

## Canadian Jewish Studies Études juives canadiennes



# Let My People Go: Calgary Community Support for the Free Soviet Jewry Movement

Saundra Lipton

Volume 40, printemps 2025

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1118239ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.25071/1916-0925.40419>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Association for Canadian Jewish Studies / Association d'études juives canadiennes

### ISSN

1198-3493 (imprimé)  
1916-0925 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Lipton, S. (2025). Let My People Go: Calgary Community Support for the Free Soviet Jewry Movement. *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes*, 40, 88–111. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1916-0925.40419>

### Résumé de l'article

Les activistes dans les petits centres de population juive ont contribué de manière significative au succès du mouvement juif soviétique. Pourtant, leur activisme est pratiquement ignoré dans la littérature. En examinant la diversité de la défense des droits des Juif.ves soviétiques à Calgary, cet article montre comment un petit centre juif a contribué au mouvement plus large, comblant ainsi la lacune concernant l'implantation du mouvement des Juif.ves soviétiques dans les petites villes du Canada. En plaçant l'activité de Calgary dans un contexte national plus large, cette étude met en évidence les défis démographiques et géographiques qui ont à la fois entravé et façonné la campagne des Juif.ves soviétiques de Calgary, tout en mettant en lumière sa relation souvent controversée avec le principal organe directeur juif de l'époque, le Congrès juif canadien.

© Saundra Lipton, 2025



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Saundra Lipton

**Let My People Go: Calgary Community Support for  
the Free Soviet Jewry Movement**

## Abstract

*Activists in small Jewish population centres contributed significantly to the success of the Soviet Jewry movement. Yet, their activism is virtually disregarded in the literature. Through examination of the diversity of Soviet Jewry advocacy in Calgary, this paper demonstrates how one small Jewish centre contributed to the broader movement, thereby addressing the lacuna regarding the Soviet Jewry movement's implementation in smaller cities across Canada. By positioning the Calgary activity within the larger national context, this study highlights the demographic and geographic challenges that both hindered and shaped the Calgary Soviet Jewry campaign while shedding light on its often-contentious relationship to the period's primary Jewish governing body, the Canadian Jewish Congress.*

## Résumé

*Les activistes dans les petits centres de population juive ont contribué de manière significative au succès du mouvement juif soviétique. Pourtant, leur activisme est pratiquement ignoré dans la littérature. En examinant la diversité de la défense des droits des Juif.ves soviétiques à Calgary, cet article montre comment un petit centre juif a contribué au mouvement plus large, comblant ainsi la lacune concernant l'implantation du mouvement des Juif.ves soviétiques dans les petites villes du Canada. En plaçant l'activité de Calgary dans un contexte national plus large, cette étude met en évidence les défis démographiques et géographiques qui ont à la fois entravé et façonné la campagne des Juif.ves soviétiques de Calgary, tout en mettant en lumière sa relation souvent controversée avec le principal organe directeur juif de l'époque, le Congrès juif canadien.*

Over five hundred Calgarians gathered on January 8, 1971, to protest on behalf of Soviet Jews seeking escape from state-sponsored antisemitism and cultural and religious annihilation.<sup>1</sup> Chaired by community leader Maurice Paperny and co-sponsored by the Calgary Jewish Community Council (CJCC) and the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, Western Region, this rally, along with two youth-led protests held a few months earlier, marked the beginning of twenty years of Calgary-based advocacy in support of Soviet Jewry.<sup>2</sup>

Although Soviet Jewry activism in Calgary mirrored initiatives developed by national organizations, the mode and magnitude of implementation by a small, relatively isolated Jewish community provides an important perspective in the historiography of this movement.<sup>3</sup> Former activist Yossi Klein Halevi has noted that the global reach of the movement was a key factor in its success, that “even when the protests were small, they were magnified by their ubiquitousness.”<sup>4</sup> This holds true for protests staged in small Jewish communities as much as it does larger Jewish population centres. Activism in those communities represents a significant element in the success

of the Soviet Jewry movement. Yet, these activities are virtually disregarded in the scholarly literature.

