied with toys, books, and Judaica. A fenced-in playground adjoins the building. Twenty children are currently enrolled, a number that will increase. It is supported by the municipality and assisted by JDC. Transportation of children to and from the preschool is a major problem.

113. Each Jewish cultural society in the city operates its own **Sunday school**. Each enrolls 130 to 150 pupils and receives some support from the Lishkat haKeshet Mechina program.

114. Rabbi Taub recently received permission to open a **day school** -- he was so informed during the opening of the nursery school -- and hopes to begin with classes in a few grades in September 1994. Rabbi Meir Schlesinger, visiting the city at the time in his capacity as director of the JDC rabbinic program, gently reminded him that it was already early May, thus necessitating some swiftness in resolving “logistical” issues,

such as finding appropriate premises, hiring a principal and teachers, enrolling pupils, etc. Rabbi Taub was confident that he could succeed.

115. Rabbi Taub would also like to open a **Jewish club for students** enrolled in city educational institutions. As yet, no firm plans exist for such an undertaking.

116. Leah Taub, wife of Rabbi Taub, directs a large **ulpan** enrolling 600 adults and offering classes in three locations. Twelve teachers are employed. The ulpan is strongly aliyah-oriented, but Rabbi Taub worries that neither he nor Leah has the time to properly prepare local Jews for **aliyah**. He would like to provide counseling services and more Zionist activity in Donetsk, believing that such programs would facilitate absorption in Israel. Between seventy and one hundred local Jews leave for Israel every month.

117. Rabbi Chaim Taub and his family arrived in Donetsk in August 1993 under the auspices of a JDC program that places modern Orthodox Israeli Zionist rabbis in Jewish population centers of fewer than 20,000 individuals. Such rabbis, who are trained at Yeshivat Sha'alvim in Israel, are charged with implenting the entire JDC agenda.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to fostering the educational, welfare, and community-building activity noted above, Rabbi Taub officiates and teaches at a large **synagogue** located in an unpleasant area of the city. The structure contains a sanctuary, several classrooms, and office space. With assistance from **Ezra**, a religious Zionist youth movement, Rabbi Taub has succeeded in teaching the fundamentals of modern Orthodoxy to about twenty young adults. Eight men in their twenties and thirties, joined by an equal number of older men, participated in a Sunday morning Shaharit service attended by Betsy Gidwitz. When some of the younger men encountered difficulty with Hebrew text, they were assisted in an unobtrusive manner by Rabbi Taub or Rabbi Meir Schlesinger, the director of the JDC rabbinic program, who was visiting the city at the time, (The

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<sup>56</sup> Three cities in Russia -- Samara and Saratov -- both on the Volga River, and Perm, in the Ural Mountains -- are also served by rabbis in this program. Candidates are being sought for approved positions in Nizhniy Novgorod (formerly Gorky; also on the Volga River in Russia), Zaporozhe (in Ukraine, to the south of Dnepropetrovsk), and undecided locations in Siberia (Omsk or Irkutsk) and Belarus. The JDC rabbinic program is directed by Rabbi Meir Schlesinger, who founded Yeshivat Sha'alvim. (Many graduates of Maimonides School in Brookline, MA learn in Sha'alvim's overseas student program.)

Although supported financially by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the Joseph K. Miller Torah Center in Kharkov, Ukraine, is also affiliated with Yeshivat Sha'alvim. This program has stationed a Sha'alvim-trained rabbi (an Israeli of Moroccan origin) in Kharkov and operates a Sunday school, yeshiva for men, ulpana for women, summer camp, seminars, and holiday celebrations for Kharkov Jews. At least 47,000 Jews live in Kharkov; its Jewish population is among the most fragmented in the entire post-Soviet Union

synagogue uses a bilingual Hebrew/Russian siddur published by a Chabad-affiliated group in Israel and distributed in the post-Soviet successor states by JDC.) When Betsy Gidwitz expressed her surprise after the service that so many men, particularly younger individuals, were familiar with ritual, Rabbi Taub responded that fifteen additional young people who usually participate in religious activity were out of the city that day, participating in a JAFI seminar in Kharkov.

