

A Survey of Jewish Life in Moscow

October 20-29, 1998

Prompted by the devaluation of the ruble in August 1998 and press reports of subsequent crises in the economic and social fabric of Russia and neighboring republics, the author visited various Jewish institutions in Moscow in late October of 1998. Attempts were made to confer with most of those individuals interviewed during a similar journey less than one year previously, in late November and early December of 1997.¹

To the visitor returning to Moscow after an absence of some eleven months, the city seemed somewhat subdued. Traffic was less congested, new construction less evident, and luxury hotels less bustling. Numerous advertising billboards and kiosks were empty of messages, except for "A place for your ad" notices, ample indication that marketing efforts had been curtailed.

Foreigners residing in Moscow observed that supermarkets and grocery stores were carrying significantly fewer imported products than six months previously, a matter of some significance as 70 to 80 percent of all food consumed in the city is imported from other countries. On a walk through one of the more desirable parts of the Russian capital during business hours, several shops featuring foreign luxury goods appeared either closed or empty of customers. The new underground shopping mall at Manege Square near the Kremlin was thronged with visitors on a weekend afternoon, but many more people were congregating in its passageways than in its upscale stores.

Discussions with various Muscovites of middle age revealed a moderate level of concern about the economy and society in general, but the panic that was reported to have followed the ruble devaluation in mid-August had abated. Russia, they said, had survived numerous crises over the centuries and had always prevailed. It



This kiosk on Tverskaya street, a prominent boulevard in central Moscow, is one of many in the Russian capital proclaiming, "A place for your ad".

¹ See the author's *Visit to Jewish Institutions in Moscow, November 24 to December 4, 1997*.

would overcome the current difficulties as well, although traditionally vulnerable groups, particularly the elderly, would suffer. Concern about the economy far surpassed anxiety about the political situation. The recent installation of former foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov as Prime Minister was seen to have defused the political crisis, although no individual with whom the writer spoke expressed any confidence in the ability of Mr. Primakov or his colleagues to turn the economy around. The problems were too numerous, too severe.

Discussions with younger people (and about young people) yielded a more despairing view. Several observers referred to individuals between the ages of 20 and 40 (or 18 and 35) as a "lost generation" (*потерянное поколение*). Many young people had invested their futures in the "new economy" -- in small to mid-size businesses, banking services, advertising, marketing, sales, etc. Some had left jobs in engineering and the sciences to become entrepreneurs. Unemployment in this sector is now 60 to 70 percent, and many who had been such eager participants in new economic ventures appear to have lost all hope.

The Memorial Synagogue at Poklonnaya Gora

1. *Poklonnaya Gora* is the point at which German forces were halted on their march to Moscow in 1941-42 by the Red Army. Oversized tank barriers and a monument had marked the location for some years, but as the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War approached,² a large memorial complex was created to commemorate the war dead. A museum is at the center of the site, flanked by a Russian Orthodox church, a mosque, and a synagogue.

The synagogue was the last of the four major buildings to be constructed, its late debut due to the emergence of a funding source only when the Russian Jewish Congress (see below) was established in 1996. The cost of the structure is reported in publications of the Russian Jewish Congress (REK) at \$8,502,591, although others estimate its cost at between \$10 million and \$17 million. Most of the funding is said to have been provided by Vladimir Gousinsky, a high-profile media magnate and President of REK.

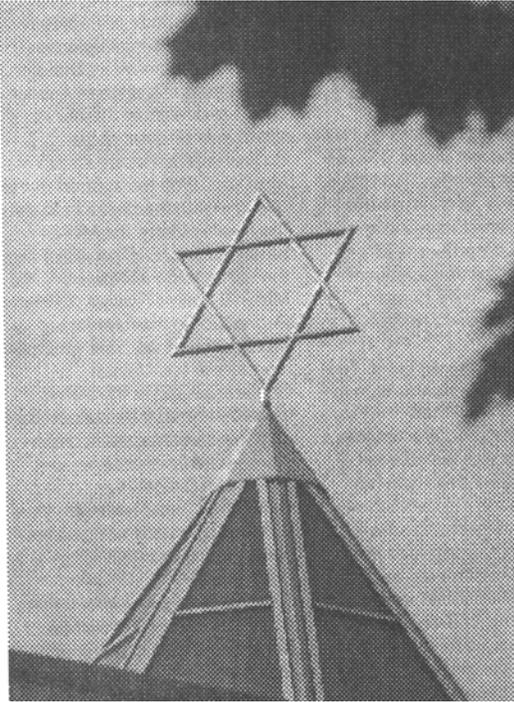
Dedication of the synagogue in September attracted a large number of foreign dignitaries. Of greater interest to many Russian Jews was the participation of

² Soviet histories of World War II refer to the conflict as the *Great Patriotic War*, emphasizing the massive Soviet component of the war and largely excluding other battle arenas, especially the war in North Africa and in the Pacific Ocean.

BETSY GIDWITZ REPORTS

Russian President Boris Yeltsin, then Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov.

A modern structure developed by Moshe Zarhi, a noted Israeli architect, with interior and exterior design work by Frank Meissler, the synagogue includes a sanctuary, display cases on upper floors surrounding the synagogue in which various archival materials and artifacts of Russian Jewish history are displayed, and a museum on the lower floor. A large menorah stands outside the building.



The synagogue is intended to be transdenominational within the Jewish community, its availability assigned to different streams of Judaism according to a schedule yet to be developed. In reality, its location far from major residential areas is likely to preclude Shabbat use by Orthodox Jews and to limit its appeal to other streams on a regular basis. It may be that its use for purposes of prayer will be confined to memorial days.

A large Magen David rises from the roof of the Memorial Synagogue at Pokolonnaya Gora.

The basement level of the structure is devoted to a museum that is divided into two display sections of approximately equal size. One focuses on the Holocaust, concentrating on its development in Soviet-controlled territory and neighboring areas of Poland. Displays include copies of Nazi extermination orders, photographs of Jews in ghettos and of massacre sites, and various artifacts. The other section concentrates on Jewish combatants during the Great Patriotic War, both those in conventional Soviet military forces and those in irregular partisan units. Photographs and artifacts are featured. Materials in both sections are professionally displayed in modern formats using display cases and wall-mounted exhibits.

Together, the two sections surround a six-sided theater with a drop-down screen on each side. A locally-produced film, which is shown simultaneously on all six screens, describes the Holocaust. Some of the film segments have been shown previously in the West, but others (apparently from archives) are new to the writer.

The writer was escorted through the synagogue and museum by Ilya Altman, one of the very few specialists on the Holocaust in Russia and the other successor states. Dr. Altman has been a major figure in organization of the museum.

Some criticism has been expressed by foreigners about the large sum of money expended in development of such a structure at a time when both welfare and Jewish renewal needs of the Russian Jewish population are so acute. Although such needs are indeed immense, the desire of local Jews for acknowledgment of their twentieth-century heritage is also great. In the four decades of Soviet power following the Holocaust and the Great Patriotic War, Soviet authorities assiduously suppressed knowledge of the former and recognition of Jewish participation in the latter. Few local Jews in middle and older age groups have escaped the sting of widely believed charges that the disproportionately large number of Jewish soldiers honored with the title of "Hero of the Soviet Union" purchased their medals in the bazaars of Tashkent. The museum assists Jews in reclaiming their dignity by attesting to the unique and tragic Jewish history of the war years.

Further development of the museum is required so that displays can be expanded and educational programs developed. Both funders and organizers of the museum have expressed the hope that plans encouraging visits by non-Jews are implemented.

Jewish Day Schools

The writer visited four of the seven Jewish day schools in Moscow. Interested readers may wish to read accounts of her visits to these schools in November and December of 1997, as recorded in the trip report cited earlier.

2. **Achey Tmimin** 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 300 youngsters (compared to 250 last year) in grades one through eleven. About 30 children are enrolled in a separate 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.

In response to a question, Mr. Kuravsky said that the economic crisis has had a serious impact on his school, which enrolls many youngsters from lower-middle and lower class homes. Salaries in many areas of the economy have decreased, causing additional hardships for many pupil families. Some hard-hit

banks have refused to release money held in savings accounts by these families. Food for the school kitchen is more than twice as expensive as it was last year.

It is too early to predict the impact of the economic situation on emigration, said Mr. Kuravsky. Historically, most students remain in Moscow after graduation and attend local post-secondary institutions in the Russian capital.³

Pupils in the school have up to ten hours of instruction in Jewish subjects each week, said Mr. Kuravsky. About half of these class periods concentrate on the Hebrew language and the other half include Jewish tradition, Jewish history, and Jewish culture. The Israeli Ministry of Education finances one position for an Israeli Chabad teacher at the school; the other teaching slots in Judaic courses are filled by local people. The school encourages pupils to participate in daily prayers, but cannot force children to do so because of its status as a public school.

Having toured the school and visited several classrooms in 1997, the writer did not spend much time at Achey Tmimim in 1998. Principals at two other day schools visited by the writer in 1998 mentioned, without being asked, that several pupils from Achey Tmimim had transferred into their schools at the beginning of the 1998-1999 school year, their parents citing deficient standards of secular education at Achey Tmimim.

3. **Beit Yehudith** (School #1330) was started in 1990 by Rivka Weiss, who sought a Jewish day school education for her own daughter. Mrs. Weiss, who is of Belgian and Israeli background, lives in Moscow with her husband, Rabbi David Weiss, a rabbi who is employed by the Joint Distribution Committee to serve a number of Jewish population concentrations in the Ural Mountain area.

The school enrolls 170 students in grades one through eleven, an increase from 152 in the previous academic year. Fifteen new youngsters are enrolled in classes beyond first grade, including boarding students from such cities as Sochi, Tashkent, and Almaty. In past years, said Mrs. Weiss, the main attractions (*привлекательность*) of the school to families were: (1) its strong secular studies program, especially in Russian and English; (2) its computer education program; and (3) its warm atmosphere. Interviews with families of new students this year, she said, showed that these factors are still very important, but parents now are especially eager that their children learn Hebrew. The economic crisis has led many families to consider emigration to Israel and they would like to prepare their children for such a move. Reflecting the increased interest in

³ In both the 1997 and 1998 visits to Achey Tmimim, the school appeared to be among the most strongly non-Zionist of any post-Soviet day school with which the writer is familiar.

aliyah, the school has intensified its “**parents’ university**” (родительский университет) program of adult education in Jewish tradition, law, history, and holidays.

Originally a girls’ school, Beit Yehudit began to enroll a few boys (usually brothers of girls at the school) in 1997-98, and now enrolls a total of nine boys. Seven are in the lower grades of regular classes, and two are in a special education class. Mrs. Weiss said that space limitations deterred expansion of the special education program.

The school obtained a school bus during the past year that transports local pupils to/from a Metro station, thus permitting more Moscow-area pupils to live at home. Accordingly, the amount of space within the school that had been devoted to dormitory accommodations has been reduced and made available for classroom purposes. (In addition to providing boarding facilities within the school, Beit Yehudit arranges accommodations for older girls in supervised apartments, and three younger girls live with Mrs. Weiss and her family.)

Mrs. Weiss has received funding from a foreign donor to buy a nursery school building, which is located some 20 minutes from Beit Yehudit, that could be remodeled into a dormitory facility to accommodate all girls requiring such housing. The building could also provide space for a synagogue and for a dental clinic; the clinic has been promised to them by World Jewish Relief, a British organization similar to the Joint Distribution Committee.⁴ However, negotiations to complete the sale of this facility to Beit Yehudit are stymied because the factory that owns the nursery school is refusing to lower the price to an appropriate post-August 17 level.⁵

Neither the current Beit Yehudit school building (also a former nursery school) nor the proposed additional nursery school building has a gymnasium. In order to satisfy municipal school regulations concerning physical education classes, Beit Yehudit transports its students to a rented gymnasium (sports hall) at a nearby public school for classes in the late afternoon. The public school is pleased with the arrangement because the rental fees provide otherwise unavailable income.

Mrs. Weiss said that most school pupils are from lower- and middle-class families, including many single-parent families. The school provides clothing for both children and adults, usually second-hand garments donated by friends in Europe and America. If families can afford it, the school charges the equivalent

⁴ World Jewish Relief, which works closely with the Joint Distribution Committee, sponsors a number of programs in the post-Soviet successor states, especially in Ukraine.

⁵ Prices of Moscow industrial, commercial, and institutional real estate plummeted after the ruble devaluation of August 17.

of one dollar for each item. A foreign sponsor underwrites a program in which the school sells kosher food at a substantial discount. The school does enroll pupils from a few wealthy families, all of them migrants to Moscow from the Caucasus mountain area.

The Judaic studies program at the school includes 15 class hours per week. Five hours are in Hebrew language study, and ten are in Chumash, tradition, and Jewish history. Jewish themes also are incorporated into lessons in music, dance, and art.

Almost all graduates of the school have enrolled in various Israeli institutions, including universities. A few girls have gone to Europe or the United States.

