

VISIT TO JEWISH INSTITUTIONS IN MOSCOW

November 24 to December 4, 1997

The following is an account of a visit to Moscow in late November and early December of 1997. Particular attention during this visit was directed to Jewish educational and communal institutions in Moscow and to Jewish emigration trends in Moscow and European Russia.

Visitors to Moscow have long commented on the enduring drabness of the Russian capital, a pervasive somber ambience that often appears replicated in the faces of countless inhabitants of this sprawling urban area. The impression of grayness is especially strong in winter as the leaden skies of the season seem to hang heavily over the city. Occasional bursts of color, in the cupolas of St. Basil's Cathedral or in garish billboards, only emphasize the overall dourness and gloom associated with Moscow.¹

In early winter of 1997, this conventional vision of plodding Moscow seems sorely outdated. Traffic chokes the streets as numerous new vehicles, many of foreign manufacture, overwhelm an existing road system never intended to accommodate large numbers of private vehicles. Construction cranes dot the sky and modern buildings rise in great number. The ponderous structures of the Soviet era remain, but much of pre-Revolutionary Moscow is being restored; graceful buildings long stained by decades of urban grime are regaining their radiance and charm.

Elegant new shops, including branch stores of prominent Western designers, line Moscow thoroughfares. Several high-standard hotels have opened, serving international businessmen in search of new commercial opportunities. New office buildings with Western amenities are visible as are numerous computer and office equipment stores, automobile showrooms, McDonald's and Pizza Hut outlets, supermarkets, and other evidence of the seeming transformation of the Russian capital.

In excursions by car and on foot and in discussions with various Muscovites and with foreigners in the growing international community, the experienced visitor readily perceives a new dynamism and vitality in Russia's largest city, at least among the middle and upper classes and the intelligentsia. Many of its citizens

¹ Garish commercial advertisements are, perhaps, a different political form of the garish state propaganda so prevalent during the Soviet period.

are optimistic about the future, convinced that Moscow offers numerous opportunities to those willing to work hard.

Yet reminders of the long Soviet period are everywhere apparent. Some of the new construction is characterized more by mass than by refinement, more by politicization than by merit or need.² Many officials in various institutions and organizations, including those serving the Jewish population, remain strongly bureaucratic in the Soviet tradition. Economic upheaval has generated extraordinary wealth for some, including a disproportionately large number of Jews; many of the new rich, frequently referred to as *New Russians*, appear heir to the power and privilege of the old Party elite.

The new rich are accompanied by a large increase in the number of impoverished individuals, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Most widely recognized in this category are elderly people whose pensions have not been adjusted to reflect the extreme inflation that has seized Russia (and other transition states) since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Less well publicized is the substantial growth in the number of children living in distressed conditions in Moscow and throughout the post-Soviet states.

The glitter and visible dynamism of Moscow often seems but a façade for a shrinking Russian industrial base, diminished investment and innovation, increasing dependence on imports, a flight of highly trained individuals from science and technology to commercial pursuits, declining standards of living for much of the population, agricultural stagnation, widespread use of barter in place of money, a collapse of public finances, and widespread crime and corruption. The political environment is unstable, nationalism is increasing in several ethnic groups, and the nascent legal system is floundering.³

Jewish Population of Moscow

1. Any review of Jewish life in Moscow must necessarily consider the number of Jews residing in the Russian capital. However, this statistic remains elusive and even controversial. Difficulties stem not only from defining Jewish identity,⁴ but

² Among the most commonly cited examples are reconstruction of the enormous Christ the Savior Cathedral (at a cost of \$300 million) and erection of a supremely ugly 150' tall bronze statue of the Peter the Great. (The latter is intended to legitimize the notion of Moscow as the traditional center of Russia and diminish the historic role of St. Petersburg, the city founded in 1703 by Peter the Great as a "window on Europe" and designated capital of Russia by Peter in 1713.

³ See *The Washington Post*, December 25, 1997.

⁴ According to *halakha* (Orthodox Jewish law), a Jew is a person whose mother is Jewish. The Reform (Progressive) movement accepts patrilineal descent as well. The Law of Return of the State of Israel confers automatic citizenship on an individual (a) with at least one Jewish

also from questions of status peculiar to Soviet and post-Soviet conditions. Jewish heritage was recorded as Jewish *nationality* in Soviet internal passports. Yet many halakhic Jews attempted to evade designation as Jews by obtaining a false passport nationality (usually as Russians). Still others have converted to Christianity, but insist that they remain Jews, citing the Soviet designation of Jewish heritage as a nationality -- and contending that Jewish nationality is compatible with Christian religious identification.

The accuracy of Soviet census data regarding the Soviet Jewish population has long been suspect because Soviet census recorders generally did not require proof of claimed nationality. As no advantage was gained by asserting Jewish identification, it has been assumed that at least some Jews declared another ethnicity. It is likely that similar misstatements will be made in census surveys in the post-Soviet successor states, some of which are planning census studies in 1999 or 2000.

2. The Jewish Agency for Israel, the Lishkat Hakesher, and several respected academic demographers place the Jewish population of Moscow in the range of 175,000 to 200,000 individuals. In speaking with both local and foreign Jews holding responsible positions in Moscow Jewish communal institutions and in academic Judaic studies, the writer heard estimates of the Moscow Jewish population as high as 500,000 and 800,000. As is common throughout the post-Soviet transition states, the average age of Jews in Moscow is believed to be in the mid-fifties.

3. Whatever its *total* Jewish population, Moscow is unique in the successor states in that its Jewish population has increased in recent years. Between 30,000 and 50,000 **Sephardic Jews** from Georgia (*Gruzia*), the Caucasus Mountain region, and the Central Asia area have migrated to the Russian capital since the collapse of the Soviet Union. A large number of heads of households are traders in the various markets or bazaars in Moscow and its immediate surroundings. Many Mountain Jews have settled in the area near the Izmailovo market in the eastern part of the capital city.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, has assisted the different Sephardic groups in organizing their own communal structures and in engaging rabbis indigenous to specific Sephardic cultures. Rabbi Goldschmidt intends to develop a **Jewish day school** in the Izmailovo area that addresses the needs of Mountain Jewish children. Many youngsters from this community speak only

grandparent or (b) married to a Jew. Many Orthodox rabbis in the post-Soviet successor states accept only halakhically Jewish children in programs under their supervision, thus excluding potential immigrants from various Jewish educational opportunities.

halting Russian, have various social problems, and drop out of school at an early age. He anticipates an initial enrollment of 150 to 200 youngsters in 1998.

4. Other than a few areas populated by recent Sephardic Jewish migrants, Moscow Jews are not concentrated in particular neighborhoods. Their dispersal throughout a sprawling city of 12 million residents generates severe service delivery difficulties for Jewish organizations attempting to sponsor various communal programs.

5. In addition to indigenous and post-Soviet migrant Jews, an increasing number of **expatriate Jews** is residing in Moscow as diplomats, aid workers, lawyers, business people, and journalists. Several hundred have participated in Jewish holiday celebrations, such as *sedarim* and Chanukah parties, developed for the foreign Jewish population. Among the leaders in organizing such events are: Dr. Eugene Weiner, Director of Special Projects for the **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee** in Moscow; Anita Weiner, also employed by JDC; and Faye Siegel, originally from Atlanta. These efforts have been supported by the **Embassy of the United States**, which has provided space for various functions, and by Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt.

Jewish Day Schools

The writer visited six of the seven Jewish day schools in Moscow, noting several differences between them and Jewish day schools in Ukraine: (1) Moscow lacks the large day schools that are well established in Ukraine, such as those in Dnipropetrovsk [700+ pupils] and Kyiv [550+]; (2) day schools in Ukraine operate fleets of buses to transport pupils between home and school, whereas most day schools in Moscow rely on the extensive Moscow Metro system for pupil transport; (3) computer equipment is more extensive and up-to-date in most Moscow schools, an outgrowth of the Russian Jewish Congress policy to provide day schools with such technology; (4) reflecting more precarious economic conditions in Ukraine, a primary attraction of day schools there is the provision by schools of two or three meals daily to all pupils, whereas pupil safety seems to be a more compelling appeal in crime-ridden Moscow; and (5) reflecting much higher Jewish emigration in Ukraine, Zionism appears more influential in several schools there and enrollment is less stable as families depart for Israel and other countries.

6. **Achey Tmimim** and **Beit Rivka** are the boys' and girls' schools respectively of the Chabad movement in Moscow. The two schools operate separate classes in the same building, enrolling 250 youngsters in grades one through eleven and 30 in a kindergarten program. Achey Tmimim and Beit Rivka are often referred to collectively by the name of the boys' school or as "the Kuravsky school," the latter in reference to its principal Zev Kuravsky.

Mr. Kuravsky said that Achey Tmimim was established in 1989, the first day school in Russia of the *glasnost* period. Its original home was a few rooms in the Archipov street synagogue (the choral synagogue now under the direction of Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt). Its current facility is in another structure in the same area of Moscow. The building has been undergoing considerable renovation, but requires more attention. Mr. Kuravsky said that enrollment in the school is increasing, but that its premises impose limitations.

Youngsters commute to Achey Tmimim from throughout the city and several towns outside city limits. Some spend as much as two hours each way on the Metro or on public buses in traveling between their homes and school. The school does not operate its own buses.

According to Mr. Kuravsky, the range of academic aptitude among pupils is very broad. Similarly, the standard of living varies substantially among families of youngsters in the school. Some families, he observed, are very poor, and probably about 20 percent of the pupils are from single-parent homes. All children are Jewish according to halakha.

In response to a question about the appeal of Achey Tmimim to parents, Mr. Kuravsky listed the following reasons (in order of importance): (1) the school provides a safe, comfortable, and peaceful environment, similar to that in a good home; (2) the school offers a quality education in secular subjects; (3) parents think that their children "should know Jewish culture"; and (4) the school prepares children for emigration (by teaching Hebrew, Judaism, and English) if families intend to leave Russia. Mr. Kuravsky observed that fewer families are leaving now than in previous years.

