

RESTRAINT OF THE SOVIET JEWRY MOVEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL

Interview of Michael Sherbourne by Lou Rosenblum

May 15, 1987, in home of Michael and Muriel Sherbourne,
North Finchley, London.



M: You were asking me why I felt that the Israelis have been acting over the years toward Soviet Jewry, in what I would call not merely playing down the campaign and seeing to it that the establishment in the West also played at a very low profile but in (what I actually accused Nehemiah Levanon of in public) sabotaging the campaign. First, Nehemiah's mentor was a man named Shaul Avigur from Kibbutz Ashdot Ya'akov. He had been in the Soviet Union, and I believe that he had been successful in getting out a few hundred a year immediately after the war and for several years afterwards. He had been doing this quietly.

L: You mean after the Second World War.

M: Yes, World War II, what I call "Our War."

L: Some time in the early 50s?

M: 47, 48, 50's, the early 50s probably. Perhaps, in fact, I don't know the details exactly but I'm assuming now it may, in that case, have been after Stalin died because it may not have been possible while Stalin was alive. I don't know for certain. Although I do know that, speaking with Tina Brodetskaya, she said that she and a number of her friends were active in the early 50's as well as the late 50's. She was sent to prison in 1953 for her activities. Avram Shiffrin did a ten year stretch; he was sentenced in Stalin's time. So there was quite a lot of Zionist activity going on there, so it may well have been even during Stalin's time. Shaul Avigur did manage to get out, probably by legal means, I should think or I'm guessing, several hundred each year. He was convinced that the only way to get Jews out of the Soviet Union was by quiet diplomacy. He passed this on to Nehemiah Levanon. The Israeli Embassy was established in the early 50s when Golda

Meir went; she went not as ambassador first but as plenipotentiary and it was a legation there. Interrupting here for a moment, if I can use up part of your tape for the story of Golda Meir and the photograph?

L: Sure.

M: There is a famous photograph taken in 1948 when Golda Meir was outside the synagogue in Moscow, surrounded by a very large number of men. All those who could be recognized on that photograph were arrested and given long terms of imprisonment. There is one today whom I met a few years ago in Givon, he said he was one of the lucky ones; he did only 10 years, many of the others did not come out alive. And, the other thing is that when Golda Meir was approached, in 1948, by a number of Jews she was given a list of those who would like to volunteer to fight in the uniformed Israeli Army. And she approached Stalin and told him about this and gave him that list. Everyone on that list was arrested and shot. I thought you might like to know, if you hadn't heard it before.

L: I heard the same from Misha Eppleman. He had a friend whose father was in that group of people who were arrested and shot; his friend is now living in Israel.

M: There is a man named [Lev] Navrozov who wrote about this ["Notes on American Innocence"] and Golda Meir threatened to take him to court and called him to withdraw. He said that he would be very glad to go to court because he could prove it; and she dropped the case.

L: So the book has been published in Israel?

M: No, in the United States. Now let's get back to Nehemiah Levanon. When the Embassy was established there, I think the Israelis not merely wanted to continue... I think that the Israel officials lead by Shaul Avigur and then by Nehemiah Levanon were anxious not to upset the Soviet authorities. They didn't want the Israeli Embassy to be in any embarrassing position. And also, they were so proud of the fact that at last the Zionist ideal had been realized and a Jewish state had been established that they felt that they must not do anything to upset the apple cart and to cause any embarrassment to the newly established Jewish state: we must placate the Soviets, we mustn't upset them. I think this is the policy behind it.

I think another very important factor is they may have felt, again I'm assuming, I don't know, no one could ever prove this sort of thing, they may have felt that amongst those coming out there were bound to be a lot of Soviet spies. And, they were very concerned to be able to vet everybody. If small numbers came out, it would be much easier to vet and see that there were no Soviet spies amongst them or, if there were, to know who they were. I believe this is a very important factor in their mentality, in their thinking.

But there is one other very important factor not connected with Soviet politics at all. And that is the Israeli mentality that I know best: "don't tell me what to do because I know best in everything."

L: (laughter) How well you stated it.

M: And as far as Soviet Jews are concerned, "I know what's best for them. And I will tell them what they should do." This I think is a very important factor behind their thinking. And this is why, I believe, they felt that they were quite justified in seeing that all information that came out and all messages that came out went to them so that they could vet them before they were published. Because they know not only what is best for Israel but what's best for Jews in the Soviet Union. But of course as events have worked out it became a case of the tail wagging the dog. They had to eventually fall in line. Going back to the early days when you first started and when I came into the picture 6 or 7 years later, they were still able to rule the roost and to control me on it. It took me 2 or 3 years to know what was going on. But when I did find out what was going on, when I found out that so many of the messages I was receiving were either being completely suppressed by the Embassy in London, or in Tel-Aviv, or were being distorted, I began issuing my own weekly bulletin.

L: You mean that the information that you turned over to the people in the Embassy was not passed out again as a news release.

M: It disappeared. I got it from Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, the various places I was phoning to. I would give the information either to Colin Schindler, who at time was working for the [British] Board of Deputies but was actually under the aegis of the Israeli Embassy (in fact his salary was paid by the Israeli Embassy and not by the Board of Deputies), and Nan Grier who

publishes that bulletin which she took over from him. She is paid, has been all of the time, not by the Board of Deputies but by the Israeli Embassy.