In response to a question about the impact of the economic crisis on the school, Mrs. Weiss indicated four factors. First, antisemitism has increased markedly, expressed in slogans on buildings (including the building in which Mrs. Weiss lives) and hostile remarks to children. People are angry and hungry, said Mrs. Weiss, and are searching for scapegoats. Second, inflation consumes wages. In order to retain teachers and accord them dignity, she pays teacher salaries that are twice the going rate. Third, all school expenses, such as food and electricity, are much higher than last year. Fourth, service personnel, such as repair specialists, are demanding payment in dollars. Because almost all school income is in dollar-denominated donations from the West, Beit Yehudit is able to meet current obligations, but the burden on the average family is extraordinary. The crisis, said Mrs. Weiss, has led to a great deal of uncertainty in peoples' lives. It has generated increased enrollment in Beit Yehudit, greater interest in learning Hebrew, and more aliyah. Therefore, she said, the crisis has positive aspects. She does not believe that Jews have any future in Russia. Russia has always been a bad place for the Jewish people.

4. **Etz Chaim** (School #1621) is a modern/centrist Orthodox day school enrolling 335 pupils in a program serving pre-school through tenth grade. An eleventh grade, the final class in most Soviet/post-Soviet schools, will be added in 1999-2000. Pre-school and early elementary school classes are offered in two different locations, and middle and high school classes are centralized in one building with boys and girls in separate classes. The school is associated with Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow.

In response to a question, Principal Vladimir Sklyannoy said that about three percent of pupils in the school are from wealthy families, about 30 percent from middle class families, 55 to 60 percent from poor families, and about ten percent from "extremely poor" families. Extremely poor families are almost always single-parent families; Etz Chaim assists these families in obtaining food, clothing, and other items.

Between 35 and 38 percent of pupils are from families that moved to Moscow from Georgia (*Gruzia*) and the Caucasus Mountain region since the fall of the Soviet regime.⁶ Many of these youngsters have serious psychological problems stemming from one or more of the following: (1) exposure to violence in regional ethnic conflicts; (2) coping with conditions of urban life, e.g., a complex public transportation system, after previous residence in relatively small cities or towns; (3) the lower level of education in Georgia and the Caucasus mountain area, especially lesser competence in the Russian language; (4) the normal stress of moving from one area to another; (5) the contrast between their former residences, which often were fairly spacious private houses there and usually are cramped communal apartments here in Moscow; and (6) prejudice stemming from their lower level of education and the reality that Georgian and Mountain Jews bear great physical resemblance to their neighbors in the Georgia and the Caucasus mountain area, i.e., many of them have significantly darker skin color than Russians, other Slavs, and most Ashkenazi Jews in Moscow.

At one time, Rabbi Goldschmidt had considered opening another day school for these youngsters that would address their specific needs. Ideally, the school would have been located near the Izmailovo market, where many of the parents work. A large number of adolescents drop out of school at an early age to assist their parents in the market. However, he has been unable to develop financial resources for such a school from organizations or from wealthy families whose children require the type of education that the school would offer. Mr. Sklyannoy said that Etz Chaim probably would initiate special classes in Russian-language instruction as a first step in assisting youngsters from this population group.

Dara Goldschmidt, wife of Rabbi Goldschmidt and an educator in the school, listed the major attractions (*привлекательность*) of the school to parents as follows: a high level of education in both general and Jewish studies; a particularly strong program in English; experienced teachers; ongoing improvements in the school curriculum and other aspects of school life; a warm atmosphere in the school, with individual attention to each pupil; and a long school day (until 5:00 p.m.) that permits parents to work without worrying about what their children do after school.

Academic standards at Etz Chaim are high in both secular and religious studies. The religious component includes three to five hours weekly in Hebrew language, four in Torah, one in Prophets, one to two in Jewish holidays, and two in Jewish history. Several pupils whose families objected to the intensity of the Jewish studies curriculum have transferred to the ORT day school, which places much less emphasis on religious instruction.

⁶ Many heads of families in these population groups are traders in Moscow-area street bazaars. A few have become wealthy in various forms of commerce, such as restaurant ownership; however, some of these businesses are very vulnerable to economic difficulties following the devaluation of the ruble in August 1998.

Although Etz Chaim has trained its own teachers of Judaic studies in the past, it does so now only on an individual basis because the Judaic studies staff has stabilized. It has made arrangements for teachers of Jewish subjects to enroll in a special Russian-language course of studies at Neve Yerushalaim, a women's yeshiva/teachers' seminary in Jerusalem, during summers. Etz Chaim pays the airfare and Neve Yerushalaim pays the room and board costs for participants.

Etz Chaim staff expressed broad dissatisfaction with the Hebrew curriculum required by the Israeli Ministry of Education as a condition for Israeli government-subsidized Hebrew and Judaic studies teachers in the school. The curriculum itself and suggested teaching methodology may be suitable for Hebrew classes for new immigrants in Israel because pupils there are surrounded by Hebrew in daily life, they said, but it is not appropriate for the diaspora where the classroom may provide the only contact with Hebrew. The Israeli government-required course of instruction offers little instruction in grammar and is too informal in a general sense.⁷

In addition to its day school, Etz Chaim operated a Sunday school for 25 to 30 American Jewish children during the 1997-1998 school year. However, due to the departure of a large number of American families following the ruble devaluation in August, the Sunday school has not opened for the current academic year. Mrs. Goldschmidt said that about eight percent of the pupils in the day school last year had emigrated with their families, most to Israel. So far, no local children had emigrated during the current academic year.

5. **Moscow National Jewish School** is also known as School #1311 and “the Lipman school”. The last title refers to Gregory Lipman, the school principal. The Lipman school is considered by many in the Moscow expatriate Jewish community to be the showplace Moscow Jewish day school. It is sponsored by Nativ (formerly the Lishkat Hakesher) under its Tsofia program.

Coeducational and operating the standard eleven-grade curriculum, the school enrolls 300 youngsters, an increase of 20 from the previous year. One hundred children are on a waiting list. Mr. Lipman said that 70 percent of the pupils are Jewish according to halakha and the remaining 30 percent are Jewish according to the Israeli Law of Return. Most are from middle-class families. “The rich ones are in [boarding] schools in America or England.” About 15 percent of the youngsters are from poor families, most from broken homes. About ten percent

⁷ Complaints about the Hebrew curriculum were widespread, a circumstance that became known during a seminar for Moscow-based Hebrew teachers sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Education itself during the time that the writer was in the Russian capital. The Ministry has had little experience with diaspora populations.

of school families moved to Moscow fairly recently from either Georgia (*Gruzia*) or Baku, the capital of Azerbaidzhan.

In response to a question about the impact of the current economic crisis on his school, Mr. Lipman said that everything is more expensive. For example, the cost of food for school meals is three times greater than previously. Many families are suffering. He expects that emigration will increase, although six months will be required for any crisis-related emigration to be visible.

Pupils live in all regions of Moscow. Most commute to school by public transportation. The school has one bus, which operates a shuttle service between a nearby Metro station and the school.

In response to a question about the appeal (*привлекательность*) of the school to parents, Mr. Lipman listed the following: (1) the fact that it is a Jewish school; (2) a strong secular curriculum; (3) very skilled teachers; (4) tasty and nutritious school meals; and (5) interesting extracurricular programs. For example, in cooperation with the Joint Distribution Committee, children from the school deliver food parcels to needy elderly Jews and visit with them. Older pupils participate in a bus tour of Holocaust sites in Belarus. Some students also have visited Jewish sites in the Czech republic and Poland on school trips. The school sponsors a one-week family summer camp in which parents and children study Judaism separately in the morning and participate in common recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings.

The philosophical orientation of the school is officially secular, but it appears to be shifting toward a more traditional direction. A Judaic studies staff of 15 individuals teaches pupils four hours of Hebrew each week, two to three hours of Jewish tradition, and one hour of Jewish history. A classroom in which tradition classes are held also serves as a synagogue; it contains an ark, Torahs, prayer books, and various other religious items. A Moscow-born rabbi from Israel conducts services on Friday evenings and on Saturday mornings. These are attended by some pupils and their parents, mostly those of Georgian background.

Mr. Lipman has visited a number of American Jewish day schools and praised the Ramaz School in Manhattan, the Yeshiva of Flatbush, and the Solomon Schechter school in Baltimore. He described his own school as modern Orthodox or "stronger Conservative". When asked if the school might engage graduates of Project Judaica, a Moscow-based program of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, as Jewish-studies teachers, Mr. Lipman responded, "Maybe."⁸

⁸ This possibility had been suggested to the writer several weeks before her visit to Moscow by a high-placed individual at JTS.

Mr. Lipman remarked that he would like pupils from his school to establish ongoing contacts with pupils from an American Jewish day school. He noted that many of the older students speak English well.

Academic Judaica

6. **SEFER**, the **Moscow Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization**⁹, dates from 1994. It was established by the **International Center for the University Teaching of Jewish Civilization** (Jerusalem), with the support of the **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee**. Sefer promotes Jewish studies at the university level and represents faculty, students, and institutions engaged in Jewish studies. Its current membership includes more than 300 scholars and nearly 100 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. Sefer is dependent upon JDC for funding.

The writer met with Rashid Kaplanov, Chairman of the Sefer Board of Directors. Dr. Kaplanov is a historian who teaches at the Jewish University of Moscow and at Maimonides Academy. (See below for reports on each.) In response to a question about the impact of the economic crisis on Sefer, Dr. Kaplanov said that it is too early to predict what will happen. In general, he expects the impact on Sefer to be limited because Sefer has never had much money. Even before the crisis, JDC was disinclined to raise its allocation to Sefer, and Sefer finds it difficult to raise its own money [because of inexperience in fundraising and because its needs appear less compelling than other causes]. Both faculty members and students in Judaic studies are committed to the field, "if not to the country". They need "half a chance" to develop their field.

⁹ *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*.

He believes that the course of Russian politics may determine the future of Sefer in particular and Russian Judaic studies in general. If communists should gain more influence, their antipathy to Jews and Jewish particularism might have a severe impact on the field. Relations with Israel and the West would also suffer. A new Russian government is likely to be center-left in orientation, perhaps led by Yuri Luzhkov (the mayor of Moscow). Mr. Luzhkov is something of a rabble-rouser, commented Dr. Kaplanov, but he has been good for the Jewish population.

At the request of the writer, Dr. Kaplanov reviewed each of several academic institutions related to Jewish studies. (See below for reports on visits to several of these institutions.) The **Jewish University of Moscow (JUM)** is now part of **Moscow State University (MGU)**, according to an agreement reached earlier in 1998. MGU itself is bankrupt, and the President of MGU is a communist. REK will continue to support the program, but Dr. Kaplanov fears a severe cutback in REK funding (of all beneficiaries) due to the economic crisis.

The relationship between MGU/JUM and Hebrew University will be good for MGU/JUM because their strengths are complementary. Hebrew University is strong in Talmud and rabbinics, and MGU/JUM has good resources in history and Semitic languages. The new alliance will permit MGU/JUM to offer a Ph.D. degree in Judaic studies.

Project Judaica concentrates on philology and archival studies. Its students appear to lack interest in Jewish history, said Dr. Kaplanov. **Maimonides Academy** is strong in Hebrew and Yiddish, and **Touro College** in Moscow is strongest in Talmudic studies. It has a more religious orientation and attracts older students.

Noting institutions in other cities, Dr. Kaplanov mentioned the **Jewish University** in **St. Petersburg**, the new **European University** (which will do postgraduate research in Jewish studies) in **St. Petersburg**, and the **Center for Jewish Studies** at **Riga State University** in **Latvia**. He described **International Solomon University** in **Kyiv** as "very independent" and, to date, unable to develop an infrastructure for exploring Jewish archival material in Kyiv. The latter has "excellent" potential for study, but a framework must be established. The **Kyiv-based Institute of Modern Jewish Studies**, a two-year program of the **World Union for Progressive Judaism**, is not a research institution, but should be very helpful in training para-professional Jewish communal service workers for the Progressive movement. Elsewhere in Ukraine, Dr. Kaplanov noted that International Solomon University had recently opened a branch in **Kharkiv**, a "very brave" move in view of the difficult political situation in that city and ISU's own problems in Kyiv. He regards the lack of any Jewish studies program in **Odessa** as very strange, especially in view of that city's history in Russian Jewish intellectual life. A brief discussion ensued about the possible reason for such an absence; heavy Jewish emigration from Odessa was posited as a

conceivable cause. Dr. Kaplanov observed that Sefer has few functional ties with Judaic studies programs in most former republics of the Soviet Union, such as Latvia, or with former east bloc countries. Every country is chauvinistic and no local institution wishes to appear to be closely associated with Moscow.

In all, Dr. Kaplanov is pleased with the development of Jewish studies programs in the successor states. He believes that few of these will emerge as great centers of Jewish studies, but each provides some possibilities for serious scholarly work. Additionally, a number of both general and specialized journals publish scholarly articles in Jewish studies. At this point, he continued, the entire field is too dependent upon foreign resources, both in financial support and in expertise in areas where local knowledge is inadequate. If REK is unable to provide sufficient funding, Dr. Kaplanov believes that individual members of REK who have shown special interest in Judaic studies, such as Evgeny Satanovsky, will continue to support their development.¹⁰

Dr. Kaplanov observed that Christian and Islamic educational institutions in Russia and other successor states also are opening departments of Jewish studies.