The most important goal of the school, said Mr. Kuravsky, is *еврейское воспитание* (*evreyskoye vospitaniye* or *Jewish upbringing*), to be good Jews, to love one another, "as Rabbi Hillel said". Mr. Kuravsky said that Chabad tradition is very important in the school.

The curriculum includes five to 11 classes in Judaic studies weekly, of which three to four are Hebrew-language instruction; the precise number of Judaic studies classes depends on age level. Two teachers from Israel work at the school. The secular curriculum aims to prepare youngsters to enter Moscow

institutes upon graduation or to attend post-secondary institutions in countries of immigration.

Classes are small and friendly, said Mr. Kuravsky. The school provides three meals to pupils each day.

Achey Tmimim has one computer classroom equipped with 14 Pentium 75 computers, each with a 650 MB hard drive and 8 MB RAM. CD-ROM capacity is available only through the network server. This system was given to the school in 1995 by the Russian Jewish Congress. The school owns a modem, but it has not yet been connected. They have several printers and a Mustek scanner. Mr. Kuravsky commented that additional computers should be placed in science laboratories and other classrooms and integrated into class work in mathematics, physics, and other subjects, but he seemed doubtful that the school would ever have the wherewithal to develop such capacity.

7. **Beit Yehudith** (School #1330) was started in 1990 by Rivka Weiss, who sought a Jewish day school for her own daughter. Mrs. Weiss, who is of Belgian and Israeli background, lives in Moscow with her husband, Rabbi David Weiss, a rabbi in the Ural Mountain area employed by the Joint Distribution Committee. Initially holding classes in the Weiss apartment, the school has since moved to a former pre-school building. It enrolls 152 youngsters from grade one through grade eleven.

Previously a school only for girls, Beit Yehudith began to enroll a few boys in first grade at the beginning of the 1997-1998 school year and expects to continue to enroll boys. Mrs. Weiss said that classes probably will remain mixed in the lower grades, but separate sections will be developed for boys and girls in the middle or upper grades. The school has also created a small special education program that currently enrolls four boys between the ages of six and eight. Both the special education class and the entry of boys into regular classes have occurred in response to requests of parents whose daughters are pupils at Beit Yehudith.

The Jewish curriculum at the school is strong, beginning with five hours weekly of Hebrew, two hours of Jewish history, and one hour of Jewish tradition in first grade and increasing to 14 hours of Jewish studies in the upper grades. The school also offers an active Jewish music and dance program and, through its dormitory (see below) and family education programs, provides pupils with Jewish life experiences.

Mrs. Weiss said that the secular studies curriculum is also comprehensive, featuring excellent instruction in English and in computer skills. Evidence of a high-quality art program was displayed on the walls of the building.

According to Mrs. Weiss, the majority of youngsters are from poor families, many of them single-parent households with an absent non-Jewish father. The school provides many girls with clothing and sends older pupils on trips to Belgium or England. Beit Yehudith girls stay in the homes of religious families in Europe so that they can learn how observant Jews live in family units.

The goal of Beit Yehudith is to bring its pupils into the Jewish people, into the [collective] Jewish family. The school maintains strong ties with such Israeli institutions as Machon Gold, Michlala, and Bar-Ilan University in the hope that its graduates will choose to enroll in one of these programs and, eventually, settle in Israel. However, Mrs. Weiss recognizes that some girls will want to remain in Russia or develop their futures in other diaspora countries. Beit Yehudith hopes to prepare its graduates to be Jewish community-builders wherever they live.

Parents learn about Beit Yehudith through advertisements in Russian media, brochures that are distributed in Jewish venues, and word-of-mouth. Parents are looking for a small, warm school with a homelike environment that also prepares their children for entry into a variety of post-secondary educational institutions.

Because of the difficulties encountered in traveling to and from school in Moscow, Beit Yehudith has established **dormitory accommodations** for approximately 40 pupils. Younger girls stay in several rooms in the school building,⁵ and older boarders live in apartments near the school. The dormitories permit enrollment of a small number of girls whose families reside in such distant cities as Saratov and Baku. A program of supervised study and extra-curricular activities has been integrated into dormitory life. Most local girls go home on weekends and some also spend one weeknight at their homes.

Mrs. Weiss believes that the warm, comfortable atmosphere of the school can be retained even if the school continues to grow. However, its current premises are quite cramped and offer little opportunity for enrollment expansion. Beit Yehudith hopes to obtain a second building on the same property; this facility is currently unused, but will require substantial renovation.

In addition to the day school, Mrs. Weiss also supervises a small **pedagogical college** that trains women to teach Jewish subjects at Beit Yehudith and at other Jewish schools in Moscow and elsewhere in the transition states. The curriculum includes Chumash, Prophets, tradition; Jewish history; Jewish philosophy and ethics; methodology, human development; Hebrew, English; computer skills; and aerobics, swimming, and dance. A discrete division of the college trains **paraprofessional social workers** who work with elderly Jews in the Moscow area. Their studies include gerontology, paramedical aid, and family psychology. Young women enrolled in the college programs serve as *madrichot* (youth leaders) for girls in the day school.

⁵ The school dormitories appear very crowded, but are clean and attractive.

Beit Yehudith also operates a "parents university" (*родительский университет*), an educational program for school parents and other adults that features lectures on Jewish tradition, law, history, and holidays by Moscow-area rabbis and Jewish studies instructors. Participants in this program are invited to Shabbatot and other holidays at the school.

Orthodox Jews in Switzerland provide major financial support for Beit Yehudith. The school has an excellent reputation among expatriate Jewish professional communal workers in Moscow and local community activists.

8. **Chamah** was founded in Russia in the 1950s by Chabad followers as an underground organization. It is now centered in Moscow and operates Jewish welfare and education programs under the direction of Rabbi Dovid Karpov. Ties between Chamah and other Chabad institutions are tenuous. Its school, the major component of its *Educational Center for Underprivileged Children*, enrolls 45 youngsters in grade one through grade four. About 15 children remain overnight at the school during the week. Upon finishing grade four, most children continue their day school education at Achey Tmimim/Beit Rivka. Chamah also operates a nursery school and kindergarten in the same premises. The school building has been renovated and includes computer facilities, an arts program, and an aboveground swimming pool.

Rabbi Karpov is seeking funds to develop an *internat* (boarding school or children's home) for Jewish street children and children from unstable homes. He has access to a building that will be suitable after extensive renovation, which he hopes to begin in September 1998. He will need \$180,000 to cover repairs to the structure and purchase furnishings. He believes that \$50,000 will be required monthly to support 100 children. The latter figure includes rent as well as food, clothing, medical care, and supervisory personnel. Rabbi Karpov expects to receive some funding from the municipal government; he is already familiar with government policies as he has visited municipal children's homes in an effort to find Jewish residents and extend support to them.⁶ In response to a question, Rabbi Karpov stated that his proposed *internat* will accommodate Jewish youngsters between the ages of four and 14 or 15. When asked about plans for youngsters after they reach age 14 or 15, Rabbi Karpov seemed startled and said that he would have to think about working with youth in this older age group.⁷

⁶ According to Rabbi Karpov, two Jewish children have resided in municipal children's homes until recently. One of them recently reached 18 years of age and has since emigrated to Israel.

⁷ Rabbi Karpov was aware of homes for Jewish children that exist in Odessa (Ohr Somayach; Rabbi Shlomo Baksht) and Dnipropetrovsk (Chabad; Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki). He was not aware of a residential program for Jewish boys that operates in Kyiv under the auspices of Yad Yisroel (Rabbi Yaakov Bleich). Rabbi Karpov questioned the writer about all three programs.

9. **Etz Chaim** (School #1621) is a modern/centrist Orthodox day school enrolling 300 youngsters in a program serving nursery school through ninth grade. The school will add tenth and eleventh grades in the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 academic years respectively as current ninth grade pupils grow into these grade levels. Classes for pre-school through second grade are held in one building, and third through ninth graders meet in a second building. At full enrollment, the school probably will accommodate about 400 pupils in its current premises. Any greater enrollment growth will require additional space, perhaps in an adjacent structure that was part of the school when it was first built for the municipality.

Etz Chaim is associated with Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow. The writer met at the school with: Vladimir Sklyanoy, Principal; Marina Grushevskaya, Principal of Jewish Subjects; and Judith Schwartz, Head of the English Department. (Mrs. Schwartz is an aunt of Rabbi Goldschmidt.) A later discussion was held with Dara Goldschmidt, Rabbi Goldschmidt's wife, who has a prominent role in the school.

All Etz Chaim pupils are Jewish according to halakha. About 60 percent are of Sephardic Jewish background. Most Sephardic families are endogamous, relatively stable, and more traditional; many observe some degree of kashrut. However, many also are of lower economic status. About half of the Ashkenazi pupils are from single-parent homes, almost all of which are headed by women; perhaps 25 percent of the absent fathers are non-Jewish. Grandparents of children, i.e., parents of the child's mother, play an important support role in many families.

According to those interviewed, the major attractions of the school to families are pupil safety, a strong moral environment, hot meals, and a comprehensive, high-quality secular studies program. Referring to one aspect of the secular program, it was noted that Etz Chaim offers an excellent English-language curriculum, whereas very few public schools now teach any foreign languages [because qualified foreign-language teachers have left teaching for more lucrative positions in private industry].

Classes are coeducational in pre-school and the first two grades. From grade three, boys and girls meet in separate sections. Pupils are scheduled for up to 16 classes in Jewish studies each week, depending on age level. Three to four classes are in Hebrew language instruction, and the remainder are in various texts. Etz Chaim places much more emphasis on religious studies than on Jewish history. To accommodate state-mandated secular subjects as well as a religious curriculum, some pupils are in school until 5:45 p.m. Some grades have met on Sundays as well, but the Sunday classes are being terminated because children need more free time. The school devotes considerable effort to tutoring new pupils, who require extra instruction in Jewish subjects.