L: Is that something demonstrated as a fact?

M: I know it and I challenged her. I said I'd like you to deny what I'm telling you that you are not paid by the Board of Deputies, your salary is paid by the Israeli Embassy. And, she bluffed it, the same way that Nehemiah Levanon bluffed it with me when I challenged him, and she wouldn't deny it.

L: In the United States at one time a similar thing came out in the press. It was an interesting revelation. I thought perhaps something happened that exposed the actions you described.

M: No. I criticize them very much. I also have this strange Jewish feeling that I don't want to do too much in the open that can harm Israel. You see the complicated position. So I found that I was passing messages to Colin Schindler, and/or to the Israeli Embassy, and sometimes direct to Tel-Aviv: to Zvi Netzer, and other people like Ya'akov Yannai and so on. And I found that a very large percentage of what I was giving over disappeared completely; or, if it was published, it came out in a distorted version. I didn't understand for a long time what was happening. It was in December 1972 when I found that nothing of what I was getting from Moscow was getting out. I was on the phone to Dan Roginsky several times a day at the time. This was when there were the first large scale demonstrations in Moscow by the Jews, in December 1972. He was the only one of the activists who wasn't with the demonstrators; he deliberately stayed behind to be available at the phone. I was getting a lot of information from him and I was passing it out. And it disappeared. So I began producing my own circular, my own bulletin. That was in December 1972. It did last a long time.

L: I think I have almost the earliest one. I think the file starts in 1973.

M: I'm glad that some one has because I haven't got them any longer.

L: I'm sorry I don't have the complete set, because they are absolutely priceless pieces of historical information. Let me ask you this. We were getting, for quite a number of years, a newsletter that Colin Schindler put out that contained detailed information. Now, were you supplying him with some of this information?

M: Yes, most of the information came from me.

L: How would you characterize Colin's newsletter? Was it accurate?

M: Yes, it was pretty accurate.

Muriel S.: It was accurate but it didn't have all that Michael gave him.

L: It was selective.

M: Selective, exactly.

L: As I recall, from our point of view, being at a distance, it seemed to be a valuable source of information, although it may not have been complete. Now, if as you say Colin was working for the Israelis, how did they let him do this. I would imagine they would have wanted to squelch that too.

M: Yes. By late '73 I began having terrific arguments with him—although I respect him very highly— over the fact that a lot of the stuff I was passing over was not being published. And he was evasive, until around about January or February 1974 he told me the situation that he was not allowed to print what he wanted to print, because he then told me that he was paid by the Israelis, which I didn't know until then, and that he was controlled by them. He said that he was unable to stomach it any longer and he's leaving. He left, I think, at the end of March 1974 and that's when Nan Grier took over. She, of course, has been a lackey of Nehemiah the whole time and she's been completely "Establishment."

So you see there have been a number of factors regarding this. But there is another factor which I couldn't possibly support and most people refuse to accept. This is I believe that the Israelis do not want aliya from the Soviet Union.

L: Oh. Not at all or only some?

M: Merely a small number. I think they feel Israel is not able to absorb a large number in any rapid...

L: I've heard this from some of the Soviet Jews themselves. I don't mean

from Soviet Jews in Russia or in Israel but in the States. The reason they offered was the Labor government, in power in Israel then, was concerned about imbalance: too many right-leaning Soviet Jews coming into the country.

M: I was convinced that this was so. They didn't want it because Nehemiah Levanon was a great Mapai man in the Labor Party and all the time until 1977 it was a Labor government, a left wing government, not very advanced left wing but certainly left wing. We knew that the majority of the Jews coming out of the Soviet Union had a very deep loathing for communism and were in fact were tending towards the right wing and towards Herut, which became the Likud later. But I was very sadly disillusioned over this when Begin came to power. I think this was 1977, you were beginning to drop out of the picture.

L: Exactly.

M: There was a meeting, an annual conference of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews was arranged for the first time in Jerusalem. What happened was that Irene Manekofsky, with whom by now I was very friendly and in very close contact, suggested that now that Begin had come to power it would be a good idea that she and I went to see him. It developed there from that that she thought someone else could come as well and then someone else and 2 or 3 people heard of it and wanted to go along. And so it was decided then that there would be a conference held in Jerusalem instead of Washington on that occasion. It was held in April 1978. It was arranged that a group of 9 or 10 of us would go in to meet Begin, in the Prime Minister's study. Unfortunately, I can't find a photograph, mislaid it somewhere, doesn't really matter. Apart from myself and Irene, there were the Sandbergs, Stuart and Enid Wurtman, Lynn Singer (I believe), Glenn Richter, Lorel Pollack from Chicago, hmm, was there anyone from San Francisco? I'm not sure.

L: Was Selma Light there?

M: No, Selma wasn't there. Hmm, no Rae Sharfman wasn't included in it. There was only a small group that went in to see him. It was arranged for a particular time. We went in and as we went in to the office there was Begin and sitting next to him Nehemiah Levanon.

L: You understood the situation at that point.

M: At that point I understood it perfectly. I hadn't until then completely. I had begun to wonder, because when Begin was first elected, in June 1977, Cyril Stein, of whom you've heard—

L: Yes I know Cyril, I've met him.