The student section of Sefer held a very productive conference during the summer of 1998, said Dr. Kaplanov. He acknowledged that many graduate students in Jewish studies leave Russia in order to complete advanced degree programs in stronger institutions abroad. Some are likely to remain abroad as opportunities are greater in foreign countries. Some will return to Russia or other successor states as *shlichim* (representatives) of various Jewish organizations.

In response to a question, Dr. Kaplanov listed the following as goals for Sefer: (1) increased Judaic studies course offerings at Sefer-affiliated institutions; (2) a larger number of institutions associated with Sefer; (3) an improvement in the quality of work at Sefer-affiliated institutions; and (4) development of Judaic studies research institute(s) associated with the Academy of Sciences. Regarding the last goal, Dr. Kaplanov said that academic politics interfered with university-based Judaic studies. In Moscow, he said, relations between the various institutions offering Judaic studies are good, whereas the individuals associated with different institutions in both St. Petersburg and Kyiv are fractious and cantankerous.¹¹ Turf battles between institutions [in St. Petersburg and Kyiv] deter collaboration by scholars.

¹⁰ Mr. Satanovsky and several other prominent Russian Jews are strong supporters of academic Judaica in large part because they perceive secular study of Jewish subjects as a welcome alternative to the dominant position of Orthodox Judaism in Russia.

¹¹ The reality that most Moscow-based specialists in Judaic studies hold part-time appointments in two or three different institutions doubtless contributes to cooperative working relations between such institutions.

According to Dr. Kaplanov, the potential for **Reform** and **Conservative Judaism** in Moscow is very strong. The cause of Reform Judaism would be advanced by establishing an Institute for Modern Jewish Studies in Moscow that is similar to the institution of the same name in Kyiv.

7. The **Jewish University of Moscow** has had official academic status since 1991. It graduated its first class in 1996, conferring undergraduate degrees in Jewish history, linguistics, Jewish history, and pedagogy. It offers courses in 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. Many of its students are enrolled in parallel courses of study at other Moscow universities and institutes. Its faculty is part-time and consists of qualified scholars who hold concurrent teaching appointments at several Moscow institutions.

The writer met with Alexander Militarev, President, and Arkady Kovelman, Rector, in the office of JUM, which is located in an obscure area of the main humanities building of **Moscow State University (MGU)**. Although JUM had no official relationship with MGU until earlier this year, it had been permitted to use an attic-like room at MGU as an office.

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**. In 1998, an agreement was reached with **Moscow State University (MGU)** that transforms JUM into the **Center for Jewish Studies and Civilization** within the MGU Department of Asian and African Studies. Course offerings within the new Center will be organized in three divisions: Jewish Languages and Literature; Jewish History; and Israeli Society, Economics, and Politics. Students also will have access to courses in the MGU School of Humanities and the MGU School of Social Sciences. The School of Social Sciences will operate a joint graduate degree program in Jewish communal service with the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University in New York.¹² JUM also will be involved in a second new Center at MGU, the **Center for Classical Hebrew and Biblical Studies**.

Students will receive their diplomas from MGU, which is considered one of the most prestigious universities in Russia.¹³ About 90 percent of faculty members

¹² MGU students will enroll in the block program at Wurzweiler, which includes three eight-week summer sessions at Yeshiva University with two years of field work. The field placement of MGU students will be in Russia.

now teaching at JUM will be accredited in the new program. Dr. Militarev will remain President of JUM, and Dr. Kovelman will become director of the Center for Jewish Studies and Jewish Civilization. The Center will be assigned classrooms at MGU during the week so that it will be able to adopt a normal class schedule.

A second agreement has been reached, between JUM and **Hebrew University** of Jerusalem. Hebrew University will send Russian-speaking faculty to teach at JUM/MGU in areas where JUM/MGU is weak, such as rabbinics and certain periods of Jewish history. The benefits to Hebrew University of this arrangement are: (1) access to Jewish resources in Russia; (2) academic positions for young Russian-speaking Israeli faculty; (3) potential influence in Russian Jewish studies; and (4) enhanced relations between Israel and Russia. Hebrew University will do some fundraising for JUM in the context of its own fundraising program. Dr. Militarev acknowledged that, if Hebrew University fundraising on behalf of JUM is successful, the JUM financial situation may become stronger than that of MGU (which is bankrupt).

Approximately 150 students are enrolled in JUM, of whom 55 to 60 percent are Jewish. The economic crisis has forced some to end their studies as they need to work to support themselves and their families. Twenty-four individuals received JUM undergraduate degrees in 1997. Four or five have begun graduate work in Jewish studies, several are working for JDC and/or other Jewish organizations, and the remainder are outside the field.

Responding to a question about the future of Russian Jewry, Dr. Militarev said that the answer depends on the course of the Russian economy. The high intermarriage rate -- "not less than 80 percent" -- obviously limits the number of Jewish births. The poor economy encourages emigration and reduces the birthrate of those endogamous families who remain. Dr. Kovelman took exception to Dr. Militarev's presumption that intermarriage will necessarily lessen the number of identifying Jews. On the contrary, he asserted, many non-Jews in mixed marriages participate in Jewish activity because it is more "dynamic" than non-Jewish life. Dr. Militarev's disagreement with his colleague's optimistic assessment of intermarriage was visible. The two men did concur that a sizable number of post-Soviet urban Jews deliberately seek non-Jewish spouses in the belief that intermarriage will lessen their exposure and that of their children to antisemitism. They also agreed that some Jews will marry only other Jews and, for yet other Jews, the ethnic background of a potential spouse is of no consequence.

¹³ The earlier private status of JUM had generated certain difficulties regarding recognition of its degrees.

8. **Project Judaica** is a joint project of the **Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH)** and the **Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)**; Conservative or Masorti movement) of New York. RSUH was founded during the *glasnost* period of the late Soviet era and is housed within the buildings of the former Higher Party School of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As noted, it seeks to train philologists in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as archivists.

Since the inception of Project Judaica, JTS has struggled to find appropriate faculty members willing to work in Moscow alongside local instructors in Hebrew language and other topics. The practice during the past few years has been for regular and/or adjunct JTS faculty members to come to Moscow in one-month rotations, teach in an intensive format, and then return to the United States. Because few such individuals are able to teach in the Russian language, Project Judaica students are required to learn English. Courses for first- and second-year students often must be taught through an interpreter.

The writer met with Rabbi Jane Kanarek, a recent graduate of JTS. Born in South Africa and raised in the Boston area, Rabbi Kanarek is following a different path than some of her JTS predecessors in that she intends to remain in Moscow through the end of the academic year. Her position is funded in part by JTS and in part by the Joint Distribution Committee. She is teaching three courses -- Basic Judaism, Torah, and Codes -- for a total of six classroom hours. She finds that preparation for these classes requires substantial time. She must teach first-year students through an interpreter, but has found that more advanced students do well in both Hebrew and English.¹⁴

Rabbi Kanarek said that other aspects of her position include being a "role model" -- as she is "young, a rabbi, and religiously observant in a modern world" -- and a "Judaica resource person". She is beginning to coordinate extra-curricular activities at Project Judaica, such as Shabbat dinners and festivities for various holidays. She also is doing some community outreach work through JDC, e.g., working with Hillel members.

Regarding Project Judaica itself, Rabbi Kanarek said that entrance into the academic program appears not to be competitive. Nine students will graduate in 1999. In the past, the best students have entered graduate programs in Jewish studies in the United States or at Oxford University in England.¹⁵ A few have entered doctoral programs in related areas in post-Soviet universities. The less capable students begin careers in other fields. Very few graduates enter the archival or philology fields for which they have been educated.

¹⁴ Rabbi Kanarek is studying Russian twice weekly with a tutor.

¹⁵ Academic observers in Moscow believe that the English-language teaching culture at Project Judaica actually encourages students to identify with the United States and/or England and to pursue careers in an English-speaking country.

Acknowledging that she had been associated with Project Judaica for just two months at the time of our discussion, Rabbi Kanarek said that the program appears to require further definition. Too few graduates work in the fields for which they have been trained. Post-Soviet Jewish-related archives simply cannot absorb them. Further, the current curriculum teaches *about* Judaism, rather than Judaism itself. She believes that Project Judaica must move "out of the classroom", but she is not sure how this should be done. She added that some of the students seem to have a real "yearning" for Jewish knowledge and Jewish lives, but no outlet exists for their searching. It is likely, she said, that some do not understand the nature of their yearning.¹⁶

9. **Maimonides Academy** is a state-supported undergraduate institution offering a five-year undergraduate degree in modern Hebrew.¹⁷ Many students also learn Yiddish, and enroll in courses in Jewish history, Jewish tradition, and related subjects. The writer spoke with Mikhail (Micha) Chlenov at the Academy, where he teaches Hebrew and other courses. An anthropologist by education and outlook, Dr. Chlenov also is President of the Russian Va'ad.

Dr. Chlenov said that Maimonides Academy currently enrolls 120 students. Graduates teach at Maimonides and in Jewish Agency ulpan, and some work for the Joint Distribution Committee. A few teach Hebrew in Jewish day schools, but the low compensation level at most day schools discourages more graduates from selecting that career path, said Dr. Chlenov.

The **economic crisis** has already affected the Academy. Citing financial pressure, the Russian Ministry of Education has reduced its planned allocation to the institution. Maimonides also receives funding from the Russian Jewish Congress and has been given one grant from the Pincus Fund of the Jewish Agency.

Dr. Chlenov believes that the economic crisis afflicting Russia will generate increased **emigration** -- "unquestionably" -- especially from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other major cities from which emigration heretofore had been relatively low. The crisis has affected smaller cities much less seriously because conditions always have been deplorable outside the largest urban areas. Jews

¹⁶ In a letter to the writer dated 25 September 1998, i.e., before the writer's journey to Moscow, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of JTS, wrote that Project Judaica has "three dimensions: the archival inventory, the restoration of Jewish studies, and service to the Jewish community." Chancellor Schorsch continued that JTS is determined to enlarge its impact on the religious life of Russian Jewry.

¹⁷ Five years is the normal duration of undergraduate study in the (post-) Soviet Union. High school graduation normally occurs at age 17, i.e., one year earlier than in the United States and some other countries.

who emigrate from Moscow probably will prefer to go to the United States or Germany, but many will move to Israel anyway due to limitations on immigration in the United States.

Dr. Chlenov estimated **unemployment** to be about 15 percent of the workforce, disproportionately affecting the small middle class. The stress level among Jews is high because many Jews are in those [middle class] professions most seriously damaged in the crisis.

Dr. Chlenov believes that the **Russian Jewish Congress** (*Российский Еврейский Конгресс*, known as *РЕК*) will survive the crisis, but will operate on a more modest level as its revenues decline.¹⁸ Its political influence also has weakened.¹⁹ It probably will lose all authority in certain regions as it had only one or two supporters in some outlying areas and these individuals have lost great fortunes in the current crisis. REK will become increasingly dependent upon Vladimir Gousinsky, as he has survived the crisis in good form. Dr. Chlenov believes that REK will remain staunchly non-Zionist as it continues to perceive the departure of Jews as threatening its own power base.

The **Va'ad**, said Dr. Chlenov, is less seriously affected by the economic crisis as its financial resources have always been very limited. It will continue to identify with Zionism.

KEROOR (*Конгресса Еврейских Религиозных Общин и Организаций России*; Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia) is gradually expanding its influence in Russia, observed Dr. Chlenov. At the same time, its dependence upon subsidy from REK is growing. REK continues to embrace both Orthodox and Reform Judaism; however, its inclusion of Reform communities has alienated the Chabad movement in Moscow, which remains strongly opposed to cooperation with non-Orthodox Jewish institutions.

The **Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut)**, said Dr. Chlenov, remains the "toughest" institution in Moscow, having created a wall around itself for security reasons. Dr. Chlenov believes that Sochnut should enter into cooperative

¹⁸ Dr. Chlenov is a member of the Governing Board of the Russian Jewish Congress.

¹⁹ It is generally accepted that the political influence of Jews associated with REK has declined due to: (1) their diminished financial capacity; (2) the apparent enfeeblement of Boris Yeltsin, whose re-election campaign many REK leaders had bankrolled and the likelihood that REK leaders will be unable to unite in support of a single candidate in future elections; and (3) increasing antisemitism, which has caused many prominent Jews to adopt a lower profile.

agreements with local organizations and involve more local individuals in its operations.²⁰

Dr. Chlenov expressed the view that most **synagogues** in the post-Soviet successor states are similar to churches, i.e., that only "believers" (верующие) are comfortable within their walls; he thinks that synagogues should operate as communal centers, welcoming every Jew, whether or not a person "believes" in Judaism. Dr. Chlenov pointed out that **Jewish identity** is an ethnic expression in the post-Soviet states rather than a religious or spiritual expression. Perhaps, he said, a new Jewish identity will emerge in the successor states, one that combines a non-Orthodox religious particularity alongside an ethnic affirmation. To be successful in reaching Jews in large Russian urban areas, Dr. Chlenov continued, Reform (Progressive) and Conservative (Masorti) rabbis must be local intellectuals who use the same "mental language" as the sophisticated urban Jewish population. Individuals from smaller Russian cities and towns will be unable to "relate" to people from the larger cities.²¹ Only those individuals educated in post-Soviet institutions will understand that the intellectual roots of many in the Jewish intelligentsia are in the philosophy of Berdyaev and other Russian Christian philosophers.²² Dr. Chlenov also commented that the Reform movement in Russia is too defensive, too concerned with being "not less Jewish than the Orthodox".