In common with Beit Yehudith, Etz Chaim has trained its own Jewish studies teachers, holding classes at night. However, such courses are not being offered during this academic year because teachers do not have time after work to take enrichment classes or to teach prospective new teachers. Mrs. Goldschmidt said that the school has obtained funding to hire teachers from abroad to teach more advanced Judaic topics, but she cannot find qualified individuals who are willing to live in Moscow. She is concerned about finding suitable Jewish studies teachers for the upper grades as Etz Chaim prepares to offer grades ten and eleven to its current ninth graders.

The central aim of the school is to build Jewish identity and Jewish pride. Many Moscow Jews deny their heritage and are self-hating. Although the school has not yet graduated any students, Mrs. Goldschmidt said that she hoped future graduates would learn at least one year in an Israeli yeshiva. About 20 pupils emigrate every year, some going to Israel and some settling with their families in other countries. The number of emigrating pupils used to be greater, but many families now perceive new possibilities for productive lives in Moscow.

Etz Chaim operates its own summer camp outside Moscow. Separate three-week sessions for boys and girls attract 180 to 220 youngsters each, most from the school.

As noted in an earlier section on the Jewish population of Moscow, Rabbi Goldschmidt intends to open a separate school for children of Mountain Jews who have resettled in Moscow in recent years. It is unlikely that they would do well at Etz Chaim because their academic backgrounds are weak.

10. **Moscow National Jewish School** is also known as School #1311 and "the Lipman school". The last title refers to Grigory Lipman, the school principal. Enrolling 280 youngsters in grades one through eleven, the school is sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Education under its Tsofia program.⁸ Most pupils commute to school by public transportation; a school bus operates a shuttle service between the school and the nearest Metro station.

The Lipman school is considered by many in the Moscow expatriate Jewish community to be the showplace Jewish day school. A large display case includes pictures of some of its more famous visitors (including the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin) and trophies of various academic competitions in

⁸ Tsofia is an acronym for "Zionism and Jewish Pedagogy" in Hebrew. About half of the 33 Tsofia schools were started by the Israeli government under its Maavar program and are secular in orientation. The other half are Chabad schools affiliated with the Chabad Or Avner organization.

which it has participated. The building is exceptionally bright and cheery; many of its walls are decorated with artwork by pupils.

The secular education curriculum has an excellent reputation. Special pride was expressed about its English and Russian literature departments as well as its computer instruction.⁹ Its Judaic studies program is more limited, aiming to teach youngsters *about* Judaism rather than the substance of Judaism. Pupils study three to four hours of Hebrew each week, one to two hours of Jewish tradition, and, beginning in fifth grade, one hour of Jewish history weekly. Some boys wear kipot and the school kitchen is kosher.

The Lipman school offers an exceptionally strong extra-curricular program, including a school newspaper, music, drama, and sports. Pupils participate in various service activities, such as friendly visits with Jewish elderly in their apartments. The school also offers several programs for parents.

Classes are coeducational and are limited in size to 25 pupils, somewhat larger than in most other Moscow Jewish day schools. Two sections are taught in some grades, and a waiting list exists for enrollment at some age levels. A school official estimated that the school can accommodate only about 20 more youngsters than its current registration, a gap that will be filled as more numerous children in the lower grades move into the secondary school division. The appeal of the school to parents, said the official, is in its friendly atmosphere, high level of secular instruction, and free tuition [as opposed to many other high-quality schools in Moscow that are private and require substantial fees]. Some parents also want their children to learn Hebrew so that they will be better prepared to live in Israel should they decide to do so. About 90 percent of graduates enroll in competitive Moscow universities and institutes, and the remainder enter quality post-secondary programs in Israel or the United States.

11. **World ORT Union** operates four day schools in the post-Soviet successor states -- in St. Petersburg (generally considered the flagship school) and Moscow in Russia, and in Kyiv and Odessa in Ukraine.¹⁰ The Moscow **ORT**

Because Mr. Lipman was out of town on a business trip during my visit, the major source of information for this report is Zhanna Karnaukova, the deputy principal of the school. Ms. Karnaukova appeared uncomfortable when questioned about certain policy issues. One such question concerned the Jewish background of pupils; typically, Maavar schools accept youngsters who are Jewish according to the Israeli Law of Return, many of whom may not be Jewish according to halakha.

⁹ The school possesses 14 Pentium 200 computers, all with independent hard drives and CD-ROM drives, and associated equipment.

Secondary School (School #326), which was established in 1995, currently enrolls 300 youngsters in grades five through eleven. About 80 percent of the pupils are Jewish according to the Israeli Law of Return (but not necessarily according to halakha). All youngsters study four hours of Hebrew each week as well as one to three hours of Jewish history or tradition.

The school premises are modern and bright, and rooms are well-furnished. Computer equipment is extensive and up-to-date.

The school offers an intensive program in computer technology, including multimedia applications and instruction in basic robotics. The school curriculum includes all standard academic subjects, including English. Planners of the Moscow ORT program had hoped that a large proportion of graduates would enter the Moscow ORT Technical College (see below), but almost all who remain in Moscow prefer to continue their education in more prestigious institutes or universities. About five graduates of the first graduating class emigrated to Israel.

12. The **ORT Technological College** is a separate institution enrolling young people age 15 and older. Its current student body numbers 550, only 20 of whom are male and (apparently) none of whom is Jewish. The college is located in the Ostankino area of Moscow and was previously operated as a training institute by an adjacent clothing factory.

Reflecting its historic ties to the clothing industry, the largest department of the college is fashion design. The curriculum in this area is introducing modern methods of design and technology in an effort to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of Russian industry. A new department has been started in information systems; specialties are computer programming, data base development, telecommunications, and multimedia technologies. Computers and associated equipment in this department are plentiful and up-to-date. Another section of the college is concentrating on small-business development.

Officials at the college are aware of the Jewish roots of ORT and are frustrated by the inability of the college to establish a following among the local Jewish population. They recognize that Moscow Jews are oriented more toward full university and institute education than toward technical schools. The college maintains links with ORT schools in Israel and elsewhere, and posters and other mementos of Israel are visible in several sections of the building.

¹⁰ The Moscow and St. Petersburg ORT schools are new institutions. The ORT school in Kyiv represents an ORT affiliation with an existing public school specializing in mathematics, and the ORT school in Odessa is a joint venture with an existing Maavar/Tsofia (Israeli government) school. The two schools in Russia enroll only youngsters in the middle and upper grades, whereas the schools in Ukraine enroll pupils in grades one through eleven.

ORT computer specialists are trying to develop a **consulting capacity** to advise local Jewish schools and other Jewish institutions on purchase, installation, and use of computer systems. Among their clients for such services are the Jewish Agency in Moscow and the writer of this report on behalf of the Jewish day school in Dnipropetrovsk.

Academic Judaica

Academic study of Judaism, Jewish history, Jewish literature, Jewish demography and sociology, biblical and modern Hebrew, Jewish art and music, Zionism, modern Israel, the Holocaust, and related topics was banned during most of the Soviet era. As the policy and practice of *glasnost* appeared to take root in the late 1980s, various scholars turned their academic talents to Jewish dimensions of their core disciplines, e.g., general historians began to explore Jewish history, sociologists became interested in sociology of Russian Jewry, etc.

13. In mid-1994, the **International Center for the University Teaching of Jewish Civilization** (Jerusalem), with the support of the **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee**, established **SEFER**, the **Moscow Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization**.¹¹ Sefer promotes Jewish studies at the university level and represents faculty, students, and institutions engaged in Jewish studies. Its current membership includes about 300 scholars and more than 50 institutions throughout Russia and the other successor states. Sefer enjoys official status in the Russian Academy of Sciences, and maintains its headquarters in the building of the Academy of Sciences.

It organizes an annual national Jewish studies conference as well as regional and student conferences, seminars, workshops, and tutorial sessions. It sponsors and coordinates visits of foreign scholars, and arranges for lecturers to speak in peripheral communities. It has published directories of Judaic programs in the transition states, research bibliographies, and curricula for use in teaching various Judaic courses. It is building a Judaica library at the Sefer center in Moscow.

¹¹ *SEFER* is the Hebrew word for *book*. The full title in Russian of *SEFER* is *Центр научных работников и преподавателей иудаики в ВУЗах "Сэфэр"*, which translates most accurately as *Center for Scientific Workers and Instructors of Judaica in Institutions of Higher Education [associated with] Sefer*.

The writer met with Rashid Kaplanov, a historian who teaches at the Jewish University of Moscow and at Maimonides Academy. He is also chairman of the Sefer Board of Directors. Dr. Kaplanov said that its major financial support is from JDC, but that JDC is beginning to show "donor fatigue". The Russian Jewish Congress also provides some resources. Unlike comparable non-profit institutions in the United States, Sefer must pay taxes; it maintains a special tax accounting department.

In response to a question, Dr. Kaplanov said that Sefer is comparable to the Association for Jewish Studies (in the United States). However, Russian scholars of Judaica do more teaching and less research than their American counterparts.

According to Dr. Kaplanov, the goals of Sefer are: (1) to expand their current activities; (2) to send more students to Israel for study and to seminars and conferences abroad; and (3) to publish more research of Sefer members. Between 30 and 40 percent of Judaic scholars and a somewhat larger proportion of graduate students are non-Jewish.

Responding to another question, Dr. Kaplanov said that both **Reform** and **Conservative Judaism** should find followers in Russia. In fact, he said, he is surprised that neither movement has mounted a greater effort to establish their particular movement in Russia. Russian Jewry needs a dynamic liberal rabbi.

Dr. Kaplanov said that **antisemitism** persists in Russia, but that the most vociferous and potentially dangerous antisemites are on the "lunatic fringe". They are very marginal and represent little threat to Russian Jews.

14. The **Jewish University of Moscow** is a private and secular institution with a small office in the humanities center of Moscow State University. A discussion was held with its president, Dr. Alexander Militarev, a philologist; several students and others joined the discussion from time to time.