M: Cyril was, and has been all the way through, the mainstay of the campaign in this country financially. And although not much has been spoken about it, he was the mainstay of the funds for Avital during her campaign for Sharansky. And he still is the financial support for the 35's, he paid for all my telephone bills. He went to Israel for Begin because he was also one of Begin's financial supporters. When he came back he phoned me. He said, Michael, Nehemiah Levanon is on his way out. I want you to prepare a statement, that I will give to Begin, showing what he has been doing over the years. I wrote 7 pages of typed foolscap going into very great detail. I heard nothing more. This was June 1977.

When we went to see Begin, April 1978, I promised Irene that I would be a "good boy" and would not shoot my mouth off, and I can assure you it was rather difficult, as you can imagine, especially seeing Nehemiah Levanon. Although I did have to interrupt him because when the meeting started up Begin welcomed us all and said we'll ask Nehemiah to give us a report on the situation. He turned to Nehemiah, he was sitting at his right hand. And, Nehemiah started out with his usual waffle, how wonderful this was and wonderful that was, and there's Hebrew teaching there, and this one's come out, and another one's come out. He spoke for over ten minutes and I could stand it no longer. I interrupted him. I said, excuse me Mr. Prime Minister we are not getting a proper picture of the situation, surely Nehemiah you know that so and so and so and so. Wait, he said, you haven't given me time to come to it yet! He wasn't going to say anything of the bad side at all. There was no anti-Semitism, there was no mention of any harassment, no mention of persecution, no mention of any arrests, no mention of anything of that sort. And if I had not interrupted him, I'm convinced there would not have been. But I wanted to force his hand, and he had to, to a certain extent.

At the end of the meeting we all chatted individually with Begin for few moments and then I produced my letter, a copy of the letter, I said, last June

our mutual friend Cyril Stein brought you a letter from me. (Imitating Begin) "Ah, a very good man Cyril Stein, a very good man. How is he? Give him my regards." He's very well but he asked me to remind you that he brought you a letter from me, last June, about Soviet Jewry. And I presume that you haven't had time to read it because I haven't heard from you about it. Here is a copy, I would very much like you to read it. I promise you I will read it and I'm sure I will read it with interest. And he reached behind and put it on the desk behind him. And I know for a fact, because I saw it, 10 minutes later it was in Nehemiah Levanon's hands.

At that point I despaired of every Israeli politician. And I came to the conclusion then that, although it may have been part of their ideas that they were afraid of the emigrés from the Soviet Union voting for the right or for the left, but at that point I began to wonder how correct I was, although most people thought it was so. And then I began to look into it more closely, I found that the Likud government showed no greater inclination to do anything for Soviet Jewry than had Golda Meir or Yitzhak Rabin. The more I looked at it, all we were getting was complete opposition and sabotage, and playing it down, damping the fires down all the way through, trying to stop us doing anything active. I mean there are so many examples I can think of: Col. Davidovich and his funeral, and Victor Polsky, and every instance I can think of where they tried to prevent us doing anything active. And the whole point in having a National Conference in the United States and of having a National Council in England was to have something that was run by the "Establishment," and therefore controlled by the Israelis. Until a few years ago, the "Establishment," certainly in this country, and perhaps in America as well, always looked upon everything that came from Israel as from *kodesh kadashim*, the *sanctum sanctorum*, the holy of holies, and what the Israeli say we must follow, we must do. This is changed somewhat, particularly since the invasion of Lebanon. But as regards Soviet Jewry, I don't think that has changed. The "Establishment" still takes the attitude that whatever the Israelis say is right and we must do that. Its certainly so with the National Council here. They are nothing but lackeys of the Israelis.

L: It's also true of Jerry Goodman in the States. It's the same. Let me ask you this, you had mentioned that you had drawn up a bill of particulars, the seven page document. Do you have a copy of that by any chance? I would hope you do, it sounds like a wonderful document.

M: I'll try to find it, but I don't know.

L: I would appreciate greatly getting a copy. It sounds like you have distilled a lot of experience into it.

M: Unfortunately we went to Israel in 1980 for a year and then again in 1982 for a year. When we went in 1982 we rented this house to Japanese. I moved all my personal things away from here. A lot of my files and a great deal of the correspondence and the circulars [bulletins] all of which I had a complete set and so on were left in the office of the 35's. You haven't seen where the 35's work?

L: No.

M: They are living now — existing — in very cramped quarters. But where they were, at the time I left all my materials with them when we went to Israel on vacation, they were in what we called the laundry, it was a building that had been a laundry and they had got possession of it because the owners had said it was being handed over to wreckers for the building to be demolished and they were going to put another building up—the land had been purchased. As this building was due to be demolished they didn't have to pay any rent. So they had it rent free. But this place, if you press hard against the wall, you were afraid the wall might come down. The time did come when they had to move out. Now, I had all my things in apple-pie order. They had a boy there, he's a young man now, Ya'akov, an albino, a Moroccan, he's very good and he knew exactly how I put my things and he was going to look after them when they moved out. Unfortunately the time came, they delayed and dallied so long that eventually the wreckers came along and said, "Ladies I'm sorry you've got to move out because the day after tomorrow without fail if you're in or not we are knocking this building down." So the following day they had to move everything out. And it rained like it rained today. And, poor Ya'akov and many others were rushing and a lot of my stuff got lost. A lot of it got ruined with the rain; some of it was taken into a garage of a lady named Gish Robins, some went into Joyce Simpson's garage, some I managed to salvage and its still in a big carton in her garage. But what's in there I don't know. I have managed to get some out; a lot I've thrown away. If there is any of this there that I can find, I'll let you have it.