Dr. Chlenov affirmed the view of the writer that many Muscovites of middle age seem unperturbed by the current **economic crisis**. "Yes, there is a crisis, but it is not so bad. We will overcome." He offered several interpretations. First, the failure of people to recognize the gravity of the situation means that people are not ready to effect the rapid and substantive changes in society that are required. Second, the quick end to the panic that followed the ruble devaluation of August 17 means that society has the strength to resist a total collapse. Third, in common with Latin American society, post-Soviet [and earlier Russian] society is unable to confront its own weaknesses; instead, it is chronically unstable, seeks to blame 'dark forces' for all difficulties, pursues spiritual explanations when mundane and pragmatic responses may be more appropriate, and prefers strong authority figures as leaders.

²⁰ Dr. Chlenov has long believed that Sochnut should sub-contract many of its operations, such as its numerous summer camps, to local groups, e.g., the Vaad.

²¹ The latter comment is an implicit criticism of the Institute for Modern Jewish Studies, the Kyiv-based two-year program of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, which enrolls a disproportionately large number of students from small cities and towns.

²² The central theme of the philosophy of Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev (1874-1948) was that the free creative human personality expresses the true meaning of the Christian doctrine of man as the image of G-d. Berdyaev also interpreted Russian history as a series of totalitarian paradigms.

10. 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.²³

In discussing the **economic crisis**, Dr. Shapiro said that its impact has been "close to catastrophic". It is especially severe (тяжелый) for young adults because many had entered private-sector careers in banking services, marketing, and advertising. Sixty to seventy percent of such professionals are now unemployed or have been told that they are "on indefinite leave" without pay. Many firms that had employed 200 people have reduced their staffs to 20 or 30. The situation is a psychological disaster for the young because they were accustomed to a high standard of living (good apartments, automobiles, foreign vacations, computers, mobile telephones). The crisis is easier for blue-collar workers, such as tailors and firemen, because conditions always have been difficult for them.

Many young people, said Dr. Shapiro, are seeking work abroad. Some hope to emigrate, others are eager for contracts of several years duration. Up to 90 percent of the graduating class in some institutes are leaving Russia. Specialists in the prime of their careers are also departing; they are working in American and European research laboratories.

Dr. Shapiro also noted the potential for food shortages. The local agricultural base has been destroyed (разрушено). Agricultural reforms have been cosmetic, not substantive. About 70 to 80 percent of all food on sale in Moscow and other big cities is imported from abroad. The devaluation of the ruble will create major difficulties in the food supply.

Similarly, local industry produces very little. Clothing, appliances, and automobiles are all imported. The "system" is so bureaucratic and so corrupt that it cannot absorb new technology. Good engineers and other specialists have no effect on industry.

According to Dr. Shapiro, individuals associated with the Academy of Sciences are receiving their salaries three to five months late. (He received his June salary in October.) Pension payments also are three to five months late. The situation for factory workers is even worse; their salaries are paid six months late. Dr. Shapiro noted that physicians who work for emergency ambulance services are on strike because they have not been paid in months.

The work ethic has declined significantly; no discipline exists. As in Soviet times, people feel that their work has no value and they leave their jobs in the middle of the day to take care of private matters.

²³ Also present was Patrick, Dr. Shapiro's 13-month old black Labrador retriever. Dr. Shapiro commented that Patrick was more effective than a lock on the door.

Dr. Shapiro said that about one percent of the Russian population can be characterized as wealthy, about eight to ten percent as middle class, and 90 percent as lower class. The middle class, which is closely related to the "new economy", has lost everything. The lower class includes pensioners, workers, teachers, professors, and physicians.

Regarding **Jewish emigration**, Dr. Shapiro quoted from a yet unpublished study that he completed this year before the ruble devaluation. Responding to questions asked in May and June 1998, 50 percent of younger Jews in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg said that they would emigrate if some sort of crisis occurred.

When asked (in 1997 and 1998 before the devaluation) where they would go if they emigrated, 36% of Jews in Russia and 40% in Ukraine said they would go to Israel, 18% in Russia and 16% in Ukraine said they would go to the United States, and 8% in Russia and 12% in Ukraine said they would go to Germany. Eleven percent in Russia and nine percent in Ukraine said they would go to other countries, such as Australia or Canada. Dr. Shapiro said that he believes that the preferred destinations are somewhat interchangeable.

He said that many Jews now are "shopping" for information about refugee status in the United States and jobs in Israel. Their capacity in foreign languages is also a factor in decision-making. He added that many dual nationals, i.e., people with two passports who are active in international trade, are returning to Israel or the United States, sharply curtailing the amount of time spent in Russia or Ukraine.

Dr. Shapiro said that the **deteriorating economy** is the main factor stimulating emigration. However, as the economy declines, some people find that Jews are a convenient scapegoat. **Antisemitism** is now a major factor in generating departures. Although anti-Jewish bigotry used to be more severe in Ukraine, it is now worse in Russia, said Dr. Shapiro.²⁴ Rukh, a major Ukrainian political party, is more supportive of Jews than any political party in Russia; Ukrainians know more about the Holocaust than do Russians²⁵; Russian nationalists, especially the Black Hundreds and similar groups, are more antisemitic than Ukrainian nationalists; and, concluded Dr. Shapiro, relations between Ukraine and Israel

²⁴ In the same pre-devaluation study noted above, 35 percent of Jews in Ukraine and 15 percent of Jews in Ukraine said that antisemitism is a key factor in decisions regarding emigration. Twenty-eight percent of Jews in Ukraine and 17 percent of Jews in Russia said that economic conditions are an important factor in such decisions.

²⁵ According to the Holocaust Museum at Poklonnaya Gora, 1,400,000 Jews were killed in Ukraine and 100,000 in Russia during the Shoah. Nazi troops occupied all of Ukraine and a relatively small portion of Russia.

are warmer than relations between Russia and Israel. A third major factor in stimulating Jewish emigration, according to Dr. Shapiro, is **family reunification**. The majority of Jews in the successor states now have relatives living abroad.

In the same study, Dr. Shapiro asked respondents about their preferences concerning the **different streams of Judaism**. Six percent of the respondents in Russia prefer Chabad, four percent prefer Orthodoxy other than Chabad, four percent prefer Conservative/Masorti, 23 percent prefer Reform/Progressive, and 58 percent do not know the difference between the various movements.²⁶ According to Dr. Shapiro, the appeal of Reform Judaism lies in its use of the Russian language in worship services, the equal role that it provides for women, and its tolerance of non-halakhic Jewish practice.



These young women are selling newspapers of the Russian nationalist Black Hundreds group in Moscow.

(Photo: Moscow News)

Hillel

11. The writer met with Evgenia (Zhenya) Mikhaileva, director of the Moscow Hillel student organization, at the Moscow Hillel Center. Ms. Mikhaileva also directs Hillel activities in Central Russia, the Ural Mountain area, Central Asia, and the Caucasus Mountain area.

Moscow Hillel has a telephone list of about 1,000 individuals. The majority are undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25. Between 200 and 300 such young people participate in Hillel activities during any given week, and a core group of 30 to 50 are real activists. Some participants are as old as 35,

²⁶ Conservative/Masorti Judaism is almost unknown in the successor states. According to some observers, the word *conservative* has a very negative connotation in Russian; many people believe *conservative* and *orthodox* are synonymous terms.

including some university faculty who participate in Hillel activities alongside their students. To serve this older age group, Hillel is developing a club for young families in which the parents are between the ages of 27 and 40.

Ms. Mikhaileva said that the preceding academic year had been difficult for Moscow Hillel. In its third year of existence, the organization had experienced "growing pains". Veterans of the first two years did not welcome an influx of new members. The Hillel Center, which is a small apartment, had become too confining to accommodate a multiplicity of interest groups.

However, Ms. Mikhaileva was optimistic that 1998-1999 would be a better year. It had started very well with **Rosh Hashana services** attended by 1,300 young students (and some older people) held in a rented hall at the Radisson Hotel. The services were organized by Hillel members, under the guidance of Rabbi Eugene Weiner of JDC and Rabbi Jane Kanarek of Project Judaica, and led by Dr. Peter Geffen of the Heschel School in New York. Hillel activists had made 1,000 telephone calls to inform Jewish students of the Rosh Hashana observance. Ms. Mikhaileva said that 70 students attended a Rosh Hashana service in 1995, 300 in 1996, and 550 in 1997. In response to a question, Ms. Mikhaileva said that it is likely that the major factor attracting students to Rosh Hashana services was a need to be with other Jews at a time of crisis, i.e., one month after the ruble devaluation, rather than the nature of the holiday itself or a need for prayer.

A major task during the 1998-1999 academic year would be assisting students in adjusting to the economic crisis. Hillel is providing food to families of some students whose parents have lost their jobs. The situation has stimulated good discussions about *tzedekah*. The crisis also is generating consideration of aliyah (emigration to Israel) among many Hillel members. None has made a decision to emigrate yet, but they are thinking about departure and want to discuss that possibility with her.²⁷ Many students had planned to build their careers in the "new economy" and have been shattered by recent events. They are a "lost generation" (*потерянное поколение*), afraid of what the future may bring. Ms. Mikhaileva has begun to work with Alla Levy, Director of the **Jewish Agency for Israel** in Russia (see below), and hopes that this new partnership will lead to an intelligent consideration of aliyah.

A significant increase in local **antisemitism** is another factor encouraging students to think about aliyah, said Ms. Mikhaileva. The prominence of Vladimir Gousinsky, Boris Berezovsky, and other Jews in media and banking has led some Russians to point to Jews as scapegoats. Students who wear a Magen David as jewelry or who are seen entering Jewish Agency offices or attending Jewish events may become targets of antisemitic remarks. Unlike previous

²⁷ Ms. Mikhailova is a psychologist by education and experience.

years, it is rare now for bystanders to intervene, to admonish those who ridicule Jews. Many of the students are concerned and fearful.

Initially, collaborative efforts with **JAFI** will not focus on aliyah, but will center on a **Shabbat project** similar to the successful Pesach project in which Hillel has been engaged for the last several years. In cooperation with the World Zionist Organization Center for Religious Education in the Diaspora, JAFI has developed a "Shabbat kit" that includes kosher wine, a suitable wine glass, Shabbat candles, a challah cover, kipot, and a richly-illustrated bilingual (Russian/Hebrew) handbook that explains Shabbat traditions and includes appropriate prayers and songs. Using the services of local JAFI coordinators in small Jewish population centers to arrange Shabbat gatherings, teams of Hillel members will take these kits with them as they go out to lead Shabbat observance in Jewish communities that are too small to attract rabbis.

About 25 students participated in a **Shabbat seminar** during the past year, spending two and one-half days in a resort outside Moscow. The setting provided a relaxing atmosphere in which Hillel members could ask questions and discuss various topics of interest. Ms. Mikhaileva would like to offer additional Shabbat seminars, but lacks the budget to do so; the cost per student is between \$90 and \$100, and most students require full subsidy.

Other, more common Hillel activities include various classes and interest groups, holiday celebrations, and social events. Hillel students also produce their own newspaper.

Ms. Mikhaileva was enthusiastic in her praise of Rabbi Eugene Weiner, JDC Director of Special Projects, whom she described as "an important advisor" and "a gift to me". Rabbi Weiner, she said, has been very helpful to her and to students in explaining how to feel comfortable with their Jewish heritage and how to incorporate Jewish tradition in their lives.

When asked to list her **priorities** for the 1998-1999 academic year, Ms. Mikhaileva indicated the following: (1) more educational programs, especially those addressing the question of how to live in a crisis situation; (2) more Shabbat programs; (3) increased cooperation with the Jewish Agency; (4) development of a Hillel choir, a project in which a number of students have expressed interest; (5) improvement in the overall Hillel program; and (6) development of family programs, such as a kabbalat Shabbat for students and their parents. Regarding student-parent programs, Ms. Mikhaileva said that many Hillel members would like to do something for their parents.

Jewish Communal Organizations

12. 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 and other businessmen, led by media magnate 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. Gousinsky continues as President of REK. Three individuals, all of whom are bankers, are vice-presidents: Boris Hait, Mikhail Friedman, and Vitaly Malkin. The Governing Board includes the four officers plus 20 other individuals. Most are businessmen, but the Board also includes four rabbis and several people from the academic and cultural arenas. Yevgeny Satanovsky is Chairman of the Board of Directors, which includes 12 at-large members as well as representatives from 46 REK regional branches. All of these individuals are men.