JUM offers degrees in various fields of Jewish studies. Its curriculum includes courses in Jewish history, Jewish texts, Judaism, Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, Jewish literature, sociology, education, and other subjects. Its classes meet in the late afternoon, evening, and on Sunday. Its faculty is part-time and consists of qualified scholars who hold teaching appointments at several Moscow institutions. Most of its 185 students are undergraduates; some are enrolled in parallel courses of study in history or other subjects at other Moscow institutions.

JUM graduated its first undergraduate class in 1996. Its press section publishes a scholarly journal *Вестник* (*Vestnik; Bulletin*) and has issued a number of original studies, several new books, and translations of existing works.

The original sponsor of JUM was the Aleph Society, an organization associated with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. This relationship was always uneasy because the resolutely secular approach of JUM clashed with the more religious orientation of Rabbi Steinsaltz. More recent financial support has come from the **Russian Jewish Congress**.¹² A recently-signed agreement will transform JUM into the **Institute for Jewish Studies and Civilization** under the auspices of Hebrew University in Jerusalem and a major Moscow university. Hebrew University will supply lecturers in fields in which little expertise exists in the transition states.

The new Institute will have two priorities. The first is training professionals for careers in: (a) Judaic studies (both teaching and research), initially at the university level, but later in Jewish high schools as well; and (b) Jewish communal service, including social work, community organization, non-profit management, and fundraising. It is likely that students in Jewish communal service will do some fieldwork in foreign Jewish organizations. The second priority of the Institute is to foster Judaic knowledge among non-Jews. This objective recognizes the reality that one-third to one-half of all students enrolled in Judaic studies courses are non-Jewish and the belief that knowledge of the Jewish world will provide some insurance against antisemitism.

The new Institute will concentrate on building a strong undergraduate program in its initial years and will develop a graduate program as soon as circumstances permit. It hopes to employ faculty on a full-time basis, acquire its own premises, and establish a daytime class schedule. It will try to increase its financial resource base by organizing a 501[C]3 support group in the United States.

15. Several additional institutions in Moscow offer courses in Jewish studies. Among the more respected programs are **Maimonides Academy** and **Project Judaica**. **Maimonides Academy** is a state-funded institution with about 100 students, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Its major role is the training of Hebrew language teachers and translators. It anticipates a 1998 graduating class of 16 students. **Project Judaica** is a program of the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York) that is housed within the Russian State University for the Humanities. It trains specialists in Jewish history and Jewish texts. It anticipates a 1998 graduating class of 15 students.

¹² The Aleph Society has lost much of its support in the last several years.

The tension with Rabbi Steinsaltz finds a local parallel in relations between JUM and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, who appears unenthusiastic about JUM for the same reason.

The **number of students** entering JUM, Maimonides Academy, and Project Judaica is declining, apparently because potential entrants believe career opportunities in Judaic fields are limited.

16. Vladimir Shapiro is a sociologist at the **Jewish Research Center** (also called the **Jewish Scientific Center**) at the **Russian Academy of Sciences**. He was interviewed at his office.

In response to a broad question about **Jewish demography** in Russia, Dr. Shapiro said that information about the number of Jews currently living in Russia in general and in specific cities will be available only after the next Russian census in 1999.¹³

He said that the **standard of living** among Jews in major Russian cities is higher than among most other ethnic groups -- absolutely, without question (*безусловно*). He observed that several factors explain the discrepancy in income levels. First, the proportion of people with higher education is much greater among Jews. Well-educated people, he said, are much more likely to understand the market economy, to speak English, and to be comfortable with computer technology -- all of which are strong advantages in post-Soviet Russia. Second, many more Jews have close relatives or friends living abroad, a factor that is helpful in expanding one's horizons and in establishing careers with international dimensions. (A study conducted five years ago showed that 27 percent of Jews in Russia have first-degree relatives [parents, siblings, children] living in the United States, Canada, or Germany; 49 percent have second-degree relatives in these countries; and 55 percent have friends in one or more of these countries.) Third, perhaps due to a history of suffering under antisemitism, many Jews are more energetic and enterprising than others in Russia; Jews expend more effort to understand the new economy and to exploit the opportunities that it offers. Professor Shapiro estimated that Jews constitute at least 25 percent of both the new Russian "financial elite" and the new Russian "technical elite".

Eighty percent of Russian finance capital is concentrated in Moscow, said Dr. Shapiro. Consequently, it is not surprising that so many wealthy Jews live in Moscow and that their wealth is so extraordinary. The wealth of St. Petersburg Jewry is far less. However, almost every city in Russia has its own local (*местный*) Gouzinsky.¹⁴

¹³ The last Soviet census was in 1989, i.e., ten years previously.

¹⁴ The reference is to Vladimir Gouzinsky, the banker and media magnate who also is founding president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Regarding **Jewish emigration**, Professor Shapiro said that many "more substantial" individuals went to the United States five years ago. Today, the more successful (*успешные*) Jews remain in Russia, perceiving almost limitless (*безграничные*) opportunities if they work hard. Less capable (*способные*) Jews have emigrated to Israel. Those who go to Germany, continued Professor Shapiro, are middle-aged and older people in pursuit of the generous social benefits offered immigrants by the German state.

According to studies conducted in recent years, reported Dr. Shapiro, four factors generate Jewish emigration from Russia and Ukraine: (1) perceived greater economic opportunity in the United States, Israel, or Germany; (2) national motivation, i.e., Zionism or a strong sense of Jewish identity; (3) antisemitism in Russia or Ukraine; and (4) family reunification. Of all of these factors, family reunification now is the most important in both Russia and Ukraine. It is especially significant in the departure of older people who emigrate in order to join their adult children in the new country; often the adult children are well-established and solidly middle class by the time that their parents arrive. Antisemitism is expressed much more crudely (*эрубо*) in Ukraine and, consequently, is more important in motivating emigration from Ukraine than from Russia. The terrible (*ужасная*) economy and equally terrible ecological conditions in Ukraine are also significant in generating emigration.

The growth in **Jewish day school** enrollment in Moscow is due in large part to the reality that these schools have attracted the best teachers [of secular subjects]. Jewish day schools pay their teachers on time and provide a safe and pleasant teaching environment. However, Jewish day schools are not without problems. The more secular schools, e.g., the Lipman school and the ORT school, are enrolling many non-Jewish pupils, a factor that is very problematic in dealing with issues related to the Jewish culture and ethos of the school and the Jewish self-identification of pupils. The more religious schools encounter problems when they attempt to intensify the Judaic content of their curricula; few parents are interested in anything more than a superficial approach to Jewish studies. Some parents fear that the general studies component of their children's education will suffer if too much emphasis is placed on Jewish subjects.

In response to a question about **Jewish identification** and the July 1997 decision of the Ministry of the Interior of Russia to remove the "nationality line" (Line 5) in internal passports (identity cards), Dr. Shapiro said that he is currently conducting a study on the impact of this decision.¹⁵ The Jewish population is

¹⁵ Line 5 requires citizens to list their nationality. In the Soviet Union, one could be a Russian (or Ukrainian, Estonian, Tadzhik, etc.) or a Jew, but could not be a Russian Jew, Ukrainian Jew, etc., as Jewish heritage was considered a nationality itself. Jews have long complained that forced ethnic identification on a broadly used document facilitated severe antisemitic discrimination.

already "totally acculturated" to Russian life, he believes, and removal of the ethnic identity line from internal passports is unlikely to have any impact on a process that is already far advanced. However, he said, removal of Line 5 will also lead to the absence of Jewish ethnicity from statistical data; this loss of information may cause some [research and planning] problems in the future.

Responding to another question, Professor Shapiro said that Russian Jews would be responsive to **Reform** and **Conservative Judaism**. He believes that at least one-third of the Russian Jewish population would find these more liberal streams appealing, whereas only about five percent of Russian Jewry would be attracted to **Orthodox Judaism**. Reform and Conservative Judaism are more democratic in their practice and more intellectual in their content, he said. However, he believes that most Russian Jews will express positive Jewish identity primarily through association with Jewish cultural and charitable activity rather than through religious observance.

Hillel

17. The Moscow **Hillel** was established in September 1994, the first Jewish student organization in the successor states. Since then, Hillels have opened in St. Petersburg, Kyiv, Minsk, and Kharkov. Groups of Jewish students and other Jewish young people in a number of additional cities have indicated interest in forming more Hillels. Hillel in the transition states is supported by JDC and Hillel International; its major funder has been the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation of Tulsa.

The writer met with Evgeniya Mikhaileva, Executive Director of Moscow Hillel, and Dr. Eugene Weiner, JDC Director of Special Projects, at the Moscow Hillel Center. The Center premises consist of an apartment that appears inadequate in size for Hillel activities.

According to Ms. Mikhaileva, Moscow Hillel attracts Jewish young people between the ages of 16 and 34.¹⁶ About 1,000 young people participate in its

However, it has also been pointed out that retention of Line 5 ensured Jewish identity during the many years that no *positive* means of Jewish identity were available. Since announcement of the new policy, which became effective on October 1, representatives of many small ethnic groups have voiced concern that their members will assimilate into the majority population. For debate on the impact of this decision on Jews in Russia, see *Nezavisimaya gazeta* of October 22 and November 10, 1997.

¹⁶ It is difficult not to note the similarity in age range between Moscow Hillel and the Soviet Komsomol organization, the youth division of the Communist party. Often presented as a student organization, the Komsomol enrolled individuals between the ages of 14 and 35. Perhaps

social activities, e.g., holiday celebrations, over the course of a year; about 100 assist in organizing events; and a core group of about 50 are activists.

Moscow Hillel holds various classes, occasional seminars, holiday observances and celebrations, drama productions, and social events. It sponsors a sports club, Israeli song and dance club, and a monthly newspaper. A 1997 Rosh Hashanah service organized by students, under the leadership of Dr. Weiner and Dr. Peter Geffen of the Heschel School in New York, drew 500 student participants as well as about 150 others, mostly American expatriates working in Moscow. In response to a question, Ms. Mikhaileva said that participants were informed of the service through announcements in the Hillel newspaper and by a telephone campaign. It would not be effective to post notices of the service in various universities and institutes, she said, because such notices would be removed by antisemites. Further, telephone contact enabled callers to inform hesitant students that the service would be more "modern" than those in the Choral Synagogue. Most Jewish young people avoid Orthodox services because they understand neither Hebrew nor the ritual. (The Hillel Rosh Hashanah service was organized at the request of Orthodox Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt. See page 23.)