The historiography of the Soviet Jewry movement includes many works that describe and analyze actions at the national level or within large Jewish communities, but little scholarship has delved into the contributions of smaller Jewish centers.<sup>5</sup> The few works that focus on the Canadian movement are limited in viewpoint and scope. Both former activist Wendy Eisen's detailed memoir-history of the Canadian movement and Mindy Avrich-Skapinker's extensive thesis on the Toronto case were published in the mid-1990s, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and thus lack the perspective afforded by the passage of time.<sup>6</sup> Eisen's work on the Canadian movement relegates Calgary's efforts to a few brief mentions and a footnote with misconstrued information.<sup>7</sup> While historian Harold Troper has surveyed and analyzed the Canadian campaign more recently, his work focuses primarily on the movement's initial years in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

Contemporaneous media reports also concentrated almost exclusively on activism in larger centres. For instance, the 1970 sentencing of nine Soviet Jews and two non-Jews to death or labour camps for their role in hijacking an airplane in an attempt to escape to the West provoked worldwide protests, including in Calgary.<sup>9</sup> However, the US-based Jewish Telegraphic Agency's coverage of Canadian rallies noted activities only in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg—the country's four largest Jewish communities at the time.<sup>10</sup>

This omission evinces the invisibility of the smaller Jewish centres to the national Jewish institutions and the challenges faced by these communities in ensuring broader awareness of local activities. Sydney Harris, chair of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) national committee for Soviet Jewry, acknowledged this communication gap. At a 1974 meeting of the Toronto-based Steering Committee for Soviet Jewry, Harris identified the need to ensure all Canadian Soviet Jewry groups were cognizant of activities throughout Canada.<sup>11</sup>

By analyzing Calgary's Soviet Jewry activity in light of its wider national context, this article addresses a critical gap in our understanding of Soviet Jewry advocacy in smaller cities across Canada. It highlights the demographic and geographic challenges that both hindered and shaped the Calgary Soviet Jewry campaign, and also how Soviet Jewry advocacy in Calgary contributed to the broader movement. It also sheds light on the relationship between the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and geographically remote Jewish population hubs. Soviet Jewry activism detailed in this paper has been ferreted out of the limited documentary evidence available in archives (minutes, correspondence, newsletters, reports), newspaper articles, oral testimonies and reflections, and documentation provided by former local activists and their supporters.

## The Free Soviet Jewry Movement in Canada

Soviet Jewry activism in Canada began to build in the 1960s, when handfuls of Canadian Jews began picketing the Soviet embassy in Ottawa.<sup>12</sup> Although the CJC first held a conference on the direction of Soviet Jewry advocacy in Canada in 1966, it would take another six years before Congress established a cross-organizational Soviet Jewry committee.<sup>13</sup> It was not until the 1970s, however, that grassroots Soviet Jewry advocacy began in earnest with tactics including press releases, rallies, letters, telegrams, and petitions. All of that was done in an attempt to harness the power of the media to educate the Canadian community, to provide support to Soviet Jewry, and to pressure the Soviet government to provide full human rights to their Jewish citizens or permit them to emigrate.<sup>14</sup>

The 1970s also signaled a strong decade-long period of Soviet-Canadian détente. Political scientist Leigh Sarty noted, "As Soviet-America relations began to falter mid-decade, relations with Canada regained prominence in the Soviet effort to stem the tide against détente."<sup>15</sup> CJC engaged in quiet diplomatic efforts to leverage Canada's improving Soviet relations. In behind-the-scenes meetings, CJC representatives encouraged Canadian government officials to advocate on behalf of Soviet Jewry through diplomatic means. Politicians including Flora MacDonald, a member of parliament from Ontario, participated in the Canadian Parliamentary Group for Soviet Jewry formed in 1976 at the request of the CJC.<sup>16</sup> Though Pierre Trudeau's government provided limited support for foreign human rights issues, Canadian diplomats did address Soviet Jewish emigration with their Soviet counterparts.<sup>17</sup> A 1982 article in the Calgary newspaper *The Jewish Star* noted former Minister of Foreign Affairs Flora MacDonald's disclosure "that the release of [Anatoly] Shcharansky was a condition for the resumption of the Canadian-Soviet dialogue abandoned after the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979."<sup>18</sup> In the 1980s, CJC continued its efforts to create support for Soviet Jewry at the federal level through various initiatives including sponsoring trips for MPs to experience first-hand the suffering of Soviet Jews.<sup>19</sup>

Soviet Jewry advocacy whether conducted through quiet diplomacy, or grassroots efforts remained a significant issue worldwide from the late 1960s until 1991. The 1990s ushered in the end of the over two-decade movement concomitant with the opening of the Iron Curtain to freer Jewish emigration and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> In the following decades, millions of Jews emigrated from the former Soviet Union seeking escape from challenging political, social and economic conditions.<sup>21</sup>