REK has five major program committees: primary and secondary Jewish education; higher lay education (academic Judaica); higher religious education (yeshivot and women's seminaries); social welfare; and Jewish culture. It also supports various religious activities and anti-defamation efforts. REK allocations in 1997 totaled \$15,360,634, including \$8,502,591 for construction of the Memorial Synagogue at Poklonnaya Gora.

The writer met with Alexander Osovtsov in REK offices. Mr. Osovtsov said that REK was at a time of transition. It had completed the memorial synagogue and museum at Poklonnaya Gora and, in 1999, would begin a special fundraising campaign for the construction of a large Jewish community center to be located across the street from the Moscow Choral Synagogue (Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt) on Spasoglinichevsky Lane (Archipov Street). The total cost of the JCC is estimated at between \$15 million and \$18 million, of which JDC has promised \$5 million. Therefore, REK will need to raise \$10 to \$13 million. In order to maximize fundraising potential for the JCC, REK will not pressure donors to increase their gifts to the annual campaign.

Mr. Osovtsov said that the **economic crisis** in Russia would necessitate a REK budget cut of 15 to 20 percent for the last three months of 1998. All beneficiaries had been asked to "find the algorithms of minimizing expenses". However, he did not anticipate that any programs would be cancelled. He believes that the situation at the date of the interview (October 22) was much better than it had been on September 1. Panic then has turned into uncertainty now.

The 1999 REK budget, said Mr. Osovtsov, depends on the economic situation in Russia. It is likely that further budget cuts will be made.

The most important factor about the current economic situation, said Mr. Osovtsov, is that it is terrible for everyone. Official registered unemployment is about 4.5 percent, but unofficial employment is about twice as high.²⁸ Individuals are embarrassed to register as unemployed, and unemployment benefits are so meager that registration may not even be worth the effort. It is likely that economic conditions will lead to an increase in emigration among both Jews and non-Jews, but he believes that most Jews in Russia will remain in Russia.

Mr. Osovtsov continued that he is not optimistic about the new Primakov government, but that the Western press is too pessimistic about Russia. "Nothing tragic will happen; no one will starve."²⁹

In response to a question about the **number of Jews in Russia** and in Moscow, Mr. Osovtsov said that about 700,000 people in Russia are listed as Jews on their passports, but many more, perhaps 2,000,000 in all, would identify themselves as Jewish on a questionnaire. He estimated that more than 250,000 Muscovites would identify themselves as Jewish on a questionnaire, but that the majority of them would be unable to prove Jewish lineage.

Intermarriage is not an important factor in Jewish identification, said Mr. Osovtsov, because many intermarried families self-identify as Jews. More critical, he said, is liberalization of the economic and political systems so that antisemitism would recede and Jews would be more comfortable with themselves. Of course, antisemitism had helped to preserve Jews as Jews and stimulated the great energy and drive that one finds in many Jews who believe that antisemitism requires them to be twice as competent as others in order to succeed.

The major portion of the **REK donor base** consists of about 70 individuals across Russia who give between \$50,000 and several million dollars per year. In addition to Moscow, major givers can be found in St. Petersburg, Kazan, Samara, Saratov, Chelyabinsk, and Krasnoyarsk. In some of these cities a major

²⁸ Mr. Osovtsov's estimates on unemployment are consistent with those heard by the writer from others in Moscow.

²⁹ Thirteen people died on the streets of Moscow from exposure and hunger by mid-November, i.e., within a month of this interview.

donor is the lay leader of the Jewish community; in other cities, the leader is not a major contributor, but is an individual with good organizing skills. In addition to the major gifts, REK receives hundreds of smaller, mostly unsolicited gifts that individuals transfer to the REK bank account. Some smaller contributions are less than a dollar. REK has made little effort to establish a systematic annual campaign targeting donors of less than \$50,000 annually.

Mr. Osovtsov spoke with great pride of the synagogue and museum at **Poklonnaya Gora**. It was important to REK's self-respect that Russian Jews fund its construction without participation from Israel or diaspora contributors. Vladimir Gousinsky was a particularly strong proponent of this view. The synagogue will be used on Shabbat, different memorial days, and other occasions by all Jewish denominations according to a schedule. The museums are very important for educational purposes. Mr. Osovtsov said that the proximity of the memorial complex to a Metro station facilitated visits by school groups and others.

Mr. Osovtsov said that **Jewish day schools** have a good future in Russia and that REK will continue to support them. When asked about the Jewish education of his own sons (ages seven and ten), Mr. Osovtsov said they attend a selective public school and do not have time for Jewish education. On Sundays, when they might attend a Sunday school, they take lessons in 'extreme sports', specifically, in karate and other self-defense activity.

13. Tancred Golenpolsky is chairman of the Editorial Board of **United Jewish Publications** (probably a deliberately inexact translation by Mr. Golenpolsky of **Объединенная редакция МЕГ**; МЕГ refers to *Международная еврейская газета*). United Jewish Publications include: the weekly newspaper *Международная еврейская газета (International Jewish Gazette)*; the monthly journal *Русский еврей (Russian Jew*, the same title as that of a tsarist-era publication); the quarterly *Diagnosis* (antifascist review, published in several languages); *Jewish Russia* Internet page; *Jewish Moscow* monthly guide; and the quarterly Yiddish journal *Di Yiddishe Gas (The Jewish Street)*. Mr. Golenpolsky is a member of the Governing Board of the Russian Jewish Congress, which subsidizes the various United Jewish Publications ventures.

Regarding the Russian **economy**, Mr. Golenpolsky expects that the coming winter will be very tough. He thinks that the Russian government should initiate protective rationing for the most vulnerable population groups, i.e., children and the elderly. Pensions have declined in value from an average of \$50 monthly to \$25 monthly. He was unsure of official unemployment statistics, but believes that the unemployment rate is at least twice the reported level. He cautioned that observers should be aware of the practice of 'unpaid extended leave', i.e., placing employees on unpaid leave for an indeterminate period, which, technically, is not considered unemployment. Mr. Golenpolsky said that his wife has been on unpaid leave from a publishing company for two years.

Mr. Golenpolsky believes that the International Monetary Fund should extend aid to Russia in the form of actual food, rather than money. Some IMF money is used to pay salaries and other IMF money disappears into insiders' pockets -- and little of it is used to build anything constructive. Industry is almost non-existent in Russia, he noted; therefore, the Russian tax base is extremely limited. **Antisemitism**, said Mr. Golenpolsky, "lives by itself" -- and doesn't need a connection to anything, such as a deteriorating economy. It is just more public now because "hoodlums" need a scapegoat. However, it is true that 85 percent of the money in Russia belongs to 15 to 20 Jews, and Jews are also 'over-represented' in liberal political parties. Many Communists, continued Mr. Golenpolsky, remain antisemitic. General Albert Makashov, a member of the Duma who is notorious for his antisemitic remarks, is a Communist. Members of the Duma asked CP head Gennady Zyuganov to condemn Gen. Makashov's bigoted declarations, but Zyuganov has failed to do so. Zyuganov did issue a somewhat apologetic statement to Golenpolsky (to be published in *Международная еврейская газета*), but it falls far short of what it should be.

Regarding **aliyah**, Mr. Golenpolsky stated a view about potential aliyah that differ from that of all others interviewed. He believes that Sochnut predictions of increased aliyah are "mere speculation", designed to attract a larger budget from Jews in the United States. He attributes lower aliyah during the past year to three factors. First, he said, Jews in Russia are receiving negative feedback from friends and relatives who have already made aliyah, mainly because these new immigrants have found it impossible to manipulate the Israeli 'system' in the same manner in which they manipulated the Soviet/post-Soviet 'system'. For example, bribes to various officials cannot buy a place in an Israeli kindergarten for one's child or cannot secure other privileges in Israel. Second, most Jews in the post-Soviet states already have what they need, such as an apartment and, in many families, also a car. Their neighbors are known to them. They do not need to face so many unknowns in Israel. Third, Israel does not need 'economic migrants' -- and post-Soviet Jews are aware that many Israelis resent them.

Mr. Golenpolsky acknowledged that he has "reservations" about the **Russian Jewish Congress**. It should be an organization that leads or, at the very least, coordinates, but it is just a foundation.³⁰ It is not even a congress because it doesn't debate anything. He believes that REK should become more active in human rights activities, but Vladimir Gousinsky believes that REK should steer clear of politics. Mr. Golenpolsky then mused that Russian spiritual values are being lost to financial values. Young people in Russia, he said, are interested only in money, not in politics. They have no social orientation.

³⁰ On another occasion, Mr. Golenpolsky referred to REK as a "wallet".

REK leadership, said Mr. Golenpolsky, is too busy with their businesses to really consider the issues facing Russian Jewry. Some of the professional staff are not committed to their work, would rather be working elsewhere, and, in any case, are not suited to Jewish communal service.

The synagogue and Jewish museums at **Poklennaya gora** are essential to Jewish self-respect and to the education of non-Jews. However, he believes that some of the exhibits portray too much Jewish victimization; greater attention should be directed to Jewish heroism. As for the synagogue, it is located too far from Jewish population centers to be used on Shabbat and other holy days. Perhaps it will be used only for memorial services and special occasions.

Mr. Golenpolsky said he was unsure that **democracy** would ever take root in Russia. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, neither of them a democrat, are the popular heroes in Russian history. It is possible, he said, that either Gennady Zyuganov or Alexander Lebed will be elected President of Russia. He predicted that at least 50 years will pass before Russia becomes democratic.

Yuri Luzhkov, the Mayor of Moscow, is a "master politician", commented Mr. Golenpolsky. He is a populist and is eager to become President of Russia. However, the various regions resent Moscow's financial and political clout -- 80 percent of all Russian money is concentrated in Moscow -- so Luzhkov may have difficulty in a national election. In order to win, Luzhkov would need a good partner, perhaps Grigory Yavlinsky, as Prime Minister.

Yevgeny Primakov is increasingly popular as Prime Minister, observed Mr. Golenpolsky. He is very well-informed. Primakov's Jewish heritage has not been an issue with Communists, said Mr. Golenpolsky, because Primakov is left of center, a Russian nationalist, and, while Foreign Minister, he returned Russia to importance in the diplomatic arena. However, Primakov seems unsure of himself on economic issues and tries to satisfy all sides on every aspect of the Russian economy; thus, no decisions have been taken on economic policy.

Mr. Golenpolsky expressed concern about conflict between the various **ethnic groups** in the ex-USSR, such as hostilities in Chechnya and other areas of the Caucasus Mountain region. Further, he said, for defense reasons, the Soviet Union had developed installations of its military-industrial complex in numerous localities throughout the vast USSR. Desperate for cash, the new independent countries in which these factories are located might be tempted to sell armaments to rogue states. For example, individuals or governments in the post-Soviet Islamic countries in Central Asia might sell nuclear weapons to Arab countries or to Iran. Kazakhstan, he noted, has its own space capacity. Belarus and other successor states in the European part of the former USSR are more likely to sell armaments to the various combatants in former Yugoslavia, he said.

Mr. Golenpolsky estimates that between 120,000 and 180,000 Jews live in Moscow. He perceives the **Georgian and Mountain Jewish newcomers** in Moscow as bringing an important sense of religious commitment to Moscow Jewry. Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, "gives them space" and encourages them to maintain their own traditions. However, Mr. Golenpolsky fears that Georgian and Mountain Jews, because of their generally darker skin color, may encounter considerable racism.

Mr. Golenpolsky was generous in his praise of both Rabbi Goldschmidt and Michael Steiner, the JDC director in Moscow. Both men, he said, "understand how Russia works" and are "priceless gifts" to the Jews of Moscow and Russia.

Troubled by conflict between Rabbi Goldschmidt and Rabbi Berl Lazar, the chief Chabad representative in Moscow, Mr. Golenpolsky wrote an editorial in a late August issue of *Международная еврейская газета* on **Jewish unity**. Aware that a large group of English-speaking Jews would be in Moscow for the dedication of the Poklonnaya gora complex in early September, he published an English-language digest of the newspaper that included this article. After 70 years of state-mandated atheism, said Mr. Golenpolsky, Russian Jews need Judaism, not partisanship.³¹ He is worried that the "international battles of [the Jewish] religious streams will take root here". Judaism in Russia, he said, is too weak to withstand such struggles. Mr. Golenpolsky said that he did not know the new Moscow Reform rabbi (Rabbi Chaim Ben Yaakov) well, but he hopes that the World Union for Progressive Judaism supports him. A strong Reform Jewish group is needed in Moscow, he continued. Rabbi Goldschmidt, he commented, understands this need, i.e., that "some Judaism is better than none".

Judaism

14. Mark Rykel, a native of Baku, is onsite director of **World Union for Progressive Judaism** programs in Russia. The writer met with him and with the WUPJ shaliach (emissary) to outlying communities, Valery Sheinin, at WUPJ Moscow headquarters.³² The World Union has two offices in space shared with

³¹ Without exception, observers in Moscow place the responsibility for this friction on Rabbi Lazar. Rabbi Lazar has condemned Rabbi Goldschmidt in public for the former's good relations with the Reform Jewish movement in Moscow and his acceptance of the Reform movement in religious umbrella organizations. Rabbi Lazar is also thought to be envious of Rabbi Goldschmidt's title as Chief Rabbi of Moscow, the prominence of Rabbi Goldschmidt's synagogue on Archipov Street, and Rabbi Goldschmidt's good relations with the press, especially the Western press.