L: It will be most appreciated.

M: I was saying that I feel it's not merely being a case of them feeling that the voters would go to the right. I began to wonder how correct that was. And I've really now come to the conclusion from what I see the way the absorption is that they do not want aliya. Its not only what we call the Office With No Name but its also the officials of the government. And, especially now there are a number of North Africans there: David Levy has a very important say in the government; he is from the Likud, you know; and he's a North African, Moroccan I think. I think he is a good man in his own way but he has no interest in Soviet Jewry, which has always disturbed me because we have always felt that Jews should be concerned about Jews wherever they come from. We were concerned about Jews from the Yemen and from North Africa as much as we were of the other Jews. I happen to spend all my time with Soviet Jewry because I happen to have studied Russian and took an interest in the Soviet Union.

The absorption on the whole of Soviet Jews has been abominable. I won't go in to detail about it because you know as much about it as I do. But one of the things that disturbed me very very much (there has been an improvement recently in the press) is the attitude of the ordinary members of the public. So many whom I speak to, who have no connection to Soviet Jewry, have nothing but bad words to say about Soviet Jews: "those who come to Israel only want a Volvo and a villa, and are only concerned about improving their own lot, they don't work and they don't do this and they don't do that. Nothing but scathing criticism of them. Its rare to come across Jews in Israel who have good words for Soviet Jews, which I find so disturbing. Its not disgusting, its disturbing, it hurts me to hear it. After all, were talking about Jews. With all their faults, were the Jews who came from Russia in the earlier days all good people? Or, were those who came from Poland such marvelous people? Or the Jews who came from England such wonderful people?

Among a very large number of the ordinary members of the public in Israel one of the major criticisms is, "why don't they come here. We go to the extend of sending them visas and they come out on Israeli visa and they don't come here." And one man in Norma's kibbutz, who comes from Poland, he said something I shall never forget, "they don't come to Israel, and I hate them." To hear a Jew in Israel say about other Jews who don't come to Israel, "I hate them," oh!

We were in Israel only a few weeks ago talking with people who used to be neighbors of ours, when we lived in Ramat Ha-Sharon for a year. Very nice couple, he's from Krakow, came from Poland in 1946 and I forget where she was from but she's many years younger and came out when she was only a small child. She didn't say very much about it but he began asking me, "why don't they come here, these Jews. " This man has two children who were born in Israel, a son and a daughter. One is married to an Israeli; they live in Toronto. The son is married to a Canadian girl and they live in Toronto. They have no intention whatsoever of going back to Israel. And he's got the damn cheek to sit there and criticize Soviet Jews who don't go to Israel! His own children are *sabras* and they've left the country. And, he's a very nice man. But the whole public has been brainwashed. And this is where Nehemiah Levanon's policy has been successful.

We have close friends, he was born in Damascus and his family went to Jaffa in Palestine when he was, I think, 12, he's now 74 or 75, two or three years older than us. And, he married a girl from Leeds, where Muriel comes from. In the early days in the Zionist movement here when we were youngsters he was our Hebrew teacher. So we know them very well and have been friends for many years, they live in Israel in Ramat Ha-Sharon. We were talking to them a while ago and they were very bitter in their condemnation about the Jews who came out of the Soviet Union and did not go to Israel and all for forcing them to go: putting them on direct flights and they must come here, "we must force them to come here." I said, "look you have sufficient trouble with people who come here and who are dissatisfied, you have sufficient trouble with *sabras* who are dissatisfied, do you want to force people who don't want to come here, who will be much more than dissatisfied they'll be will be rebellious". He said, " Yes, why not? Do you think all the refugees after World War II wanted to come here? We brought them here by force!"

L: (Laugh) That's a rewriting of history I suppose.

M: I had no answer to that.

L: The point you alluded to about Nehemiah's policy being successful, I gather you mean he was successful in not painting a very grim picture about the plight of Soviet Jews so the public didn't appreciate what they were going through.

M: Not only that, but in getting the public to be of the opinion that those

Jews who came from the Soviet Union into Israel were not particularly good people and yet we must condemn those — whom we don't — and who don't come here.

L: In what way did that information get out to the public? Was Nehemiah responsible for news report and the like?

M: I'm quite convinced of it that it was done from his office.

L: I had not heard that before.

M: And through the press. Now, the press in the last two or three years has changed around a lot, particularly in the last 12 months since Sharansky came out. In that respect, Sharansky's coming out has been a very good thing as far as we have been concerned, as far as the campaign has been concerned. But for many many years the Hebrew press and the Jerusalem Post either had very little about Soviet Jewry or what they had was not very favorable. Within the last 12 months there's been a great change, and much more has been done, particularly in the Jerusalem Post. In that respect we have to thank Martin Gilbert; with the name he has he's been able to get things into the paper. Together with Martin and Louis Rapaport they have a full page every fortnight, every two weeks a full page on Soviet Jewry: usually it includes a short article by Martin Gilbert, Louis Rapaport writes something; and Enid Wurtman.

L: Enid is in Israel now?