118. Rabbi Chaim and Leah Taub are committed to developing Jewish identity and encouraging aliyah among Donetsk Jewry. They have five young children and live on a high floor in a large apartment building some distance from the synagogue, thus requiring Rabbi Taub to spend all of Shabbat at the synagogue away from his family. They seem quite competent but also somewhat overwhelmed by the tasks that JDC and they themselves have established as their agenda. They are desperate for some assistance, preferably another young rabbinic family who could not only assume some essential responsibilities, but whose children could also interact with the Taub children in a mutually supportive observant atmosphere. Rabbi Taub would also appreciate funding for sending advanced students to programs in Moscow or in Israel for further learning.

## Commentary

119. The level of anxiety within the Jewish populations of Ukraine and Moldova varies markedly from one area to another. Local economic opportunities in comparison with perceived opportunities elsewhere, Russian nationalism, Ukrainian or Moldovan nationalism, antisemitism, age of family members, presence of relatives in Israel or another country, the strength of an individual's Jewish identity, and environmental conditions all play roles in determining whether a Ukrainian or Moldovan Jew will choose to emigrate or decide to remain in a post-Soviet successor state.

Jewish emigration from Moldova has been in decline for some months, probably reflecting economic and political stability in that country. Jewish emigration from Ukraine has risen significantly in recent months, in both absolute and relative terms, an increase often attributed to severe economic dislocation and, in some areas, ethnic tensions.

120. "Ukrainianization" is proceeding at a rapid pace, with the Ukrainian language displacing Russian in many spheres of public life. Road signs and building markers that had been in Russian for many years are being changed to Ukrainian. The new business cards of Rabbi Yaakov Bleich are bilingual in Ukrainian and English, rather

than in Russian and English. Rabbi Bleich also reports that increasing numbers of parents are requesting Ukrainian-language tracks for their children in his Kiev day school instead of the Russian track that was preferred just a year ago. The new building marker on the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish Day School is also in Ukrainian. Such displacement of Russian in favor of the native language is consistent with changes that have been observed elsewhere in the post-Soviet successor states, such as the Central Asian republics and Lithuania. With the exception of relatively small Jewish populations in areas of Central Asia and the Caucasus mountain region, the overwhelming majority of Jews in the successor states are much more competent in Russian than in the local language.

121. Competition between the two aliyah-oriented Israeli service agencies, the Lishkat haKeshet and the Jewish Agency for Israel, remains a disturbing reality in many locales. The breadth of the Joint Distribution Committee mandate leads to disquiet and misunderstandings. Overlapping and duplicated agendas squander resources and cause acrimony within the Jewish population. When disputes are aired in the presence of non-Jewish authority figures, the stature of all Jews and Jewish institutions is diminished.

It must be acknowledged that interagency conflict is less public now than previously in a number of cities; clearly, most emissaries of the Jewish Agency and representatives of the Joint Distribution Committee are complying with enunciated policies of their respective organizations to refrain from denouncing other organizations. Some in the Lishkat haKeshet -- fortunately, not all -- appear to be following a different path. Derision of other organizations and their leadership, ridicule of religious institutions and religious leaders, arrogance, and general coarseness are too often associated with envoys of the Lishka. The role of the Lishkat haKeshet in the post-Soviet Union should be examined with much greater rigor than has been the case in the past; the Joint Distribution Committee should also reassess its relationship with the Lishka.

122. Jewish elderly currently constitute about one-third of the Jewish population in Ukraine and, due to continuing emigration of younger age cohorts, are projected (by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) to comprise two-thirds of the Ukrainian Jewish population by the end of the century. In smaller cities and towns, the Jewish population is already overwhelmingly aged as younger Jews have departed in search of opportunities elsewhere. Jewish elderly in the post-Soviet successor states are in weaker condition than their counterparts in the western diaspora and in Israel; lingering effects of World War II, continuing poor nutrition, ineffective medical care, inadequate housing, and various tensions have all extracted a significant toll on their well-being. Rampant inflation has reduced pensions to less than ten dollars monthly.