On the horizon for Hillel students are trips to small Jewish population centers to conduct Shabbat services and other Shabbat events. These Jewish population centers are too small to attract rabbis. The students will be trained in Shabbat traditions, ritual, and music in a series of workshops similar to those in which they participate prior to conducting Pesach sederim in small Jewish centers.

Jewish Culture

18. The writer attended two cultural events of Jewish interest. The venerable Nehama Lifshitz, a native of Kaunas (Kovno), presented a concert of mostly Yiddish (and some Hebrew) songs in one of the most prestigious halls in Moscow. Although the richness of her voice is understandably diminished by time, she is nonetheless an elegant performer. Ms. Lifshitz, who emigrated to Israel in 1969, was an inspiration to many Soviet Jews in the 1950s and 1960s. Her performance in Moscow was underwritten by several prominent Israeli institutions.

The Jewish playwright and director Mark Rozansky presented a dramatization of the Isaac Bashevis Singer novel *The Magician of Lublin*, a work set in 19th-century Poland. The production was staged at the noted studio theater У Никитских ворот (Nikitsky Gates Theater) established by Mr. Rozansky in 1983.

because of the Komsomol precedent, the broad age range of Moscow Hillel may seem conventional to participants.

Jewish Communal Organizations

19. The **Russian Jewish Congress** (*Российский Еврейский Конгресс*, known as *REK*) was established in January 1996 as a central organization committed to developing a Russian Jewish community that will operate in an inclusive and efficient manner. Its primary backers have been a group of wealthy Moscow Jewish bankers led by Vladimir Gouzinsky. Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, has been an important leader in REK, and the Joint Distribution Committee has supported its organizing efforts.

Mr. Gouzinsky, REK president, has recruited four other bankers and businessmen to serve as vice presidents, each of whom chairs an important committee. Mikhail Friedman, a banker, heads the committee on **culture**; Vitaly Malkin, a banker, heads the committee on **social welfare**; Boris Hait, a banker, chairs the committee on **elementary and secondary education**; and Levy Levayev, a businessman, heads the committee on **higher education**. Genrikh Reznik, a prominent attorney who is a member of the REK Community Advisory Board, chairs the committee on **anti-defamation**. Other members of the Advisory Board include four Moscow rabbis and the editor of a Moscow Jewish newspaper. All of these individuals are Muscovites, with the exception of Mr. Levayev, who lives in Israel, but maintains residences in Moscow and western Europe.¹⁷ A Board of Directors includes representatives of more than 40 Jewish population centers, some of them quite small (such as Kemerovo and Kostroma), in which REK is active or intends to become active.

According to Dr. Alexander Osovtsov, Executive Vice-President of REK, the **regular budget** of REK is \$2.6 million.¹⁸ The **irregular budget** of REK, said Mr. Osovtsov, is "much more". For tax purposes, executives in certain businesses contribute goods and/or services as supplemental gifts or, sometimes, in lieu of cash. Between 65 and 70 Jews contribute to REK in Moscow, said Mr. Osovtsov; the smallest gift (cash and/or goods and services) is probably about \$50,000, and the largest is more than \$1 million. Between 25 and 30 Jews contribute in St. Petersburg, and only three or four donors participate in most of the other Jewish population centers.

¹⁷ Mr. Levayev is the founder and primary funder of Or Avner, an organization that supports Chabad rabbis and programs in the post-Soviet successor states.

¹⁸ The regular budget was allocated as follows in 1996: religious programs, \$340,294; social welfare programs, \$276,360; culture, \$156,247; elementary and secondary school Jewish education, \$234,700; higher education, \$295,000; anti-defamation, \$13,900.

Cash donations are effected by bank transfer to ensure accurate record-keeping and minimize irregularities. Dr. Osovtsov said that new tax laws effective in 1998 should encourage more cash gifts. He also said that REK had refused donations from Jews with criminal backgrounds.

Responding to a question about the lack of contributions under \$50,000, Dr. Osovtsov said that the **slow growth of a middle class** precludes donations in the \$5,000 to \$20,000 range; if individuals are unable to contribute \$50,000, they are also unable to contribute \$5,000. [Some individuals in the nascent middle class contribute such smaller amounts to Chabad-associated programs. BG]

Individuals in each Jewish population center are now attempting to build **local infrastructures**. Each community is subject to different local circumstances, such as relations with local and *oblast* power structures, ease of reclaiming communal property, presence or absence of rabbis, strength of local Jewish leadership, etc. In most communities, a priority project is the development of **Jewish community centers**. In Moscow, development of one such center is already in progress and approval for a second is expected from municipal authorities soon.

Dr. Osovtsov said that the **most important problem affecting Russian Jewry** is the sense among Jews, including the younger generation, that being Jewish is abnormal, unacceptable, shameful. The word *еврей* (*evrey*, Jew) was considered impolite during the Soviet era and is still considered impolite today. Many intellectuals expend considerable effort to refer to Jews as "citizens of Jewish nationality", as in Germany prior to World War II, rather than risk accusations of vulgarity by saying "Jew".

Some prominent Jews and half-Jews are so intimidated by their Jewish heritage that they are antagonistic to REK, fearing that its very existence provokes anti-semitism. The hope that future generations will be more self-assured and comfortable with their Jewish heritage prompts REK funding of Jewish education.

In response to a question about the potential reception for **Reform** and/or **Conservative Judaism** among Russian Jews, Dr. Osovtsov said the liberal forms of Judaism can prosper in Russia because Russian Jews need to "communicate with G-d" in their native language, i.e., in Russian, rather than in Hebrew. A strong sense of spirituality exists among Russians, he said, motivating some Jews to search for G-d in Russian Orthodox Christianity because that is the only religious experience available to them. Several Russian Orthodox priests promote a very intellectual form of Orthodox Christianity that has attracted a number of Jewish intellectuals. Regarding **Conservative Judaism** in particular, few people understand the difference between Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism because the term "conservative" is often understood in Russian as synonymous with "orthodox"; some people, said

Dr. Osovtsov, would interpret "conservative" as connoting more traditional practice than that suggested by the term "orthodox". "Conservative" is not a favorable term in post-Soviet Russia.

Regarding **Jewish emigration** from Russia, Dr. Osovtsov believes that departures will continue to decline. Most Jews who want to leave have already done so. As long as the Russian economy continues to improve, the appeal of emigration will be limited. A decision to make aliyah is now a very pragmatic decision, rather than a judgment based on emotion, ideology, or romance. A great deal of information about Israel is now available to Russian Jews regarding every aspect of Israel. Russian Jews can even visit Israel to see what it is like, to explore employment opportunities, etc.

20. A meeting was held with Micha Chlenov, President of the **Vaad**, at Vaad headquarters in the Shalom Theater. Roman Spektor, a vice-president, was present for much of the discussion. The writer has been acquainted with both men for some years.

The Vaad was established in 1989 with the goal of representing all Soviet Jewry. It never attained its objectives and, in recent years, it has been overshadowed by the Russian Jewish Congress. Yet it persists, seeking a role as political voice of post-Soviet Jewry both (a) within Russia and the barely functioning Commonwealth of Independent States, and (b) in international forums on behalf of post-Soviet Jewry.

Dr. Chlenov, an anthropologist, is now working on developing the structure of a new Russian Jewish umbrella organization, the **Federal Jewish National-Cultural Autonomy** (FENKA or *Федеральная Еврейская Национально-Культурная Автономия*) designed to unite REK, the Vaad, and the new Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations (KEROOR; see below) in one body. FENKA should be eligible to receive funding from the Russian government for specific purposes under new legislation stating that minorities have the "right" to claim a "share of the national budget" in Russia. FENKA is only a "symbolic consolidation" of the three organizations; each is expected to remain active and independent, said Dr. Chlenov, with the Vaad as the political center of Russian Jewry, REK as the economic center, and KEROOR as its religious center.

Dr. Chlenov said it is likely that two to five years will pass before the Russian government will fund any autonomy. Further, he anticipates certain conflicts within Russian Jewry over federal funding because the legislation provides for

support at three different levels -- federal, oblast¹⁹, and municipal. It is likely that oblast and/or municipal Jewish organizations will file funding applications that compete with applications presented by federal Jewish organizations.

Removal of the **fifth paragraph** (nationality line) from Russian internal passports (identity cards) will deepen the **Jewish identity crisis** affecting Russian Jewry, said Dr. Chlenov. He believes that **Reform** and **Conservative Judaism** could be very helpful in alleviating this problem. He said that Russian Jewry has a deep need for spirituality (*духовность*) that is not currently being addressed through Orthodox Judaism. Some Jews within the intelligentsia find certain intellectual groups within Russian Orthodox Christianity attractive.

21. Sharing space with the Vaad in the Shalom Theater premises is **MEOD** (Moscow Jewish Community Home or *Московский Еврейский Общинный Дом*), a district community facility. Irina Scherban, Director of MEOD, explained that the organization sponsors a children's choir, children's art club, an ulpan, Shabbat evenings for families, a women's club, activities for senior adults, lectures, a Jewish library, a monthly newspaper, and other programs. The facility is quite small, but is currently renovating some unused space so that its programs can be expanded. It receives support from both REK and JDC.

Judaism

22. Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, a native of Switzerland, is Chief Rabbi of Moscow. Originally funded by Aguda, he is now identified with a broader, more accommodating philosophy. Rabbi Goldschmidt has assisted different Sephardic Jewish population groups in Moscow in engaging rabbis from their own traditions and has welcomed the Reform movement into the Russian Jewish religious umbrella group, the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia. When he was unable to attract young people to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services at his own synagogue, he asked Moscow Hillel and JDC to organize services of a more liberal nature and arranged for the auditorium at the (Orthodox) Etz Chaim School to be available for these observances.