M: Enid and Stu have been in Israel a number of years now. She unfortunately works for the "Establishment, "she works for the Public Committee for Soviet Jews. This is one of the reasons that Dina Beilina wouldn't talk to her. I don't know if you know that the attitude of the Israeli government toward Sharansky was always that "we want nothing at all to do with him." I don't know if I'm telling you anything new on this.

L: No. I would imagine that they would treat him with suspicion; and for good and sufficient reasons—in their book. Since he was associated very closely with the Democrats, they certainly would believe him of having split loyalties.

M: He committed the heinous crime of a Zionist who worked closely with

non-Zionists and with Jews. This is one of the points which I vehemently disagree with their point of view. Because they are always telling us that the establishment and we should get support from Parliament and the Church. But heaven forbid that we should help them over a Christian. We must never raise our voices over a non-Jew, because we must not appear to be anti-Soviet. Now, whenever I speak in public I refer to our Jewish leaders and I say, either, "it saddens me," or depending on the audience, "it sickens me when I hear our leaders say we are not anti-Soviet. I say, without fear or favor, I, Michael Sherbourne, am Anti-Soviet. And I will be as long as the Soviet government is acting in an anti-Semitic fashion." Our leaders (and I've heard it over and over again) Grenville Janner (I've great respect for him and I'll be very sorry if he's not elected in this next Parliament) and June Jacobs (I've no time for her) start off a meeting by saying, "it is not part of our platform to say that we are anti-Soviet..."

Back to Sharansky. With him being a very outspoken leader they were afraid of him. And, I can see now they have got good reason to be afraid of him because he's saying things now they don't like at all.

L: He has a world platform.

M: Yes, that is because of us and in spite of them. If it hadn't been for us, the world would never have known of Sharansky. Now, Avital was marvelous. We could not have done the campaign without Avital. But, Avital would have got nowhere without us. After all, who opened the door to the White House? Who opened the door to the State Department? Who opened the door to No. 10 Downing Street? She didn't do it by herself, we had to do it for her: with the contacts Irene Manekofsky had, Lynn Singer had, and that we had here with the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister's Office. But, she was absolutely first class and she also had a certain charisma. So, they were upset with the way we were able to push the campaign on his [Sharansky's] behalf. When he was first arrested, June Jacobs said, "He's a naughty boy, he shouldn't have been mixing with dissidents." And I heard her with my own ears (I was one of about five or six people) where she said, "well, we all know that Sharansky really is a spy. And this was a attitude she got not from her own thoughts but from the Office in Tel-Aviv. They did nothing for him the whole time. They weren't interested at all the whole time he was in jail.

A number of members of the Knesset and several U. S. Congressmen were going into the Soviet Union a few years back (1980 or 1981). This is before Nehemiah retired. And he briefed them in Tel-Aviv. One of them said "you've given us the list of who we should see in Moscow, but who should we see on behalf of Sharansky?" Nehemiah's reply was, "Sharansky is nothing at all to do with the State of Israel." And this was their attitude. The Israeli government and their officials did nothing at all for him and in fact the press, over all those years [that he was in prison], both the Jerusalem Post and the Hebrew press took no interest in Sharansky, occasionally there was a little note of it but took almost no notice whatsoever.

When he was released it was seen that he came across that bridge in Berlin accompanied by two United States ambassadors. Now when it was known that he definitely was going to come out, the group who are called the Center of Information—whom we call the Boys, who are not establishment, several ex-Soviet refuseniks, Yosef Mendeleovich is the chairman (he's great) and Yuri Shtern, Shmuel Azar and one or two others (and they're very good) —booked an apron on the runway at Ben Gurion Airport where VIP's land. When the Israeli government saw Sharansky coming across the bridge, and when they heard of the reception he'd been accorded by the United States government, and how Reagan was going to phone him, and they heard then that the Boys had booked this strip, they cancelled the Boys' booking. Then, they took over, within two or three hours before Sharansky was due to arrive. Until then they did absolutely nothing, were not going to receive him in any way whatsoever. But when they saw what the American government were doing and the publicity he got, their hand was forced and they had no alternative.

L: What has happened to the groups and individuals that proceeded Mendeleovich like MAOZ, Action Committee for Newcomers, Ann Shenkar, Leah Slovina.

M: Oh, Leah Slovina, she's become very establishment. She took over the Jewish Agency office for acceptance of immigrants and runs the office in Vienna. And who do you think who is with her? Dov Sperling is there. He is very, very pro-establishment now.

L: My God, what a turnaround. He and Yasha Kazakov made quite a pair in the early 70s fighting the Israeli establishment.

M: Yasha Kazakov works in the Office where Nehemiah use to work—the Office With No Name.

L: Who is head of that Office these days?

M: A man by the name of Bartov. Before that it was someone named Lapidot. We were recently, several years ago at a conference of the UCSJ in Jerusalem and He [Bartov] came to address the people and we were firing question at him. Sitting next to him was Sara Frankel. I don't know how very well you know her. She was the correspondent for Kol Israel broadcasting to the Soviet Union. But, she doesn't know any Russian; she used to speak to a number of Refuseniks in Hebrew, particularly with Yelena Sirotenko. Do you remember that name?

L: Oh yes, yes. A slight young lady, quiet. In fact she's in that picture I've showed you taken in Luntz's apartment during my trip to the Soviet Union in 1974.