Many elderly reside in ill-maintained dwellings, some in communal apartments in which individuals and families live in single rooms and share common kitchen and bathroom facilities. Numerous seniors are effectively imprisoned in flats on upper floors in

buildings without elevators.<sup>57</sup> Able-bodied relatives of some elderly provide a strong support system; other seniors are without family as emigration attracts younger, more adaptable generations. Some aged Jews have compassionate, helpful neighbors who visit and run errands. Others are much less fortunate, living out their days in isolation, often hungry and fearful.

JDC-assisted welfare services, such as Ezrat Avot in Kiev and Shaarei Chesed in Dnepropetrovsk, are well-intentioned and usually staffed by exceptionally caring and committed individuals, many of them trained in JDC seminars. Yet numerous such workers are overburdened with unreasonably high caseloads and inadequate access to essential goods and supplies needed by their clients, such as replacement bedding and personal clothing, food, and basic medications. Surely the American Jewish community can and must do more.

In at least one city, Kiev, JDC has succeeded in persuading a limited number of elderly Jews who live in suitable apartments to deed those residences to JDC in their wills so that other aged could reside there subsequently. To the extent that such arrangements can be made, the housing issue for seniors may be resolved. However, because the potential for like transactions seems to be limited -- and they would not necessarily address the problem of *isolation* for Jewish elderly -- it may be appropriate to consider the development of residential programs, e.g., community-owned and -subsidized apartment buildings, group-living facilities, and longterm institutional care settings. Doubtless, such an approach would require a major commitment of funds, both for construction and operation and for the inevitable complexities of dealing with post-Soviet bureaucracies and nascent legal systems, but the Jewish community may have few alternatives if Jewish elderly in the successor states are to live in dignity.<sup>58</sup>

Transportation is another critical problem for many elderly. In some areas, public transportation has been curtailed in response to fuel shortages. Even when available, access to public transportation is difficult for many seniors suffering the various infirmities associated with aging. Another major expenditure may be required for appropriate vehicles to transport Jewish elderly to hot lunch programs, other social events, clinics, etc.

123. As has been reported in the Western press, the former Soviet medical system is close to collapse. Among its most distressed components is the pharmaceutical

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<sup>57</sup> An enduring image in the memory of Betsy Gidwitz is that of an elderly, distraught woman encountered in the center of Kiev by several in the JDC group on an early spring evening. A few of the Americans offered her money, which she accepted, but she remained distressed. Subsequent conversation with the woman elicited the information that she knew that it was time to go home, but she was reluctant to return because she lived on the fourth floor of a building without an elevator and she was unable to climb so many stairs.

<sup>58</sup> As in Kishinev, communities may be able to recover one-time Jewish hospitals or comparable buildings for rehabilitation into residential facilities for Jewish seniors.

industry. Many basic medications, e.g., aspirin and insulin, are available only at exorbitant prices in foreign currency or through the goodwill of foreigners who carry in supplies (medications and medical equipment) whenever they can. Some established international welfare organizations, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, have been reluctant to engage in the systematic distribution of pharmaceutical goods in the post-Soviet successor states. A number of concerns are cited for such policy: complexity and cost of collecting appropriate medications; anxiety that inadequately trained physicians in the post-Soviet Union will use medical supplies inappropriately; apprehension that some post-Soviet Jews might become *dependent* upon diaspora or Israeli medications and worry that political or other international tensions might disrupt essential supply lines; possible diversion of medicines into the black market; potential legal liability; and fear that international Jewish supply of medical goods might generate another "Doctors' Plot," the Stalinist accusation that Jewish physicians were plotting to murder Kremlin leadership and the subsequent severe persecution of Jews that was ended only by Stalin's demise.

As valid as these concerns are, JDC has begun to reconsider its policy. The medical needs of post-Soviet Jewry are so critical that a new approach is required. Development of Physicians Councils in the successor states that are legally separate from Jewish welfare organizations, additional training for medical personnel, provision of pharmaceutical reference manuals, enlistment of foreign Jewish medical personnel and institutions as advisors (perhaps through 'sister-city' linkages), and other measures may mitigate potential difficulties. The dearth of medicines and medical goods is of such magnitude that development of a new policy is essential.