## Calgary Activism

Calgary welcomed its first permanent Jewish residents in 1898. By the 1910s there were over six hundred Jewish citizens, 1.5 percent of the total population, and key Jewish infrastructure was in place, including a cemetery, burial society, synagogue, and school, as well as cultural organizations. A sizable portion of Calgary's early Jewish population had roots in the Russian Empire.<sup>22</sup> During the years of the Soviet Jewry movement, Calgary's Jewish population exploded with an influx of immigrants from Quebec, South Africa, Israel, and the Soviet Union. By 1991, the Jewish population of 7,255 had doubled since the early 1970s.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the period of the Soviet Jewry movement, the attention and financial resources of the Calgary Jewish community's leadership were consumed by the challenges of this dramatic demographic increase and by other pressing issues, including antisemitism (in particular the high-profile hate speech trials of Alberta high school teacher James Keegstra in the 1980s) and Jewish education.<sup>24</sup>

Soviet Jewry advocacy in Calgary began in 1970 with initiatives spearheaded by Calgary youth.<sup>25</sup> In the early 1970s, the CJCC partnered with other organizations to support Soviet Jewry.<sup>26</sup> In 1972, Calgary Hadassah-WIZO (CHW) public affairs committee chair and Soviet Jewry activist Sophie Kettner proposed to the CJCC that the CHW's public affairs committee collaborate with CJCC's Community Relations Committee (CRC) to coordinate efforts in support of Soviet Jewry and other public affairs issues.<sup>27</sup> By 1974, the CRC had established a sub-committee, the Calgary Committee for Soviet Jewry (CCSJ), to lead activity in this area, with Kettner taking on a leadership role.<sup>28</sup> The CCSJ, considered by CJC to be a regional chapter of the Canadian Committee for Soviet Jewry, organized activities and encouraged Calgary Jewry "to respond to our brothers' cries for help."<sup>29</sup> Most Soviet Jews who requested permission to leave faced denials and were termed *refuseniks*. Calgary Soviet immigrants, Anna and Jacob Gelt's first unsuccessful 1974 emigration application marked them as betrayers of the Soviet Union and the Gelts, like other refuseniks, were subsequently dismissed from their jobs.<sup>30</sup> Under Eliot Cohen's leadership in the late 1970s, the CCSJ appealed to the community to create "a scream of protest that could be heard loudly and clearly throughout the World" through petitions to the Soviet embassy, telephone calls and letters to refuseniks, speakers on Soviet Jewry, and committee membership.<sup>31</sup> During her term heading the CCSJ from 1979 to 1981, Rena Cohen addressed local Jewish groups, organized rallies, submitted articles to the Jewish press, encouraged letters and cards to refuseniks, and liaised with the media.<sup>32</sup>

Local women's organizations were also actively engaged in advocacy, predominantly CHW and the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), as were Jewish youth groups, synagogue clergy, B'nai B'rith and the Calgary newspaper, *The Jewish Star*. Among these Calgary organizations, only NCJW appears to have established a local Soviet Jewry committee.<sup>33</sup> CHW activism was conducted under the umbrella of the

public affairs committee. Soviet Jewry was a frequent topic of CHW meetings and one chapter even considered changing its name to the “Soviet Jewry chapter.”<sup>34</sup> As in Toronto, Calgary’s efforts to aid Soviet Jews in their struggle for freedom of religion and free movement were largely supported by women.<sup>35</sup> Over the twenty-year campaign, four women were key leaders for Calgary initiatives: Sophie Kettner (early to mid-1970s), Rena Cohen and Fay Schwartz (late 1970s and early 1980s), and Gayl Veinotte (mid-1980s). Calgary Jewish activists and clergy advocating for Soviet Jewry were drawn from a cross-section of denominations. In 1977, as part of commemoration for fourteen Jewish intellectuals and artists murdered under Stalin, both Orthodox rabbi Louis Tuchman of Shaarey Tzedec and his Conservative colleague, Rabbi Louis Schechter of Beth Israel Congregation, addressed congregants on the situation for Soviet Jewry.<sup>36</sup> Reform Rabbi Jordon Goldson of Temple B’nai Tikvah (formed in 1979) served with David Cramer as a co-chair of the Committee for Oppressed Jewry.<sup>37</sup>

The level of CCSJ activity fluctuated over time, depending on the commitment and availability of volunteer committee heads. After 1981, the CRC chair and CHW leader Fay Schwartz, challenged to find volunteers for the CJCC Soviet Jewry subcommittee, relied on the few activists from B’nai B’rith, CHW, NCJW and student groups to spearhead local Soviet Jewry advocacy initiatives.<sup>38</sup> Schwartz, very aware of the need for a permanent committee to liaise with CJC and to ensure higher awareness of local activism, continued to appeal for volunteers.<sup>39</sup> Even while NCJW announced plans to reinvigorate the flagging Soviet Jewry campaign in Calgary with a 1984 Chanukah event, the CJCC was unable to fulfill the CCSJ’s request to re-establish a local Soviet Jewry committee “to help co-ordinate and carry out the work of the Canadian committee.”<sup>40</sup> In 1986, the CJCC moved Soviet Jewry responsibilities to the newly formed executive-level Committee for Oppressed Jewry.<sup>41</sup>