M: Married a Ukrainian and dropped all her Zionism. But Sara Frankel is a bitch of the first waters. (She became a [Israeli] consul in New York. She was worse there than she had been on Kol Israel.) I got a message, this goes back many years now, that Slepak had been trying to get in touch with me, he had an urgent and important message he'd wanted to pass on. He hadn't been able to get through to me but he had managed to get through to Sara Frankel and the message had been given to her, I should get it from her. So I phoned to Tel-Aviv, spoke to Sara Frankel and asked for the information. "Oh", she said, "I passed it to the office." I asked her, "which office?" She said, "you know the office." I said, "you mean Levanon's office?" "I've given it to the people who will deal with it," she said. I never got it and I don't know what was in that message. By the time we finished having our argument over several weeks, the importance of it had completely gone. This is typical of what went on.

L: When was this?

M: This was after 1977, in the late 70s. Anandale

L: Now, let's get back to Sharansky. I had a communique from you

concerning him, in April 1977. I checked my files before this trip and the letter seems to be misplaced. Do you recall what it was about?

M: Yes, I think I do. On the Sunday morning shortly after Sharansky was arrested, Doreen Gainsford had a meeting in the 35's premises at Anandale. Linda Alexeyeva was there and it was agreed that we should work together with her and Bukovsky, who was already out, and Lydia Voronina was there and one or two others. To work together with them and with the Zionist groups—the Jewish groups—and through the establishment. Because it was important: as everyone in Moscow had been saying if Sharansky falls, we shall all fall, Sharansky is terribly important. So we agreed that we should work in all directions, including Sharansky's non-Jewish friends—and they were very close friends, if you remember.

Doreen sent out a memo about this. And within a day or so I received, amongst a number of other people, from the Israeli consul here, Shmuel Hatzor, a note saying that he'd been distressed to hear that there had been a meeting at which he hadn't been present. Incidentally, he had been invited to it but didn't turn up, didn't think it was worth while, it was only about Sharansky you see, it wasn't important. He was surprised to see that that it had been agreed to work with the dissidents and non-Jews. Let me go back a little bit. He must have said something like this, as far as I can remember. "This morning I received on my desk two communications one was from the 35's" (which said what I just told you) "the other was a Telex from Avital Sharansky which reads as follows" (and the wording was something like this) "Request that you do not work together with non-Jews because this would dilute the opportunity to work properly for my husband." He then went on to say, "Some people, who think they know better, seem to feel that they should work their own way and work with dissidents. But the message coming from his wife says that we should work on these lines."

This really got up my nose. And, I wrote him a letter that I sent out to a large number of people, including yourself probably, saying, "Yesterday Shmuel Hatzor referred to people who think they know better. Well, I'm convinced that I know better than he does. He came into this campaign not as a volunteer but because he was given a job to do so by Nehemiah Levanon. This man knows not a word of Russian, he knows nothing about Russian history, he knows nothing about the history or philosophy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He had, was it, one week or two weeks of training before he was sent here as the man in charge of Soviet

Jewry affairs. I'm convinced I know far more about this situation and Soviet Jews in general. How dare he tell us what to do." I then said, "Isn't it rather a coincidence that so quickly he received a Telex from Avital about the meeting we had on Sunday when she could have obviously not known anything at all about it." I forget the wording; it was something like that; it was a very, very bitter attack on him.

A lot of people were very annoyed with me for writing this. But, I don't regret it for one moment, because I think this is typical of their attitude. Not merely do they say we know best—even though this man had two weeks training. I've been studying the Soviet Union, not since 1950 when I first began studying the Russian language, but going back to 1930, when I was 13. Let me just tell you about this. I was 13, my father took me to a meeting in the East End of London. We went to the meeting at a place called the Assembly Hall which is owned by the Salvation Army. It was very often held for Jewish meetings but this wasn't a Jewish meeting. This was a meeting organized by the Labor Party and the Fabians. On the platform were Lord and Lady Passfield (Sidney and Bertrice Webb), H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw. I don't remember the things that were said at the meeting, except one thing stuck in my mind. Someone in the audience stood up and said, "Can they please tell us something about the effects of the dreadful famine in the Soviet Union." George Bernard Shaw said, "Famine? Nonsense. I never ate so well in all my life." A time when over 12 million people died of starvation in the Soviet Union. I think that might have been the first thing that pushed me to question.

A number of years went by and there came the beginning of the purges and the great trials. There was a very good liberal newspaper here called the News Chronicle and one of their main essayists, an article writer by the name of A. J. Cummings, was present at the trials in Dnepropetrovsk of British engineers, Metro-Vickers, accused of sabotage and they confessed. Of course the whole thing was nonsense. Bukharin and Zinoviev and one or two others confessed at the trial; at first they didn't confess but were sentenced to 10 years and then brought back to trial again. Immediately after they confessed and were found guilty, they were executed. A. J. Cummings wrote that he was convinced that these confessions were genuine. At this time, it was about 1937 and I was about 20, I said how can it be genuine, how can people who devoted their lives to communism, how could they confess that they were "agents of the imperialist powers?" I had done a little bit of reading about Marxism, not a lot. I'd read Prof. Joad and

Harold Lasky. From that moment I was critical of any thing that happened in the Soviet Union.