BETSY GIDWITZ REPORTS

the Russian Va'ad, the Shalom Theater, and MEOD (*Московский Еврейский Общинный Дом* or Moscow Jewish Community Home), a district Jewish community facility.

Mr. Rykel said that 55 WUPJ congregational groups are active in the post-Soviet successor states (in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine), of which 20 are located in Russia. Most of these groups offer kabbalat Shabbat evenings, festival celebrations, and Bar and Bat Mitzvah programs. In all, 12 WUPJ-affiliated Sunday schools are active, some with co-sponsorship of Nativ, an Israeli government agency (see below). WUPJ also sponsors four kindergartens (two in Kyiv and one each in Vitebsk and Omsk), three summer camps for adolescents (one each in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine), and one summer camp in Belarus for university students. WUPJ operates the Kyiv-based Institute for Modern Jewish Studies, a two-year program currently enrolling 16 students, that prepares paraprofessional Jewish communal workers for WUPJ programs in Ukraine. According to Mr. Rykel, the World Union would like to open a similar institute in Moscow to train paraprofessionals for Russia and Belarus. WUPJ holds four seminars each year for educators in its various youth endeavors.

Mr. Rykel noted that the World Union operates local programs only in the post-Soviet successor states and in Israel. In all other countries, local communities raise their own funds and operate their own programs. Observing that a delegation from the U.S. **Union of American Hebrew Congregations** had visited Progressive groups in the successor states recently, Mr. Rykel said that he is anticipating support from American Reform Jews soon.

Three Progressive rabbis work in the post-Soviet states. Rabbi Chaim Ben Yaakov and Rabbi Nelly Kogan, both native speakers of Russian, are posted in Moscow and Minsk respectively. Rabbi David Wilfond, an American, is in Kyiv. Each is young and inexperienced. Four Russian-speaking rabbinical students currently are enrolled at Leo Baeck Institute in London. Mr. Rykel believes that only rabbis of Russian background will know Russian culture sufficiently well to be successful in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

In response to a question, Mr. Rykel said that the **chief priority of WUPJ** in the post-Soviet states is to open new congregations. New congregations, he said, concentrate on holidays and life cycle events, such as Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and weddings. Each congregation determines congregational priorities; for example, one group may focus on a youth club and another may decide to operate programs for the elderly.

³² Rabbi Chaim Ben Yaakov, the Progressive rabbi in Moscow, was out of town when the writer met with Mr. Rykel and Mr. Sheinin. However, Rabbi and Mrs. Ben Yaakov invited the writer to their home for dinner several days later.

Local Jews are attracted to WUPJ congregations through advertisements in local Jewish publications and through personal contacts. Many newcomers had some previous exposure to Orthodox Judaism, but had been discouraged from further participation by what they considered an overemphasis on such issues as kashrut.

Mr. Rykel said that the **chief problem for WUPJ** in the post-Soviet states is the lack of professional personnel. The Progressive movement needs three rabbis in Moscow alone, as well as other trained personnel. The second problem, he said, is a lack of congregational premises, i.e., synagogues with associated program space, office facilities, etc. In some cities, it rents a local hall for Friday evening services, but a congregation requires permanent operating facilities. However, centrally-located space is usually very expensive. Chabad rabbis fight WUPJ for any synagogue that is returned to the Jewish community. No WUPJ congregation in the successor states has adequate facilities, said Mr. Rykel

Twinning relationships with Reform congregations in the West would be very helpful, said Mr. Rykel. However, he cautioned that such arrangements often are difficult to organize.

Mr. Rykel said that 500 people attended 1998 Rosh Hashana services in Moscow, which were held in a rented hall. About 250 participated in Rosh Hashana services in Minsk, which were held in a banquet hall, and about 150 attended such observances in Kyiv.

Turning to the difficult situation in **Kharkiv**, Mr. Rykel said that a "war" (*война*) existed between Chabad and Eduard Khodos, a local Jew with a criminal past who heads a group of Progressive Jews in the city. Khodos occupies the second floor of the Choral Synagogue; the ground floor is occupied by the Chabad movement. Mr. Khodos holds strong Ukrainian nationalist and anti-American views, the latter frequently expressed by burning American flags before television audiences. Mr. Khodos is the lead suspect in ordering a fire bomb attack on the synagogue earlier this year.³³ Mr. Rykel acknowledged that, "without a doubt" (*без сомнения*), Khodos himself is a "problem", but a problem would exist even if Khodos was not there. The real problem, said Mr. Rykel, is that 200 Liberal and Progressive Jews in Kharkiv have no premises in which to meet.³⁴ Mr. Rykel continued that he does not "love Khodos", and that Khodos is not his "friend".

³³ For background information on the synagogue situation in Kharkiv, see the author's *Visit to Jewish Communities in Ukraine and Moldova, April 1-30, 1998*, pp. 11-12, 51.

³⁴ Two groups of Jews identifying with the World Union for Progressive Judaism exist in Kharkiv.

The Jewish Congregation for Liberal Judaism is headed by Khodos. A second group is called The Religious Congregation of Progressive Judaism; although this group is nominally led by another individual, some believe that it is controlled by Khodos as well.

Further, he does not even speak with Khodos because Khodos is a "bad boy" and "abnormal" (*ненормальный*). In fact, said Mr. Rykel, Khodos has his own mafia in Kharkiv. Mr. Rykel is aware that the municipal government of Kharkiv is "embarrassed" by Khodos.³⁵ Even if it wanted to do so, said Mr. Rykel, the World Union of Progressive Judaism would be unable to bring any pressure upon Khodos because Khodos "believes that he is the representative of G-d". Quite apart from Mr. Khodos' delusions, Mr. Rykel is reluctant to accept the notion that Khodos should leave the Choral Synagogue for another reason; in common with several others in WUPJ; he thinks that Khodos should retain his foothold in the building on behalf of Progressive Judaism.³⁶

15. Rabbi Chaim Ben Yaakov, a Moscow native who had emigrated to Israel as a child with his parents, is the first World Union for Progressive Judaism rabbi in Moscow. Although he works from office space shared with Mr. Rykel and Mr. Sheinen and has no congregational premises, he appears to have raised the profile of WUPJ significantly and to have reached out to many local Jews in the several months that he has been in the Russian capital. He is a frequent speaker at events sponsored by the Jewish Agency³⁷ and the Joint Distribution Committee, and attracted 500 people to Rosh Hashanah services held in a rented hall.

16. 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 offices in the large and recently restored Moscow Choral Synagogue on Spasoglinichevsky Lane (Archipov Street).

In speaking of the **Jewish population** in Moscow, Rabbi Goldschmidt said he believes that 200,000 to 300,000 Jews reside in the Russian capital. If one is considering those who are Jews according to the Israeli Law of Return, i.e., those who have one Jewish grandparent, perhaps as many as one million Jews reside in Moscow. Rabbi Goldschmidt believes that about 40,000 Sephardi Jews from

³⁵ The city government is said to be embarrassed both by Mr. Khodos' bizarre behavior and by the fact that his continuing occupation of the second floor of the synagogue is deterring the Chabad movement from completing renovation of the building. City officials would like the synagogue to be fully restored because a renewed Choral Synagogue would enhance the image of Kharkiv.

³⁶ Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch, Executive Director of the WUPJ, and Menachem Leibovic, a WUPJ staff member who works on programs in the post-Soviet successor states, both have expressed this view to the writer.

³⁷ Rabbi Ben Yaakov teaches a course entitled *Introduction to Jewish Tradition* within a JAFI ulpan.

the Caucasus Mountain area and Central Asia have moved to Moscow since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most of them are in the capital illegally, without residence permits. They are traditional in Jewish practice and well-organized in patriarchal networks that, in many ways, replace the state. Unlike some other observers in Moscow, he thinks that few Jews from smaller cities in Russia, Belarus, or Ukraine have relocated to Moscow in recent years. The high cost of living in Moscow is a deterrent to such moves, he says, and no social service agencies exist in Moscow that would assist people in finding employment, housing, and other necessities.

During an interview in late 1997, Rabbi Goldschmidt had spoken of starting a Jewish day school in the Izmailovo area, near the market in which many **Mountain Jews** work, that addresses the needs of Mountain Jewish children. Many youngsters from this community speak only halting Russian, have various social problems, and drop out of school at an early age. He had anticipated an initial enrollment of 150 to 200 youngsters during the 1998-1999 school year. However, the cost of initiating such a school has proved prohibitive. He and staff of the Etz Chaim day school, which he sponsors, are working hard to integrate Mountain Jewish youngsters into Etz Chaim. He believes that their integration into Etz Chaim will help them and their families integrate into Moscow, and that their stronger sense of Jewish tradition and Jewish family life will help Ashkenazi children and families at Etz Chaim become more Jewish and develop healthier Jewish families. The Mountain Jews, said Rabbi Goldschmidt, are very proud Jews.

Rabbi Goldschmidt plans to organize a **home for disadvantaged Jewish children** in early 1999, as soon as he can find suitable premises. Initially, he had hoped to look for housing in the early fall, but the devaluation of the Russian ruble and accompanying drop in real estate prices convinced him to wait until after the first of the year when additional property at reduced cost should be available. He hopes to find premises accommodating about 25 youngsters, both boys and girls. He has engaged a Georgian Jewish couple as houseparents.

Regarding the impact of the **economic crisis** on the Jewish community, Rabbi Goldschmidt said that the poor will become poorer and the rich will become richer. The rich will do well, he said, because they are able to buy property at distressed prices now and they will sell it later when prices rise. The middle class, continued Rabbi Goldschmidt, "took a big hit". It is likely that many of them will make aliyah. Rabbi Goldschmidt noted that the Russian ruble had been overvalued and that local producers could not compete with imported goods. Now, local producers will do better, and importers will do less well. He believes that Boris Yeltsin will be unable to hold on to power. Gennady Zhuganov, head of the Communist party, has moved the CP somewhat closer to center, and Yuri Luzhkov, Mayor of Moscow, has moved to the left. Rabbi Goldschmidt thinks that very wealthy Jews, who were united in support of Boris

Yeltsin and bankrolled his 1996 Presidential campaign, will split their financial support and votes in future elections.

The economic crisis will have some impact on **REK**, the Russian Jewish Congress. Moscow operations are unlikely to change very much, but some outlying regions will encounter major problems because, in most cases, only a very small number of individuals contributed large amounts to REK. If the primary giver suffered reverses in the economic crisis -- and some have done so -- the financial resources of the local REK office will be greatly diminished. It is likely that the political influence of once-wealthy Jews also will suffer. The ranks of REK leadership, he said, will change. There will be fewer bankers and importers and more manufacturers. REK allocations may be reduced somewhat, but Rabbi Goldschmidt believes that massive reductions are more fear than reality. Vladimir Gousinsky will retain power, said Rabbi Goldschmidt, because his major business activity is in media; banking now is a relatively small portion of his portfolio.

Construction of the planned **Jewish Community Center** (on property across the street from the Choral Synagogue) will proceed as planned. The first step is acquiring title to the land from the city. The JCC will be a joint project of REK and the Joint Distribution Committee, with JDC providing \$5 million of the projected \$13 to \$14 million cost. Rabbi Goldschmidt cautioned that development of the Center is likely to be exceedingly complex because of the need to involve REK leadership in extensive committee work. He hopes that JDC does not become impatient with all of the necessary process. He observed that JDC has declined a financial commitment to the large JCC currently under construction by **Chabad** adjacent to the Marina Roscha synagogue. Rabbi Berl Lazar will insist on controlling that facility, whereas JDC prefers community-wide involvement with a community board of directors.

Rabbi Goldschmidt said that the museums in the synagogue at **Poklonnaya gora** will be developed further. He stated that the cost of the project to date is close to the \$8+ million noted in the REK Annual Report, not \$10 to \$17 million as some claim.

An increase in **antisemitism** is likely as people suffer from hunger and look for scapegoats, said Rabbi Goldschmidt. Grassroots antisemitism is growing. However, no discernible increase in anti-Jewish bigotry has occurred as a result of the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Prime Minister, even through both his mother and father were Jews. General Albert Makashov, the Communist party member and Duma representative, is a problem. His antisemitic statements cannot be ignored.

17. The writer met with Rabbi Berl Lazar, the chief representative of Chabad Lubavitch in Moscow, at the Marina Roscha synagogue. The facility had been

firebombed earlier in the year, but the damage had been repaired. No one has been arrested for the crime, and few observers believe that the case ever will be solved. Chabad operates two additional synagogues in Moscow, a kindergarten, the Achey Tmimim/Beit Rivka day school, a heder, yeshiva, technical college for young men, women's college, youth clubs, welfare service, and other activities. It recently bought its own camp, which has heated buildings for year-round use, near Moscow.