¹⁹ An oblast is a regional entity with authority between that of a county and a state within the United States. Russia is divided into 89 oblasts plus several other regional structures representing ethnic minorities (republics and districts).

Rabbi Goldschmidt has offices in the large and recently restored Moscow Choral Synagogue on Spasoglinichevsky Lane (Archipov Street). A Jewish community center will be constructed on land directly across the street from the Choral Synagogue.

As noted immediately above and in an earlier section of this report (see page 3), Rabbi Goldschmidt attempts to address the needs of diverse Jewish population groups within the Russian capital. In discussing characteristics of Ashkenazi families, he observed that many such families were dysfunctional. Divorce is easy and cheap in Russia; one can change spouses "as easily as one can change shirts". Alimony and child support arrangements are rarely enforced, leaving many single-parent families in serious distress.²⁰ Sephardic Jews, said Rabbi Goldschmidt, also have extramarital affairs, but they are less likely to divorce.

Rabbi Goldschmidt said that the new **Jewish community center** to be built across the street is designed to attract middle-class Jews. The Jewish "business elite" participate in the Jewish community through the Russian Jewish Congress and independent philanthropic initiatives, and the Jewish welfare population is served by JDC and other organizations. The JCC will offer services to the nascent middle class in the same way that American JCCs serve middle class American Jews. Rabbi Goldschmidt suggested that among the services available at the new JCC would be: sports programs, day care, an alcoholics anonymous group and other support programs, and job training and employment services.

Rabbi Goldschmidt acknowledged that **Christian missionary** groups in Moscow are targeting Jews. Missionary activity is related to assimilation and the confusion many Jews feel about their own identity, he said. He noted that some Jewish girls wear necklaces with crosses because it is fashionable to do so; when questioned, they seem oblivious to the significance of their "fashion statements". Christian missionary activity and the larger assimilation problem can be addressed only through a positive information campaign about [the joys of] being Jewish.

Among his goals, said Rabbi Goldschmidt, is the creation of about 40 **synagogues** in and around Moscow. KEROOR (the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia) will be instrumental in developing such institutions so that their independence from foreign influence will be assured. In general, **local organizations** are less dogmatic than foreign groups and they are not burdened by a history of rivalry and turf battles. Local leaders are more pragmatic than many officials of foreign-based institutions.

²⁰ Rabbi Goldschmidt's observations on the instability of Ashkenazi Jewish family life in the transition states has been corroborated in the writer's discussions with rabbis and other Jewish communal activists in numerous Russian and Ukrainian cities.

Rabbi Goldschmidt believes that, within ten years, REK will be very successful in filling Moscow Jewish community needs, except for the extraordinary needs of the elderly, which still will require outside support.

Rabbi Goldschmidt anticipates organizing a **home for disadvantaged Jewish children** in the very near future. Residents of such a home will include orphans, street children, and children from dysfunctional families. He hopes that an appropriate facility can be developed near the synagogue and the future JCC. Initially, he hopes to accommodate between 40 and 60 youngsters. A family in New York has expressed interest in supporting such a project. Rabbi Goldschmidt is aware of residential programs for Jewish children that exist in Ukraine (Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, and Kyiv).

23. Rabbi Adolf Shayeivich is **Chief Rabbi of Russia**. Rabbi Shayeivich's Russian origins -- he was born in Birobidzhan -- are said to be an important factor in his appointment as Chief Rabbi of Russia. KEROOR and the city of Moscow tendered a gala event for Rabbi Shayeivich in late November on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. Held at *The Great Hall of the Mayor of Moscow*, the first part of the event included singing by several Jewish ensembles, including children's groups; speeches in tribute by representatives of numerous Jewish organizations, civic dignitaries, and representatives of Christian and Moslem communities; and the presentation of gifts, including many proclamations, in his honor. Following the official ceremony, a reception was held for selected guests.

24. Rabbi Berl Lazar is the chief rabbi for **Chabad** in Moscow. Chabad operations in the Russian capital include two synagogues (Marina Roscha district and Bolshaya Bronnaya Street), schools, a yeshiva, children's and youth clubs, welfare services, and other activities. Rabbi Lazar was interviewed at the Marina Roscha synagogue, a building of recent construction that was nonetheless undergoing massive renovation due to settling.

Rabbi Lazar said that major growth is underway in Chabad activities in Moscow, particularly in Marina Roscha, an area of Moscow that remains affordable and thus attracts young Jewish families. Under construction next to the synagogue is a large seven-storied **Jewish community center**. Using a detailed model, Rabbi Lazar enthusiastically pointed out major activity areas in the new facility: a synagogue/assembly hall seating up to 1000 people; a smaller auditorium seating up to 400; classrooms and office space; library; computer center; restaurant and kitchen for various functions, including a hot meals program for elderly; gymnasium and weight room; two mikvehs; and indoor parking. It is hoped that the large hall will be available for Rosh Hashanah in September 1998, but the rest of the building will be completed later in 1998/1999.

Once the JCC is completed and in use, Chabad will consider additional structures for another area of the same property. For example, Rabbi Lazar is thinking about a smaller building to be used as a **family center**. It is unlikely that any space on the site will be committed to formal adult Jewish education because few people are attracted to formal education programs.

Many of the Jews who participate in Marina Roscha activities do so in part because local people are managing these programs. Moscow Jews are eager to organize their own community life in Moscow. They are much less interested in emigrating now than they were previously. When local individuals realized that the Marina Roscha synagogue had sustained structural damage from ground settling, local Jews arranged for the necessary repairs.

25. Zinovy Kogan is both the representative of the **World Union for Progressive Judaism** (Reform movement) in Moscow and the Executive Director of **KEROOR**, the **Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia**. Mr. Kogan was interviewed in the KEROOR office, which is located in the Choral Synagogue in Moscow.

Regarding the **World Union for Progressive Judaism**, Mr. Kogan said that it has organized small groups of Jews in 21 cities in the transition states. The appeal of Progressive Judaism is in its use of the Russian language in prayers and services and in its democratic nature, the latter referring to the inclusion of women as equal members of congregations and other governing bodies.

The World Union provides some funding and Russian-language *siddurim*. Mr. Kogan believes that WUPJ should prepare and distribute more Russian-language material on Reform Judaism as well as Russian-language textbooks for use in WUPJ educational settings. Five Progressive Sunday schools operate in Russia -- in Moscow, Rostov, Krasnodar, Samara, and Chelyabinsk.²¹ At one time, more Progressive Sunday schools existed, but some have closed due to emigration of their members and/or lack of support. Mr. Kogan believes that Progressive educational ventures require "enticements", such as computer classes, to attract youngsters and their parents. WUPJ also operates one 12-day summer camp, and organizes quarterly seminars for activists.

Mr. Kogan said that individual Progressive congregations are weak and will require many years for growth and institution-building. Much of the weakness is due to the absence of rabbis who could attract participants by organizing and conducting life-cycle events such as bar and bat mitzvahs and weddings. Mr. Kogan is aware that five individuals from the transition states are in the rabbinic

²¹ In response to a question, Mr. Kogan said that no WUPJ presence exists in St. Petersburg, Russia's second largest city, which is believed to have a Jewish population of about 90,000.

seminary at Leo Baeck Institute in London, but he is concerned about the ability of WUPJ and local Progressive Jewry to support these future rabbis and the programs that they would operate.

26. **KEROOR** (*Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia or Конгресса Еврейских Религиозных Общин и Организаций России*) was established in 1997 as an umbrella and resource organization for religious-based Jewish organizations in Russia. Its leadership includes: Rabbi Adolph Shayevich, Chief Rabbi of Russia; Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, here in his capacity as President of the Beit Din of Russia; Boris Shpiegel as President; and several prominent leaders of REK, including Vladimir Gouzinsky and Boris Hait.

Rabbi Eliyahu Essas, an Israeli, is the executive vice president,²² and Zinovy Kogan is the executive director.

Many KEROOR services are designed to support small religious communities that do not have rabbis. KEROOR sponsors seminars for lay leaders, publishes an attractive wall calendar with detailed information about holidays, distributes tasteful and informative pocket calendars, issues information about the Holocaust, provides funding for holiday observances, and publishes a newsletter. Its assistance reaches dozens of Jewish groups across Russia.

KEROOR works closely with the Joint Distribution Committee in the latter's program of support to religious communities. Its relations with Chabad are less fruitful, in large part due to Chabad anger over KEROOR inclusion of and cooperation with Progressive communities.

International Organizations

27. **The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee** (known as **JDC** and **Joint**) provides support to Moscow Jews through various social services, cultural and religious activities, and education programs. According to Michael Steiner, the JDC director in Moscow, the major task of JDC in the Russian capital is building a Jewish communal infrastructure. Jews in Moscow possess the motivation and talent to do whatever work is required, but, at this time, they require partners in order to succeed. Mr. Steiner continued that Moscow Jews have their own agenda and JDC must respond to that agenda, rather than impose a JDC-inspired plan upon them.

²² As Ilya Essas, Rabbi Essas was among the most prominent refuseniks of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Referring to needs in the **welfare** sphere, Mr. Steiner described circumstances for elderly people as "tragic". JDC cannot cope with the situation he said. Between 35,000 and 40,000 Jewish elderly in Moscow have been identified by JDC as needing assistance, but only about 10,000 of them actually receive aid. Such aid ranges from occasional food parcels to *patronage* services.²³ About 4,000 Jews in Moscow are homebound, but only about 1,000 receive necessary support. Needs of the vision- and hearing-impaired are addressed only minimally. It is unlikely that the situation will improve. Although emigration has decreased, younger people still leave Moscow, some of them abandoning parents and other elderly relatives.