124. Jewish day schools in the successor states not only educate Jewish children, but also restore the Jewish identification of many Jewish parents and hence entire families. Here too transportation is a major problem as schools cope with inadequate transportation capacity to bring children to school and return them to their homes. Lacking funds for appropriate vehicles, a number of schools are served by vintage conveyances of dubious safety. Overcrowding on school buses (because the schools lack enough buses) only increases the danger to which children are exposed. Again, a significant allocation of funds will be required to provide adequate, safe transportation. Obviously, school buses can be used for other purposes as well.

125. Both day schools and Sunday schools remain burdened by the absence of textbooks, particularly series of textbooks, in Judaic subjects. Appropriate texts are vital to any formal educational process, but in the post-Soviet successor states their availability is especially crucial because so few teachers are adequately trained in Judaism. It has been reported that a coordinating committee of Israeli-based agencies active in post-Soviet Jewish education has been unable to agree upon a common approach to textbook development. Here too diaspora and Israeli Jews extend their conflicts into the territory of a deprived Jewish population hungry for Judaism and unencumbered by denominational and political self-righteousness. A 'universal' or

'unified' series of textbooks in each major Judaic subject would do much to expand the accessibility of Judaism to post-Soviet Jewry; those organizations finding such common texts inadequate could publish their own supplementary materials.

126. As noted in the section on Pavlograd, older Jews in that city referred to a nearby pre-war Jewish agricultural settlement, *Freiheit*. A similar settlement existed in the vicinity of Krivoi Rog, another city in Dnepropetrovsk *oblast*.<sup>59</sup> Such Yiddish-language colonies existed elsewhere in the pre-war Soviet Union, some as expressions of Soviet efforts to collectivize the Jewish population in a manner that, not incidentally, would also increase the agricultural productivity of the new Soviet state, and some as projects of Agro-Joint. This important chapter of Soviet Jewish history should be recorded while some of its participants are still alive and before relevant archival material is misplaced or worse during current conditions of confusion and disorder.

127. Dozens of Jewish newspapers are published in the former Soviet Union, most on a monthly basis. They have great potential to reach tens of thousands of Jews, to be a major factor in the development of Jewish identity and a sense of Jewish community. With few exceptions, these newspapers are poorly written and composed, dependent on handouts from the Lishkat haKasher or JAFI and reprinting of lengthy chapters from books on Jewish history, antisemitism, or other topics. Various measures can be taken to improve the quality and thus the appeal of these publications, such as editorial and/or reporting workshops with the help of quality Russian-language Israeli newspapers, diaspora Jewish newspapers, schools of journalism, and private western foundations concerned with improving the post-Soviet press; translation and transmission of appropriate Jewish Telegraphic Agency reports; and, in Ukraine, strengthening of an existing Jewish press service. Workshops for business managers would also be beneficial.

128. Indigenous Jewish leaders and Jewish organizations in the successor states should be sensitized to the implications of their involvement in partisan political campaigns. It is presumptuous for American Jews to assume that their experience in such matters will translate fully into the post-Soviet milieu; nonetheless, some aspects of American and other diaspora practice in this area may be of benefit to Jewish leadership in the successor states.

129. Small Jewish population centers are scattered throughout the post-Soviet Union. Provision of services to these communities is difficult and expensive. Cost factors may

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<sup>59</sup> In fact, a leader of the current Krivoi Rog Jewish community was approached earlier this year by an elderly Jew, a onetime resident of the settlement, who is now living in a town near the former collective. The visitor was searching for a tenth man for a minyan to replace another settlement veteran who had just died.

preclude the establishment of day schools or, in some cases, even Sunday schools or youth groups; yet it is essential that young people in these towns be reached by Jewish organizations. With few Jewish peers for social interaction and little sense of Jewish peoplehood, the positive Jewish identification of such younger Jews is at risk. Many are likely to migrate elsewhere in search of greater opportunity; if a strong Jewish identity is developed during their childhood and adolescence, their migration is more likely to be to Israel than to a life of assimilation in a larger post-Soviet city. Energetic recruitment of such youngsters for Jewish summer camps and various youth seminars is essential.