Rabbi Lazar said that he is optimistic about the future of the Moscow Jewish community in the long term. In his view, the world press is much too pessimistic. The **economic crisis** is causing real difficulties for the elderly, the loss of foreign investment and foreign trust are serious problems, and general recovery will require at least two to three years. However, Russians are accustomed to hardship and will persevere. In what sounded like a political endorsement, Rabbi Lazar said that Moscow **Mayor Yuri Luzhkov**, who is believed to be considering national leadership, would "make order in this country".

Antisemitism has increased somewhat, but less than might be expected, considering the large number of Jewish bankers and Jews in high government positions. Rabbi Lazar believes that **aliyah** may increase somewhat due to the economic situation, but that "not many" will leave Moscow.

The **Chabad Jewish Community Center** is adjacent to the synagogue. With seven floors, it is a hulking building, yet unfinished. However, with the assistance of local Jews who brought in temporary carpets, chairs, lighting, and heaters, Chabad was able to hold **Rosh Hashanah services** inside the structure. According to police estimates, 5,000 people were in attendance. Participation was high on Yom Kippur and Simchat Torah as well. Jews want to come to synagogue on these occasions, said Rabbi Lazar, because they want to be with other Jews and to pray. They are looking for identification with their heritage, for security, and for comfort. Many local Jews are eagerly awaiting completion of the JCC. Even people of modest means have made contributions toward its construction, donating ten rubles or whatever they can afford. He believes that uncertainty engendered by the economic crisis is spurring Jews to want to be with other Jews in a Jewish environment.

According to Rabbi Lazar, Moscow Chabad has spent \$2.3 to \$2.4 million on the **JCC** to date. Completion of the structure, not including furnishings, will cost another \$4.25 million. Prior to the collapse of the Russian ruble, they expected to raise most of this money locally. They have many commitments of \$500 to \$10,000 per month. However, payment of these pledges has slowed down considerably since the crisis began in August. Rabbi Lazar now doubts that they will be able to complete the fundraising campaign without significant international assistance.

Rabbi Lazar expressed strong disappointment with the failure of the **Joint Distribution Committee** to provide financial support to the Chabad JCC. JDC has provided encouragement and advice, but no funds. He expects some JDC opposition to Chabad fundraising efforts in the U.S. on behalf of its Marina Roscha JCC because people will confuse it with JDC's own JCC fundraising campaign. However, he believes that JDC has been fair and generous in its support of Chabad welfare programs.

Moscow Chabad has a **computerized mailing list** of some 15,000 Moscow Jews. Each entry includes information about an individual's age, family status, and other data. Chabad sent attractive illustrated calendars to most of the mailing list at Rosh Hashanah; about 1,000 people responded by sending donations to the Chabad bank account.³⁸ Many others sent thank-you notes.

18. Rabbi Dovid Mondshine is Director of **Or Avner**, an independent fund that supports most **Chabad Lubavitch** operations in the post-Soviet successor states. It was established in 1993 by Levi Levayev, a Tashkent-born Israeli businessman, in memory of his father, Avner Levayev.

Or Avner supports rabbis in 25 cities in the post-Soviet states. Among the cities in which it has made new rabbinic placements are: Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, and Saratov along the Volga River; Orenburg and Yekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains area; Khabarovsk in the Russian Far East; and Kremenchug in Ukraine. In its new program of placing rabbinic students or para-rabbis in small Jewish population centers, it recently has placed students in two central Russian cities, Briansk and Smolensk. Each rabbi is responsible not only for the city in which he resides, but also for eight to ten smaller Jewish population concentrations (many with 1,000 or fewer Jews) in the same region.

Declining Jewish populations, especially through aliyah, may cause Or Avner to withdraw rabbis from some cities in which they now serve. Rabbi Mondshine said that the most likely cities for which Or Avner will end rabbinic support within a few years are Zhitomir and Kherson in Ukraine, and Samarkand in Uzbekistan.

Or Avner subsidizes 15 **Jewish day schools** in the post Soviet-states (including two separate schools in St. Petersburg that Or Avner considers one unit). A total of about 3,000 pupils are enrolled in these schools. The Or Avner subsidy covers approximately 50 percent of day school expenses. Another 20 percent is provided by the Israeli government through its Tsofia program. The remaining 30 percent must be raised by local rabbis.

Or Avner also subsidizes 15 **summer camps**, including two (in Moscow and Dnipropetrovsk) that actually are owned by Chabad communities in the respective cities. Additionally, Or Avner supports a number of pre-schools,

³⁸ The number of the bank account is printed in the calendar.

yeshivot, several women's seminaries, and other institutions throughout the post-Soviet states.

The Or Avner 1998 **budget** is about \$13.5 million, of which Levi Levayev provides about \$6 million, individual rabbis raise another \$6 million (both within the post-Soviet states and from foreign supporters), and the Rohr family provides about \$1.5 million (most for synagogue renovation). Although Mr. Levayev's holdings in Russia have been adversely affected by the Russian economic crisis, he has promised to maintain his contribution at its current level. Another major donor who has lost money in Russia has reduced his gift substantially. Rabbi Mondshine said that the economic situation is forcing Or Avner to place all new projects on hold for an indeterminate time and to increase fundraising in both the United States and Israel. Notwithstanding the economic crisis, Or Avner has found that local Jews are assuming more responsibility and that it is easier to raise funds locally than was the case several years ago.

Or Avner distributed 650 tons of matzot throughout the post-Soviet states at Pesach. The price of the matzot varied according to the economic circumstances of the consumer.³⁹

International Organizations

19. **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. Michael Steiner, the JDC director in Moscow, was in the city during part of the writer's visit, but was unable to meet with the writer during this period.

The writer met with Asher Ostrin, director of the JDC post-Soviet program, and Amos Avgar, head of its welfare operations, in Jerusalem on November 19, 1998. The situation in Moscow was a major topic of discussion.

Rabbi Ostrin said that JDC is waiting for the Russian Jewish Congress (REK) to take the lead on planning the new **Jewish Community Center** in Moscow, which will be located across the street from the Choral Synagogue. It is REK that will obtain title to the land from the city and will be able to determine the appropriate time for the initiation of a major fundraising drive.

Unlike other cities in the post-Soviet states, JDC does not support a *hesed* (JDC-initiated welfare center) in Moscow. Instead, it has contractual arrangements

³⁹ Because of a heavy subsidy in most cities, the imported Chabad matzot often was less expensive than locally-produced matzot.

with eight different organizations that operate their own **welfare programs**, such as Yad Ezra, Bikur Cholim, Chamah, and MEOD. A central welfare committee decides the mix of services, such as canteens, meals-on-wheels, and food parcels. Despite the work of the committee, said Rabbi Ostrin, the system could be much more efficient; the various organizations need to cooperate with one another, and each group should be responsible for services in one coherent region. The economic crisis is affecting these programs in two ways: (1) more elderly require assistance, and (2) it is likely that local funding sources, such as REK and Chamah, will have difficulty raising funds.

Because a number of its major donors have suffered serious losses in the current economic crisis, JDC expects that **REK** will be unable to match its previous fundraising success. However, it may be able to attract a larger number of small- and medium-size gifts.

Regarding its **support of rabbis** in the post-Soviet states, Rabbi Ostrin said that JDC policy is to support a "limited number of rabbis for a limited time". It is now providing partial funding for Reform rabbis in Moscow and Kyiv, a Conservative rabbi in Moscow, and several [Orthodox] rabbis. Rabbi Ostrin expressed disappointment that the Conservative rabbi in Moscow was occupied with academic responsibilities at Project Judaica, rather than outreach work in the broad Jewish population.

20. Eugene Weiner is Director of Special Projects for JDC in Moscow. Rabbi Weiner's work focuses on the Hillel student organization. In a brief discussion at the beginning of the writer's visit to Moscow before Rabbi Weiner went abroad, he expressed satisfaction at the large number of young people who participated in Hillel Rosh Hashanah services at the Radisson Hotel. He noted that other Rosh Hashanah services in Moscow also were well-attended.

Rabbi Weiner is looking for property that might be used for a **young people's synagogue** or **synagogue center**. The success of the Hillel Rosh Hashanah service has convinced him that such an institution might draw young people to study of Judaism and to other Jewish activities. He expressed some ambivalence about the new JDC emphasis on **Jewish community centers** as a panacea for the weak Jewish identification of so many post-Soviet Jews. In the absence of other institutions, he said, they are empty gateways. Later, Rabbi Weiner said that JCCs have some potential to attract people to various activities in a Jewish context.

From his interaction with Hillel members, Rabbi Weiner is observing some movement toward **emigration** of students in the wake of the economic crisis. He believes that Hillel organizations might offer additional and more serious instruction in foreign languages and also provide networking services in destination countries that will facilitate resettlement.

21. The writer visited the **Jewish Book Fair**, a JDC initiative in many post-Soviet cities during the autumn months. In addition to exhibits of Russian-language books on Jewish topics, the event also includes various lectures and cultural events. The Moscow Jewish book fair was held in a building associated with the centrally-located former Lenin Library.

22. 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.

Ms. Levy said that Moscow, among all Russian cities, had suffered the greatest damage in the current **economic crisis**. The "new economy" was more widespread in Moscow than elsewhere, and many Jews had been employed in positions in the "new economy". These included such areas as small to mid-size businesses, banking services, computer technology, marketing, and sales. Many people who have lost their jobs feel that entire fields have simply disappeared. They believe it unlikely that the economy will be restored in the near- to medium-term future and, if it is restored, it will collapse again. Many young people feel that they are wasting an important period of their lives by remaining in Moscow. Some even are abandoning university studies, saying that universities are approaching collapse as many professors are refusing to teach because they are not being paid. Such students are good candidates for **Selah**, Ms. Levy observed, an aliyah program designed for young people preparing to enter Israeli universities.

Families have expressed new interest in **Na'aleh**, the aliyah program in which adolescents complete the last three years of high school in Israel. However, since the Israeli government has assumed operation of this program, the number of applicants accepted has been reduced to 25 percent, whereas JAFI accepted 45% to 50%. Some in JAFI believe that it should disassociate itself from Na'aleh because too many false hopes are raised.⁴⁰

The economic crisis has spurred an upsurge in Moscow in requests for information about aliyah, said Ms. Levy. More than 9,300 people made such inquiries October 1998, compared with 3,500 in October 1997. Fully 50 percent of



JAFI transferred operation of Na'aleh to the Israeli government. JAFI remains the recruiting agent for Na'aleh and administers its activities.

those seeking information are younger than 35.

A JAFI computer laboratory with 10 workstations is popular with adolescents (shown) and with adults learning new skills in preparation for work in Israel. It operates in very cramped quarters in JAFI headquarters in Moscow.

Ms. Levy stated that **Sochnut** lacks teachers and classrooms to meet the increased demand for **Hebrew (ulpan) classes**. Whereas 258 people were enrolled in Hebrew classes in September 1997, 726 had registered for ulpan in September 1998.⁴¹ JAFI headquarters cannot accommodate such numbers. To alleviate space constraints, JAFI has moved its youth activities to the district public cultural center on Vodkhovsky Street, where it already rents space for other programs. (JAFI later opened additional ulpan at the Moscow ORT school.)

When JAFI announced a new **children's program** at the Vodkhovsky Street facility, it expected a registration of 50 children. It had to close enrollment after 210 youngsters had registered because it has no budget for additional teachers or program space. The families of these children are strongly aliyah-oriented and are preparing for departure from Russia sometime in 1999.

Ms. Levy said that Sochnut needs a new large building of its own in central Moscow. She hoped that falling real estate prices would enable JAFI to purchase such a structure.

Another requirement is the **improvement of aliyah and absorption preparation**. Sochnut and the Ministry of Absorption need to provide emissaries with up-to-date information so that they can take full advantage of opportunities such as the current upsurge of interest in aliyah.

Additional programs in **Jewish education** also are essential. In many communities, one can see a direct link between Jewish education and the decision to make aliyah. In Moscow, Jewish education is necessary to retain the interest in Israel of those Jews who decide not to leave right away.

In response to a question, Ms. Levy said that the official **unemployment** rate in Moscow is about 4.5 percent, but that most people believe it really is about 11 percent. She expected it to rise to 15 percent in the near future.

⁴¹ Ms. Levy stated during a Jewish Agency meeting in Jerusalem on November 10, 1998, that 90 percent of these students have families and/or friends in Israel. Most are professionals; JAFI will develop professional ulpan that combine instruction in Hebrew with some instruction in appropriate technical English and computer technology for engineers, economists, physicians, nurses, and programmers.

Antisemitism, said Ms. Levy, has increased since the ruble devaluation on August 17. Regional newspapers are publishing more antisemitic articles and *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, a traditionally nationalist newspaper with national circulation, was also carrying more anti-Jewish writing. Some of this bigoted journalism includes fairly sophisticated accusations of Jewish interference in Russian life. In response, several of the more visible Jews, such as Valdimir Gousinsky and Boris Berezovsky, have almost disappeared from public view. They are keeping low profiles.