Also, as a Zionist we were constantly in conflict with the Communists. It didn't make sense to me that here were people that proclaimed their adherence to humanitarian ideals, to helping amongst other people the Jews, and yet they were opposed to Zionism. It didn't make sense to me. I didn't realize they were merely following the line that was laid down by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow. It struck me that there was something fishy about this. I was constantly at loggerheads with them. I very nearly went to Spain during the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer. A lot of my friends went and one or two of them were killed. Fortunately, I was stopped before I was able to leave home, because I would have regretted it to this day...

L: I want to get from you the names and dates of Nehemiah's representatives in London.

M: The first one I met was Yitzhak Rager. He was followed in 1973, 1974, or something like that, by Ben Rabinovich, a sabra, who knew nothing at all about the Soviet Union. He was followed by Shmuel Hatzor whom I referred to earlier. He was born in Germany, came here as a boy, when a number of children came as refugees just before WW II; went to Israel in 1946, I think, and has ever since lived as a member of K'far Hanasi, the second English kibbutz that was established. Following Hatzor, it was Yehoshua Prat. After that I more or less lost touch with them. There was someone named Aryeh Kedem. I can't remember the name of the one who immediately followed Prat. The present one is Dr. Baruch Gur, who used to be called Guryevich. I think he's Israeli but he speaks Russian. A very intelligent man but follows in the same pattern as all the rest of the Israelis. One thing I remember particularly about him, one of the conferences in Jerusalem, we were sitting out in the open, it was so nice, it was not long after Sharansky had been arrested. Gur was saying various things and Misha Stieglitz, Avital's brother, said something that Gur felt he must answer. He said, "My dear friend" and before he could say anymore Misha said, "You are no friend of mine and you are no friend of my brother-in-law, and you are no friend of Soviet Jewry."

L: You also knew Tzvi Netzer and Ya'acov Yannai?

M: Yes. Ya'acov Yannai to do him credit was in a labor camp for 10 years.

Because he served in a labor camp for ten years and obviously suffered a great deal, he imagines that he knows all the answers. You can't tell him anything because he knows what's its about. And this is one of the tragedies there, some Israeli specialists think that they know all the answers and nobody else does. And you can't tell them anything.

L: His named figured into the Marina Tiemkin case. He apparently at that time was in the Tel-Aviv office. He was trying to put the lid on Prof. Tiemkin's attempts to get back his daughter. And one of the pieces of disinformation that came from him, specifically, was that in the Soviet Union, if the parents are divorced, the child goes with the mother.

M: That is completely wrong, because the courts had given Marina to her father.

L: In any event, it was a move by Yannai to discredit Tiemkin in his attempt to keep his daughter; to indicate that the mother had rights too; that the Soviet government was acting legally; and that we should not get in between parents in such situations. In the States that line was picked up by some of the major Jewish organizations which tried to halt the campaign to help Prof. Tiemkin.

Now, what was Zvi Netzer's role in Nehemiah's office?

M: He was second in command.

L: He was Nehemiah's deputy.

M: Oh, yes. A very smooth man.

L: I met him in the very early days, in the mid-60s. When Nehemiah first came to the States, Zvi Netzer came soon after. We had him over our house on occasion. Now, let me ask you about telephone calls to the Soviet Union, in the time just before and after the big cutoff.

M: It was August 1972 on Nixon's first visit to the Soviet Union when a very large number of Jewish telephones were cut.

L: You were the one who was making most of the calls from England. Is that correct? And from Canada it was Gennia Intrator.

M: Yes, from Canada. And I'll tell you about her in a moment.

L: Then from the U. S. there were several other people. Representatives of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, and then an individual, under the direct orders of Nehemiah, Noam Shadovsky. Did you know him at all?

M: I met him for the first time a few weeks ago in Israel.

L: Do you know what his background is? I know that he was principal of a Jewish day school in the New York City area and that's about all.

M: No, I don't know much more than that.

L: From Israel, in the early 70s, to my knowledge there were several of the Soviet olim who were making phone calls from Israel to the Soviet Union, either independently or paid for by Nehemiah. The independents didn't last too long because he put the lid on them. There were people like Meir Gelfand and later when Polsky got out he was making calls.

M: Not very much.

L: OK. Do you know of any one else who were making calls from Israel?

Muriel S.: Dan Roginsky was making some.

M: Yes, Dan Roginsky. Boris Ainbinder.

L: Both of those seemed to have fallen under the influence of Nehemiah's office. Was it so?

M: No. They had to tread a very careful line. There were others speaking to their own families. I can't think of the names at this moment. But Noam Shadovsky was very much the establishment.

L: Absolutely. I know that.

M: And so was Genny Intrator.

L: I've heard that from you and others—people who were unhappy that she was not passing on information that she received.

M: My first eye opener in that was the trial of Michael Shtern, Dr. Shtern. What was that 1975 or 1974? What happened was that Aleck Goldfarb, Lova Lazaris and another went down to Vinnitsa. They were attending the trial and were phoning to Moscow each day. Aleck was giving the information to, of all people, Leonid Tsipin.

L: Ah, yes I met him in Moscow in 1974 and had talked to him a number of time before by phone.

M: He was not like Lipavsky and [name garbled on tape]; they broke him [Tsipin]. At the time, I think he was (pause)...

L: Legitimate.