As noted elsewhere in this report, elderly Jews constitute the majority of the Jewish population in smaller cities and towns. Addressing their needs, which are often greater than those of their counterparts in more sophisticated urban centers, is an enormous logistical challenge.

130. Most Israeli and diaspora workers in the post-Soviet successor states readily acknowledge that their collective efforts reach only ten to fifteen percent of the post-Soviet Jewish population. As Jews in Israel and the diaspora strive to raise and allocate additional millions of dollars to expand these efforts, attention must be focused on the needs of post-Soviet Jews themselves and the ability of world Jewry to respond to those needs. Although the problem of overlapping and competing agency programs may have been resolved in some areas, it still exists in others. JDC must define its own priorities within its ever-broadening agenda, including the nature of its relationship with the Lishkat haKasher. As the only mainstream Jewish organization with a mandate for and experience in welfare operations, perhaps the JDC focus in the successor states should be in addressing the needs of Jewish elderly who have few alternative resources for assistance.

Provision of additional Jewish identity-building programs for children, adolescents, and young adults would seem essential. Youth groups and summer camps may be more effective in transmitting a sense of Jewish peoplehood than formal Jewish education, the latter being an alien and discomfiting concept for many post-Soviet families long separated from Jewish tradition and wary of religious doctrine. Jewish Agency efforts in these endeavors should be supported more generously, and increased mainstream Jewish communal funding might also be sought for other agencies that have initiated worthwhile programs with promise in the post-Soviet successor states. Some of these are struggling with inadequate financial resources, such as the Masorti movement's Ramah camps and some activities of Bnei Akiva and Ezra. In Ukraine, where aliyah is increasing, all such activities should be strongly Zionist in content so as to prepare participants for aliyah and klitah.

Adult education programs, such as 'Jewish universities' that reach both the new Jewish educators and communal service workers as well as lay people comfortable in an academic setting should also be supported. Scarce resources should be directed toward those institutions that have the ability to focus on Jewish studies without the distraction of non-Jewish course offerings.

Community-building will proceed at its own pace in each community as some post-Soviet Jews are better prepared than others to enter into self-governance. Similarly, twinning or sister-city relationships between a post-Soviet Jewish population center and a diaspora Jewish community will reflect the strengths and weaknesses of each partner city. Two relationships may be comparable, but not identical.

Finally, the 'conflict' between those Jews who remain in the post-Soviet Union and those who emigrate is overdrawn. Even the most fervent Zionists recognize that Jews will remain in the post-Soviet successor states for some time. Equally, most champions of a strong diaspora acknowledge that current instability in some areas of the former USSR and potential instability in almost all of the newly independent states suggests that aliyah may be a wise course for many post-Soviet Jews. Whether Jews stay for a decade or more or whether they leave in the near future, they should be provided with opportunities for Jewish identity-building. Jewish elderly deserve compassion and a variety of services, wherever they live. Eventually, the combined forces of emigration, assimilation, and aging of those who remain will reduce the size of the post-Soviet Jewish population in general and leave its remaining numbers advanced in years. Continuing support from outside the successor states will be necessary and should focus on the most effective means of service delivery. Certainly, more local Jews must be trained to assume positions of leadership in their own post-Soviet communities. Outside agencies, whether Israeli or diaspora in origin, must work collaboratively, each in fields of greatest competence. That most such agencies are financed directly or indirectly by a single American Jewish fundraising mechanism should encourage American Jewish leadership to pursue an institutional response that uses limited resources efficiently to assist post-Soviet Jews to live in dignity and to reclaim their Jewish heritage.

*This report was prepared by Dr. Betsy Gidwitz in consultation with several other individuals who are familiar with the Jewish population centers covered in the report, the relevant agencies, and/or other applicable issues. May-July, 1994.*