On a Sunday, the writer visited a JAFI-sponsored **seminar** of two and one-half days duration on the topic of Russian-language Jewish literature, including such literature published in Russia and other successor states as well as in Israel. The seminar was held in a resort outside Moscow and attracted about 35 Jewish intellectuals, most of whom work in fields related to literature, literary criticism, and other fields of culture. Some were in sociology or anthropology, and one was a physicist. Rabbi Chaim Ben-Yaakov, the new Reform rabbi in Moscow, was another participant. In addition to members of the Jewish intelligentsia, one Russian academic specialist on Israel and one Armenian were also in attendance; the latter urged Israel to retain its Jewish heritage and be true to itself. The writer attended one session in which three olim, all of whom are well-known Russian-language writers, expressed strong Zionist views in a panel discussion.⁴²

Ms. Levy explained that such events were intended to bring the Russian-speaking Jewish intelligentsia closer to their roots and to encourage within them warm feelings for Israel. Although the Israeli speakers provided proof that those whose careers are dependent upon the Russian language could indeed thrive in Israel, JAFI realizes that many Jews whose careers are linked to the Russian language will prefer to remain in Russia. Before outreach efforts of this type were initiated, continued Ms. Levy, many Jewish intellectuals in Russia were hostile toward JAFI because they feared that it would try to "force" them to move to Israel and abandon the Russian-speaking culture in which they are immersed in Russia. Now, she said, JAFI is able to include Hebrew lessons in the program which are attended eagerly by many of the seminar participants. Ms. Levy noted that the JDC-initiated Jewish Book Fair, then underway in Moscow and many other cities, also reached out to the Jewish intelligentsia.

23. Marina Ben-Arie supervises Sochnut activity in 22 cities outside Moscow, a large area known as the *Golden Ring*. This area extends from Rybinsk in the north to Kursk in the south and from Smolensk in the west to Tambov in the east. JAFI offers Hebrew ulpan, holiday celebrations, aliyah clubs, and aliyah

⁴² The three are Grigory Kanovich, Feliks Dekter, and Eli Luxemburg.

preparation in these municipalities. JAFI-trained local Jews serve as aliyah coordinators and Hebrew instructors.

In response to a question about the differences between this year and last year, Mrs. Ben-Arie said that the number of visitors to the Moscow center had increased threefold from this time last year. The 1998 visitors were younger (ages 18 to 40) and much more middle class than those in 1997. The Jews of 1998 feel as if their world has turned upside down, said Mrs. Ben-Arie. Even if they still have jobs, they are worried about unemployment in the future. They are also concerned about the many institutions, such as banks, which don't function properly.

In Moscow, JAFI has 600 new ulpan students. Many are people educated as engineers. They had quit their engineering jobs, where opportunities seemed limited, in favor of positions in the "new economy" -- small businesses, banking services, management, marketing, and sales. The new economy has collapsed -- and now these people have nothing.

Increasing numbers of people also are visiting JAFI in the Golden Ring cities, including Jewish students whose universities appear to be disintegrating under economic constraints. More individuals of working-class background than is the case in Moscow also are interested in aliyah. Antisemitism, which is much more severe in peripheral cities, also spurs aliyah in the Golden Ring area, said Mrs. Ben-Arie.

Sochnut offers eight different Hebrew classes at one time in Moscow on Sundays. Mrs. Ben-Arie said that most students in the classes will emigrate to Israel, but some will remain in Moscow to care for elderly parents or for other reasons. Sophisticated Muscovites, she said, are searching for detailed information about all aspects of life in Israel. Those with relatives in Israel rely on relatives for advice, but others embark on real research projects.

Many prospective olim join JAFI-sponsored special-interest groups to help them prepare for aliyah. JAFI offers aliyah clubs for families, parents of children already in Israel, parents of soldiers in the Israeli defense forces, single people, women, musicians, and people in other specific professions.

Mrs. Ben-Arie said that 55 individuals from Moscow registered for the *Yachad* (*Together*) program in one month recently, compared to 20 during all of last year. Yachad is an aliyah program in which Jews between the ages of 18 and 25 form groups while still in the successor states, study together for six months, and then make aliyah as a group. They attend ulpan in Israel together and are mutually supportive as they move through progressive stages of absorption. Another 50 people from Golden Ring cities have registered for Yachad; they will convene in one city for a three-day seminar and then meet regularly in small groups in their own towns before making aliyah together. As in Moscow, only 20 people from Golden Ring cities had joined a Yachad group in all of 1997.

24. Vladimir (Vlad) Lerner is Minister Plenipotentiary of the Embassy of Israel in Moscow. Mr. Lerner represents Nativ (formerly Lishkat Hakesher), an Israeli government entity within the Office of the Prime Minister. A specialist in solar energy, Mr. Lerner is on leave from the Weizmann Institute in Israel.⁴³

Mr. Lerner estimates the **Jewish population** of Moscow to be between 300,000 and 400,000 individuals, according to the Law of Return. Also according to the Law of Return, it is likely that between 500,000 and 600,000 Jews live in all of Russia and that 1.2 million Jews reside in all of the post-Soviet successor states.

Regarding the **economic crisis**, Mr. Lerner spoke of the severe problems of traditionally vulnerable population groups, such as the elderly. However, he said, conditions in outlying areas are "much worse" (гораздо хуже). He had just returned from a trip to the Ural Mountains region, where the situation is so tragic that he "can't put it into words". The Israeli embassy, he said, is already processing 15 to 20 percent more visa requests and about twice as many requests for information about immigration than during the same period last year. However, he cautioned, observers should not become "overexcited" about increased **aliyah**; it does not yet look like a repeat of 1990 and 1991 [when almost 182,000 and 145,000 Soviet Jews emigrated to Israel]. Current circumstances have "great potential" for aliyah, he said, but decision-making about emigration is a complex process for each family and conclusions are not reached overnight.

Mr. Lerner said the situation concerning current **antisemitism** is "complex". Unlike the Soviet era, government-sponsored antisemitism is now "zero". Universities no longer apply antisemitic quotas to student enrollment.⁴⁴ Street or popular antisemitism is increasing, but not yet as serious as it was in the 1960's and 1970's. A considerable amount of antisemitic literature is available "on the street", much of it distributed by organized groups.

It is possible that the **Russian Jewish Congress (REK)** is "in trouble", said Mr. Lerner. Some wealthy sponsors have suffered significant losses during the economic crisis and are withdrawing from REK. The bank accounts of other would-be donors have been frozen because the banks are insolvent.

⁴³ Mr. Lerner is the son of Professor Alexander Lerner, a well-known specialist in cybernetics and leader among Moscow refuseniks of the 1970s and 1980s. Vladimir Lerner also was a refusenik.

⁴⁴ Other observers disagree with this statement. However, most concur that contemporary antisemitic quotas appear to be formulated by individual institutions, perhaps at the direction of a specific external source, rather than implemented generally by broad government decree.

In response to a question about the **changes** that he sees in Russia since he emigrated to Israel in early 1988, Mr. Lerner said that he perceives very few substantive changes. Most differences are cosmetic. Russians still think in the same manner as they thought during the Soviet period. They still make decisions in the same way. They don't know how to work, many are intoxicated and lazy. Some tell him that he works too hard.

When asked what American Jewish activists should know about the current situation in Russia, Mr. Lerner cautioned that his answer would be very subjective and would reflect his strong Zionist feelings. Russian Jewry is in danger, he continued, but Russian Jews seem not to understand that they are in peril. Mr. Lerner believes that changes in Russia are superficial, that they can be reversed in a short time. He perceives a move to the right. For example, Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist party, has called for a *наблюдательный совет* (supervisory council) to oversee Russian mass media. Freedom here means freedom to steal. Many local people in business think that a business is successful only if it achieves a profit of 300 percent to 500 percent or more. No economic system can survive such greed. Russians are always looking for someone to blame for their problems, e.g., Jews.

25. Julie Brooks is an American employed by **U.S. AID** (United States Agency for International Development). Prior to employment by the U.S. government, she worked for an international aid organization and as the Moscow representative of the U.S. National Conference on Soviet Jewry. Ms. Brooks said that most U.S. aid programs are now administered on a regional basis because regions are much easier to comprehend, organize, and supervise than an entire country. She has worked on various aid projects in the Novgorod Veliky area (southwest of St. Petersburg), Samara region (mid-Volga area), and the Russian Far East. Some 30 different programs are available, including U.S. Peace Corps teachers as instructors in English, leadership development programs for local non-government organizations, agricultural assistance, and industrial development.

26. Mari Dieterich is Human Rights Officer in the Political Section of the **Embassy of the United States** in Moscow. She apologized for her lack of information on some subjects, explaining that she had been in her position for only a short period. In general, she said, the U.S. government believes that Russia is continuing to make "steady progress" in human rights. The United States acknowledges an increase in neo-Nazi activity, but this growth is not yet substantial. The deteriorating economy is leading to increased bigotry as some people seek a scapegoat for their difficulties. However, she noted, not a single

Russian newspaper has reported details about Yevgeny Primakov's background, i.e., that he is Jewish.⁴⁵

After checking with immigration officials, Ms. Dieterich said that the economic crisis had generated increased interest in immigration to the United States, but this new interest was not yet substantial (October 27).

27. Paul J. Martin is a diplomat at the **Embassy of the United States** in Moscow. His major responsibilities include observing the socio-political roles of (1) religion, and (2) the media in Russia. His previous position was Human Rights Officer, i.e., the same position that Mari Dieterich now holds.

Mr. Martin said that more political will than money exists in Russia to improve the general **human rights** situation. The political intent is not necessarily based on principle, he said, but on international obligations inherent in several international conventions that Russia has signed. Many non-governmental organizations have no access to international grants that they have been awarded because the banking crisis has frozen their bank accounts. Non-profit organizations have little or no clout with which to influence banks to release their funds. Another financial problem is that courts lack operating funds to hear cases and perform other functions.

According to Mr. Martin, the **most serious human rights problems** in Russia are: (1) the Russian criminal justice and prison systems, which offer no protection to the accused or incarcerated, and (2) the legal system in general, which is underdeveloped. Mr. Martin also observed that the economic crisis is generating a 'need' for scapegoats, which is leading to increased antisemitism.

Mr. Martin said that the U.S. Information Service is planning to conduct a **public opinion poll** in Russia in autumn 1999. The poll will include a number of questions designed to measure antisemitism.

The U.S. Embassy, said Mr. Martin, is watching Nikolai Kondratenko, the Governor of Krasnodar *Krai* (region) "carefully". His expressions of antisemitism are "outrageous", continued Mr. Martin, and the United States is worried about his influence. "He is potentially very dangerous." Kondratenko's public statements, said Mr. Martin, are full of references to Jews who are prominent in Russian government or commerce and to the supposed "international Zionist

conspiracy".⁴⁶ The U.S. Embassy has expressed its concern about Mr. Kondratenko to the government of the Russian Federation, but the Russian

⁴⁵ See the comments of Tancred Golenpolsky about the absence of commentary on Mr. Primakov's ethnic background, p. 29.

government claims that a region designated as a *krai* enjoys a certain level of autonomy from the Federation and, therefore, that Russian influence over the krai is limited.

Mr. Martin said that the U.S. Embassy has observed a modest increase in the number of inquiries about **emigration** since the economic crisis erupted in August. He commented that, in his view, young professionals in Russia should consider departure because "it will take years for conditions to improve here".

Observations

28. The failure of Masorti (Conservative) Judaism to place a community rabbi in Moscow and the limited support to date by Progressive Judaism of Rabbi Chaim Ben Yaakov remains disquieting. The response of Jewish students to Hillel Rosh Hashanah services, which borrow heavily from the Conservative format, and the success of Progressive Rabbi Chaim Ben Yaakov, who operates on an itinerant basis without designated program space, suggests that each of these movements would generate significant appeal among Moscow's many Jews.

29. At the same time, the inability of one segment within Orthodox Judaism to accept the philosophy and practice of non-Orthodox Judaism as legitimate creates additional problems for all who endeavor to advance the cause of Judaism and Jewish renewal in a Jewishly-barren land. The divisiveness engendered by intolerance does much to vitiate the substantial good accomplished in the post-Soviet successor states by the same group.

30. The incidence of antisemitic statements by prominent Russian politicians, especially those representing the Communist party, increased significantly following devaluation of the Russian ruble in August 1998. More ominously, the Russian Duma (Parliament) has declined to censure its members who make antisemitic statements. As 1999 approaches in a country tried by economic

⁴⁶ Mr. Kondratenko is former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Krasnodar Krai. He frequently refers to Jews as "cosmopolitans", an appellation dating from the Stalinist era. Krasnodar Krai is an agricultural area in southern Russia with a small Jewish population. It is the home base of Kuban Cossacks, one of the more active groups of contemporary Cossacks.

distress and political uncertainty, concern is warranted about further escalation of anti-Jewish bigotry in Russia.

31. In a Report entitled *Visit to Jewish Institutions in Moscow – November 24 to December 4, 1997*, this writer observed: “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.” In the space of less than one year, such sentiment appears to have been transformed among many individuals into respect for Israel as haven for those escaping the adversities of life in contemporary Russia.

Betsy Gidwitz
December 21, 1998