Departing from its practice in other post-Soviet cities, JDC has not organized *hasadim* in Moscow.²⁴ Instead, JDC works with and tries to strengthen existing social service organizations, such as Yad Ezra (with a caseload of approximately 1500 elderly clients), Chama (Rabbi Dovid Karpov), Bikur Cholim (based at the Choral Synagogue), and MEOD (described earlier). It supports two large soup kitchens, one in cooperation with Chama and REK, and several programs delivering meals-on-wheels to elderly Jews.

In response to a question, Mr. Steiner said that he was unaware of any Jewish **community pharmacies** in Moscow. However, he said that he would explore initiating such a program as there is an obvious need for them.

Mr. Steiner believes that between 50 and 100 Jewish **children** in Moscow have already been identified (by day schools, other institutions, and individuals) as potential residents of Jewish children's homes. He is aware of the plans of Rabbi Goldschmidt and Rabbi Karpov to develop such facilities. Once these institutions exist, they will attract disadvantaged Jewish children from other cities in Russia [as the Jewish children's homes in Ukraine have attracted youngsters from other cities in that state].

Acknowledging my awareness of JDC programs in the areas of religious programs, Jewish education, and Jewish culture, Mr. Steiner did not discuss these activities. However, JDC was instrumental in facilitating my meetings with Rashid Kaplanov of Sefer, Alexander Militarev of the Jewish University of Moscow, and the Hillel organization.

²³ Patronage services refer to assistance provided by homecare workers who visit homebound individuals on a regular basis to perform such services as shopping, cooking, cleaning, arranging medical care, etc.

²⁴ *Hasadim* (plural of Hebrew *hesed*) are multi-service welfare centers. In large cities, they usually include hot-meal programs for elderly, clinics, programs dispensing medical equipment, social activities, etc.

28. The **Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI or Sochnut)** operates a variety of programs designed to encourage and facilitate emigration of Russian Jews to Israel. Alla Levy is Director General of the JAFI Unit for the FSU and Eastern Europe and, since mid-1997, Head of the JAFI Delegation in Moscow as well. Ms. Levy was born and raised in Moscow.

Perhaps the best-known programs of JAFI are **Hebrew classes** (*ulpanim*). The Moscow-area Hebrew program is directed by Natalia Lifshitz, a native of Vilnius. Ms. Lifshitz reported that 34 Hebrew classes, each with at least 10 students, were operating in seven districts of Moscow at the time of my visit. In all, 638 adults were enrolled. Ms. Lifshitz anticipated that almost all would emigrate to Israel in the near future; those who would not do so are a few individuals who study Hebrew because of a general interest in Judaism and/or Israeli culture and others whose departure will be delayed because they are caring for elderly parents who are not candidates for aliyah. The Hebrew classes, usually held in the evening or late afternoon and on Sunday, are taught by 30 local Hebrew teachers, who have been trained by Ms. Lifshitz. The curriculum includes background information about Jewish and Israeli holidays, in addition to the Hebrew language itself. Most classroom space is rented from public schools in which the principal is Jewish and friendly.

In addition to offering Hebrew instruction in the city of Moscow itself, JAFI operates 24 Hebrew classes in a large area around Moscow, known historically as the *Golden Ring*. This area stretches from Rybinsk in the north to Kursk in the south and from Smolensk in the west to Tambov in the east. Ms. Lifshitz visits teachers of these classes periodically and the teachers come into Moscow on a regular basis for JAFI pedagogical seminars.

A Sunday visit was made to a Moscow district cultural center in which JAFI rents space for multiple activities enrolling almost 300 Jews. In addition to several **ulpan classes** at various proficiency levels, JAFI operates a **Sunday school** in this building that enrolls children (ages four to 12) of adult ulpan students; the Sunday school program includes holiday celebrations, Israeli music and dance, arts and crafts, and other activities. In another room, 28 adolescents were participating in **Limudia**, a program designed to prepare them for examinations determining entrance into **Naaleh** or **Sela**.²⁵ Limudia participants meet for six hours every Sunday, devoting two hours to each of three subjects: (1) English; (2) mathematics²⁶; and (3) a course combining Hebrew, Jewish tradition, and Land of Israel studies. A fourth activity is a **Family Club**, a new venture

²⁵ Naaleh is a high school program in Israel. Selah is a one-year program in Israel preparing high school graduates for study at Israeli universities.

²⁶ The mathematics class is taught by Edward Dubov, a mathematician and also a past President of the Moscow Chess Federation. Mr. Dubov said that many Russian young people are very skilled in basic mathematics, but very weak in solving problems requiring logic and interpretation of text.

attracting parents with school-age children. On the day of the visit, several weeks before Chanukah, families were engaged in several Chanukah-related projects, including making menorahs. It is hoped that adults will enter ulpan classes and eventually make aliyah with their families.

To reach **older adolescents and young adults**, JAFI operates monthly disco evenings, which are very popular because strict security measures prevent the entry of hooligans as well as alcohol and drugs. Announcements are made between dances about JAFI student clubs and other events of interest to Jewish young people. Sign-up sheets for these activities are available at the disco.

Some students recruited at disco evenings have expressed interest in becoming leaders of high school **youth clubs** operating under JAFI auspices. Candidates for these positions attend a series of weekend seminars at a site just outside Moscow where their skills and talents are assessed. A training course follows for successful applicants. Experience shows that many of the youth leaders will emigrate to Israel in the future.

Outside of Moscow, JAFI activity in *Golden Ring* cities operates under the direction of local JAFI coordinators trained and supervised by Marina Ben-Arie, an Israeli staff member of JAFI in Moscow. Mrs. Ben-Arie, who was born and raised in Kharkov, a strongly russified city in northeastern Ukraine, said that about 70,000 Jews live in the Golden Ring cities. Aliyah from these cities is proportionately greater than from Moscow itself because of particularly strong antisemitism in some, especially Voronezh, where the Slavic Union is active, and economic distress in others, such as Bryansk, Smolensk, Kaluga, and Tver. Sela and Chalom²⁷ are very popular programs in these communities. In addition to ulpan, JAFI programs in Golden Ring cities include holiday celebrations, aliyah clubs, and aliyah preparation. Mrs. Ben-Arie said that Jews in these towns were informed of local JAFI activities through the "Jewish telegraph", i.e., word-of-mouth reports from friends and relatives. Advertisements in the public press bring "unwanted visitors", she said.

In discussing **target groups for aliyah** from Moscow, Alla Levy said that major focus is on young adults and on white-collar families. Both groups require outreach and a program of involvement and recruitment over time. Russian Jewish **young adults**, said Ms. Levy, do not relate to Israel. They are very anti-ideological and strongly career-conscious. Many perceive numerous career

²⁷ Chalom is a program in Israel that includes a five-month ulpan and a 10-month vocational training course. It is geared to the needs of young people who lack the qualifications and/or desire for university education. In practice, most participants in Chalom have come from the smaller cities and towns in the successor states where secondary school preparation for university entrance is often inadequate.

opportunities in Moscow. Considering all of these factors, she continued, JAFI must develop a dialogue with them on their terms. Ms. Levy believes that Moscow Jewish young adults have three options regarding their Jewish identity: (1) rejection of any Jewish content in their lives; (2) Jewish content with little or no Israeli dimension, a direction that seems to be fostered in the Hillel organization; or (3) Jewish content with a strong connection to Israel. Obviously, JAFI wants to encourage the third option. Development of a strong Israeli consciousness will require time and effort.

White-collar families are struggling to survive in contemporary Russia. Specific career programs may help them to find better opportunities in Israel. JAFI must develop a support system for such families.

JAFI is not targeting **scientists or artists** in its aliyah efforts. Many scientists and artists have found absorption very difficult. However, some Russian Jewish scientists and artists are very sympathetic to Israel and can be helpful in promoting a positive attitude about Israel and aliyah.

Regarding **St. Petersburg**, Ms. Levy said that JAFI efforts in promoting aliyah from that city will be less long-term. The St. Petersburg Jewish population is smaller and older, and aliyah is stronger²⁸.

29. Zeev Ben-Arie is the Press Attache of the **Embassy of the State of Israel** in Moscow. Mr. Ben-Arie was born and raised in Kharkov, as was his wife, Marina, who works for the Jewish Agency. (See page 29.)

Mr. Ben-Arie predicted that **aliyah** from Russia would continue at 20,000 to 25,000 people annually, with a disproportionately large number of *olim* coming from provincial cities and towns. Little can be done to stimulate aliyah from larger cities because many post-Soviet Jews in Moscow and St. Petersburg perceive economic opportunities in these cities and cannot be swayed by Zionist appeals. They are very anti-ideological, he said. Generating aliyah from Moscow and St. Petersburg requires a long-term investment. Mr. Ben-Arie noted that such efforts are very expensive, especially in the large Russian cities. He believes that day schools can be effective in producing a strong Jewish and Zionist consciousness, but such schools are very costly to operate, perhaps two to three times more expensive in Moscow than in Ukraine.

²⁸ As noted earlier, the Jewish population of St. Petersburg is probably about 90,000. A large proportion of St. Petersburg Jewry is descended from Jews who migrated to Leningrad from Belarus shtetls in the pre-war period or immediately after the war as refugees; their Jewish identity is stronger than that of many Moscow Jews. Additionally, the St. Petersburg economy is much weaker than that of Moscow.

Probably the best way of promoting aliyah in Moscow, said Mr. Ben-Arie, is targeting specific professional opportunities in Israel and recruiting appropriate individual Jews to fill these positions. [The Jewish Agency Aliyah 2000 program addresses this need. BG]

The **economic status** of Jews in Moscow and St. Petersburg is generally higher than that of the average Russian. In fact, a disproportionately large number of Jews are very wealthy. In addition to banking, many Jews have done well in computer- and medical-related businesses. Engineers and mathematicians are less prosperous, but the more energetic among them have supplemented institutional incomes by doing consulting work. Mr. Ben-Arie said that some wealthy Jews live in each of the Russian provincial cities, noting especially Nizhniy Novgorod, Kazan, and Samara. The number of poor Jews in these and other Russian provincial cities is very high.