M: Yes. And I was phoning every night to Tsipin. I was getting down on the tape recorder the information he was getting from Aleck Goldfarb and I was translating it into English. I tried to get through to Enid [Wurtman] or Glenn [Richter]. I couldn't get to them, so I phone Gennya. I gave her all the information for five or six days. The next day I couldn't get through to her number. So I phoned Enid in Philadelphia and said to her, "I got more information for you; this will continue on all the information I have been giving you the last few days." She said, "what information?" I said the information about the Dr. Shtern trial, through Gennya Intrator which she has been passing on to you." She said, "I haven't heard a word from her." The information I'd been given to Intrator had all been passed on to the Israelis and all disappeared. Fortunately I had it on tape. But if left to her there would have been no mention of Dr. Shtern at all.

L: Gennya at one time was not that way. I think, in her case, she had a love of power and influence which turn her head and her loyalties.

M: I think you're right.

L: What, to your knowledge, happened to the information from calls, made from Israel or the West, under the sponsorship of Nehemiah's office? I have conjectured that the information went into his files and never saw the light

of day again, except for those bits and pieces he wanted released. Do you know what criteria he used for the information he did release?

M: I can only assume he did it very carefully. He felt he had to release a certain amount of material. And, when he found that I was no longer working hand-in-glove with him but was giving information out on my own or to others, particularly the 35s, who eventually, when I found that my circular was getting to much for me, they took over from me. They began doing the circular which became the weekly circular. Do you see it at all?

L: No. I did get them up to about 1980 or so.

M: I'll give you the last few. When Nehemiah found that I was getting information out and I was getting information apart from him, they had to show some semblance of doing something. And they had to publish some information. Very often it was the information that I had as well and they were duplicating it. But they had no alternative.

L: In regard to individuals serving prison sentences in the Soviet Union, certain of these have been left off of prisoner lists circulated by the Jewish establishment organizations in the West. When I was in Moscow in 1974 with Zev Yaroslavsky, Si Frumkin and Bob Wolf, one of the conversations I had with Slepak and Luntz raised this point. They said that they had heard that Yuri Federov and Aleksey Murzhenko [two non-Jewish defendants in the 1970 Leningrad "hi-jacking" trial] were deleted from the lists of prisoners they had sent out. I assured them that this was not the case with lists the Union of Councils distributed. I said that when I returned to the States I would contact Jerry Goodman [Director, National Conference for Soviet Jewry] and find out what he had to say about the deletion of Federov's and Murzhenko's names. I did speak to Jerry when I got back and conveyed the message from the Moscow activist about including all names on their lists. It was not a fruitful conversation and nothing, in fact, changed; Federov's and Murzhenko's names continued to be deleted from lists published by the American Jewish establishment.

Do you know of other cases like this where individuals were deliberately excluded from general or specific lists?

M: A very large number. Your example was of non-Jews. There were a very large number of Jews who were not recognized.

L: And that is what I wanted to get to. The reasons for this, in some cases, struck me as arbitrary.

M: It comes down to they decide, they know best, who is and who is not a genuine, what they call, "Prisoner of Zion." Gluzman, for example, they don't recognize him. There is a man named Kagan, whose family is in Israel and who begged us to do something for him. His father is a musician and composer in Leningrad and made quite a bit of money. When they left, he, another son, and his wife and I think a daughter, they couldn't take money out with them. So they left a large sum of money with a son they left back there, Lazar. The family had no sooner gone than Lazar was arrested and charged with embezzlement and given a 12-year sentence and he's serving it now. There is a Dr. David Blatnoi, from Alma Alta whose family are in Israel and they begged us to do something for him. He was arrested on the false charge of bribery. They showed us the law, which says if a doctor is given gifts, after he has completed his treatment, that it is not to be considered bribes in any way. I've seen that law myself; they sent me photocopies of it. But the Israelis don't want to know. He's doing a ten-year sentence.

L: Why do you think that in these cases, having to do with alleged forbidden financial transactions, that the Israelis have been silent?

M: Because the Israelis want to play safe all the time: maybe he did embezzle, maybe he is just a crook.

L: So the least suspicion, they will stay away from it.

M: There are very many like that. Ida Nudel used to spit blood on the telephone talking to me about this, because she would find out all sorts of such cases and the Israelis just did not want to know; and so the establishment didn't know. I remember one name particularly, such an unusual name, Rostislav Eppelfeld. He had been doing Zionist propaganda but they accused him of what ever it was, I don't remember, and the Israelis didn't want to know of him. Ida used to give me ever so many names of that sort. I would say it ran into several dozen. And, I would say that at the moment there are probably 30 or 40 who are serving sentences. The establishment don't want to know. Now they talk about there being one Prisoner of Zion in the Soviet Union, Magarik, and then there will be no more. And they can close down the campaign.

L: Wasn't Stella Goldberg in that category of "the untouchables?"

M: Yes, because her husband wasn't a Zionist, he was a defector. In any case although he did live in Israel for sometime, he lives in Germany, I think he's with the Frankfurt Philharmonic, he's a cellist.

L: Misha Eppleman from Leningrad, who I knew well, was also a defector and even though he went to live in Israel, Nehemiah's office didn't want anything to do with helping his wife, Polina, and his daughter, Julia, leave the Soviet Union. Misha, Polina and their daughter now live in the Boston area.

[End of interview, 5/19/1987.]

This transcript of the recorded interview was reviewed for accuracy by Michael Sherbourne, 9/5/2000.