In response to a question, Mr. Ben-Arie acknowledged that some Jews who have emigrated to Israel have returned to Russia as businessmen. He estimated that perhaps two to three dozen such individuals live in Moscow.

Mr. Ben-Arie noted that a large number of very successful Russian Jewish businessmen have asked for Israeli citizenship for purposes of protection, a "guarantee" against a change in the current political and/or economic atmosphere in Russia. Some of these individuals have purchased apartments in Israel. Some vacation in Eilat, bringing Russian government cronies with them. Some also support ex-wives and children who live in Israel.

Most of the businessmen involved in **REK** are eager to build a Jewish community in Russia. They want to be full partners with Israel and with other diaspora Jewry, and they reject any patronizing from outsiders. However, some have become patronizing themselves in their efforts to aid Israel through investing in various Israeli businesses. They have often demanded special privileges, one-sided deals, then become very annoyed when such preferential terms are denied.

Mr. Ben-Arie said that contemporary **antisemitism** is not an independent ideology in itself in Russia, but a byproduct of rightwing politics and Russian nationalism. Nationalist groups, such as the Slavic Union, are marginal and enjoy no broad support. Such groups benefit from the disorder and crime in post-Soviet society. For example, members of the Slavic Union have become associated with official militia patrolling certain public parks, such as Sterlitsky Park in Moscow, that are said to be hangouts for drunkards, drug dealers, and other undesirable people. The Slavic Union members dress in black clothing adorned with swastikas and beat up individuals in the park whom they dislike, not all of whom are drunkards, drug dealers, etc. Similar Slavic Union activity exists in other Russian cities, such as Krasnodar and Voronezh.

The Russian **legal system**, said Mr. Ben-Arie, is insufficiently sophisticated to deal with hate crimes. Some of the difficulty in enacting and enforcing necessary legislation stems from fear by remaining communists that antifascist laws will be used against them.

Mr. Ben-Arie continued that **antisemitism is used as a weapon** in competition between various businesses, such as between banks [because many banks are controlled by Jews]. It is also used in cultural battles, such as the recent episode regarding the November 9 television broadcast of the controversial Martin Scorsese film *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The Russian Orthodox church considers this film blasphemous and drew attention to the fact that the television channel in question is owned by Most Media Group, which is controlled by Vladimir Gouzinsky. The church asked the municipality of Moscow to withdraw all of its deposits from Most Bank. It is common knowledge that Mayor Yuri Luzhkov of Moscow is supported financially by Mr. Gouzinsky and several other Jewish bankers. The antisemitic innuendo in the church reaction to this television program was quite blatant.

Mr. Ben-Arie stated that the use of antisemitism as a weapon for control of the economy and culture is far more dangerous than its exploitation by such individuals as Alexander Barkashov, leader of the Slavic Union. Mr. Barkashov's organization is small and is likely to remain so.

30. Eliyahu Sheizaf is an attache at the Embassy of Israel in Moscow and also Director of the **Israeli Culture Center** in Moscow. Such centers are operated by the **Lishkat Hakesher**, more recently known as **Nativ**, an increasingly controversial unit within the Israeli Prime Minister's office. In a meeting with Mr. Sheizaf at the Israeli Cultural Center, he said that the role of the Center is to provide information about Israel to local Jews.

Discussing **Moscow Jewish demography**, Mr. Sheizaf said that between 1.0 and 1.8 million Jews live in Russia and that between 170,000 and 200,000 of that number live in Moscow. Of those who reside in Moscow, 30,000 to 50,000 have some association with a Jewish organization, although that relationship may be passive. Many of the rest are "hiding" or simply do not know that opportunities for exist for Jewish experiences and affiliations.

Regarding potential for **aliyah from Moscow**, Mr. Sheizaf said that aliyah from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kyiv is relatively low because many Jews in those cities perceive bright economic futures for themselves in these large population centers. Jewish life has never been important to them in the past and they have no interest in it now. Every Jew "has a corner in his heart for Israel," said Mr. Sheizaf, but Israel can wait. Everyone seems to have a problem deterring

aliyah; for some, it is a non-Jewish spouse. For others, elderly parents require care and/or local business opportunities show great promise. Mr. Sheizaf observed that the reluctance to emigrate was also evident in the fact that American and German immigration quotas for Jews from the successor states were also unfilled.

Mr. Sheizaf said that the Israeli Cultural Center operates a **Sunday school** enrolling 86 youngsters between the ages of seven and 17. Approximately 45 of these pupils actually appear on any Sunday. The Center also offers **Hebrew classes, lectures, a Russian-language library** on various Jewish and Israeli topics, **holiday celebrations, a student club** (for young people between the ages of 17 and 26), a **children's club** (mainly art classes),²⁹ and, through the **Maccabee** sports organization, activities in basketball, soccer, judo, and chess. The Center library is equipped with 12 computers programmed with information about Israel so that potential immigrants can find answers to any questions that they might have. Mr. Sheizaf said that a few non-Jews come to the Center, mainly for youth activities or holiday celebrations; perhaps no more than one or two percent of participants in Moscow are non-Jews, but the proportion may be higher in smaller cities because there is nothing else to do in some of these places.

31. Paul J. Martin is a Second Secretary at the **Embassy of the United States** in Moscow. He apologized for his lack of detailed information on some subjects, explaining that he had been in his position only two months.

In response to a question about the September 26 signing of a bill by President Boris Yeltsin that effectively restricts **religious freedom**,³⁰ Mr. Martin said that enactment of the bill had received strong support from populist forces in the Duma and from the official Russian Orthodox church. The latter fears competition from other Christian denominations.

In addition to the restrictive nature of the new law, the U.S. Embassy considers it very poorly written. It is self-contradictory in several areas. A mitigating factor is

²⁹ Eight children were present at an art class during the visit of the writer to the Israeli Cultural Center. The library was more extensive than libraries that the writer has seen in other Israel Cultural Centers. Only two of the computers were up-to-date Pentium models; however, Mr. Sheizaf said that the 10 old 286s probably would be replaced soon.

³⁰ The new law divides religions into *traditional* and *non-traditional* categories, the former including only those faiths that have been registered at least 15 years previously. These are Russian Orthodoxy (first among equals), several other specific Christian groups, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Non-traditional groups (which include Catholics, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, dissident Orthodox, and others) are subject to complicated bureaucratic requirements affecting tax relief, public assembly, the use of property, and the employment of foreign clergy and other representatives. Even traditional groups face laborious registration procedures that can be manipulated by hostile officials.

that the legislation contains no implementing regulations, so enforcement of it may be liberal.

Responding to another question, Mr. Martin said that a **middle class** is "rising" in Russia, but it is "developing very slowly". The current year (1997) is the first in which there has been economic growth in Russia, although this growth has occurred only in major cities.

Antisemitism still exists, but it is not tolerated officially. Right-wing groups, such as the group associated with Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, are increasingly on the fringe of society.

Observations

32. In no other post-Soviet Jewish population center that this writer has visited does such a large segment of the indigenous Jewish population appear so alienated from Israel and Zionism as in Moscow. *Israel* often seems to be the unspeakable word. It represents a twofold threat. On one level, the notion of tiny, often vulnerable, Levantine Israel as a homeland preferable to that of a [greatly diminished] superpower is demeaning and insulting, even laughable, to the large proportion of Moscow Jewry who identify with the Russian intelligentsia and/or the new business elite. On a second level, the attraction of Israel to several segments of Russian Jewry, however limited, is perceived as ominous. If any educated post-Soviet Jews choose to live in Israel, the self-confidence of other Jews in the security of Russia (Moscow) as homeland may be misplaced; if Jewish young people depart for Israel, the future of the nascent local Jewish community is less certain. Israeli recruitment of academically able Jewish youth for such programs as Naaleh and Sela is viewed by some as a hostile act.

Moscow Jewry (or a significant segment thereof) certainly is not the only population cohort to express unbridled hope in a future that others perceive as less promising. But perhaps all is not as it may appear. Among the very wealthy supporters of the Russian Jewish Congress are those who maintain foreign bank accounts, foreign residences, and, in some cases, foreign citizenship, thus suggesting that their expressed optimism is less than immutable. That some hold these forms of insurance in Israel suggests that alienation is less absolute than is apparent.

That different Jews in Moscow hold different sentiments about Israel is hardly startling. Diversity of attachment is also common in other diaspora lands with far less traumatic histories. Those Jews who elect to remain in Moscow or elsewhere in post-Soviet Russia must develop their own relationships with Zion. What is troubling about the current situation is less the fact that many local Jews

exhibit disdain for Israel than the reality that some Israelis working in Moscow under Jewish auspices seem to encourage that disdain by nurturing extravagant visions of "a brilliant Russian Jewish culture". Demographic characteristics alone -- very low birth rate, high average age and high death rate, massive intermarriage -- suggest that exuberant proclamations about a brilliant Russian Jewish culture are careless at best.

33. A related issue is the enormous importance attached by Jewish Muscovites to local control over local Jewish communal institutions. The Russian Jewish Congress is an outgrowth of just such sentiment. Notwithstanding the compelling logic of such a view, the heritage of seven decades of Soviet rule ill prepares indigenous Jews to operate their own institutions. They lack skills in priority-setting and planning. Civil debate, tolerance, and accountability are not characteristic of deliberations conducted under the Soviet regime. Narrow horizons do not generate vision. Neither the Soviet economic system nor post-Soviet financial chaos produces financial management skills.

Not only do those indigenous Jews now assuming roles as lay leaders lack qualifications to represent Moscow Jewry. Those becoming Jewish communal service professionals are even less able. The JDC Institute for Communal and Social Service Workers in St. Petersburg (including its branches in other cities) has accomplished much in addressing short-term needs, but true professionalism will emerge only after more systematic training and more extensive experience.

34. The potential appeal to Jews in Moscow of those forms of Judaism identified in the United States with the Reform and Conservative movements is substantial. The failure of these movements to support rabbis in the Russian capital is extraordinary and inexplicable; skilled leaders with good Russian-language skills will attract their own financial support after an initial period of subsidy.

Betsy Gidwitz
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