Though nationally the Canadian Committee for Soviet Jewry included regional chapters, as well as B’nai B’rith, NCJW and CHW, no such central coordination existed in Calgary. As Rena Cohen noted, “each of the different organizations in Calgary was involved mainly in ‘doing their own thing’ as the time and spirit moved them.”<sup>42</sup> Local attempts in the late 1970s and early 1980s to constitute the CCSJ as an inter-organizational council for overall coordination and support for Soviet Jewry activism were ineffectual amidst waning Jewish community interest.<sup>43</sup> Cohen independently marshaled individuals and organizations through the short-lived Calgary Action Program for Jews in the Soviet Union, which she created in late 1981.<sup>44</sup> On a smaller scale, in 1981 Cohen joined with Shira Waldman of the NCJW and Karen Behar and Gila Lesky of the Orthodox synagogue House of Jacob’s sisterhood to organize the Calgary Committee to Free the Paritsky Family.<sup>45</sup> Upon news of refusenik Alexander Paritsky’s upcoming trial, the committee contacted Calgary MP John Thomson regarding the possibility of a Canadian government observer at the trial.<sup>46</sup> Arrested during the summer of 1981 Alexander Paritsky was formally charged on November 11, 1981 with slandering the Soviet state as a result of his 1976 application to leave

the Soviet Union and was given a three-year prison sentence.<sup>47</sup> Despite the lack of official central coordination, local groups did partner for a number of Soviet Jewry events and some integration of Calgary activity was likely generated organically as a result of the limited pool of Calgary activists simultaneously holding leadership roles in multiple local Jewish organizations.<sup>48</sup>

Most of the Calgary groups active in Soviet Jewry advocacy were part of national Jewish organizations with a Soviet Jewry focus. The national support to the Calgary movement was primarily limited to assistance that could be provided from a distance, namely correspondence, program documentation and sponsorship of speakers. The occasional visits by national staff and lay leaders, though intermittent, served as important morale boosters.<sup>49</sup> Sydney Harris reported that a 1973 visit from CCJS national coordinator Leah Feinman spurred a heightened level of local Soviet Jewry activism in the city.<sup>50</sup> The CJCC, B'nai B'rith, synagogues, NCJW, and CHW all pledged their support for the cause of Soviet Jewry following a 1981 meeting with Genya Intrator, chair of the Canadian Committee for Soviet Jewry.<sup>51</sup> Participation in the 1981 New York Soviet Jewry Conference motivated Fay Schwartz to try to re-energize the moribund Calgary Committee for Soviet Jewry.<sup>52</sup> Distanced from larger centres, Calgary activists experienced fewer opportunities to benefit from the networking and moral support offered by national and international Soviet Jewry conferences.

While taking their cue from central organizations, the Calgary volunteers shouldered the responsibility for implementing local action. Rena Cohen commented that the CCSJ received "little direction and no funding from the local community; we were left to function mainly on our own."<sup>53</sup> Calgary volunteers personally financed activities.<sup>54</sup> Lacking the funding base of the larger centres, the CJCC could not assign dedicated staff to focus on Soviet Jewry. However, some administrative and program support was provided by CJCC executive director Harry Shatz and staff member Gil August in the 1970s and early 1980s and by CJCC director Drew Staffenberg and staff members Pauline Pankowski and Leslie Jacobson in the 1980s.<sup>55</sup>

CJC allocated annual funding to Calgary in support of Soviet Jewry and other Congress activities operated locally by the CJCC.<sup>56</sup> Correspondence between Shatz and the CJC reveals a fractious relationship over perceived funding inequalities and a lack of empathy for the challenges of being so geographically distanced from central Canada. In 1982, CJC national director Stan Urman expressed his concern that Calgary's direct expenditures for community relations and Soviet Jewry, "two of the primary concerns of CJC," only totaled seventy-six dollars for the 1980-81 fiscal year.<sup>57</sup> Shatz noted that the annual CJCC allocation (\$13,150 for 1981) was well under actual expenditures for the locally implemented Congress activities.<sup>58</sup> In the fall of 1981, Urman met with Shatz and other representatives of the CJC-Alberta Region.<sup>59</sup> Issues discussed included the irregular receipt of the annual allocation from CJC and the timing of mailed notices for CJC meetings that failed to account for the



two-week delivery period to Western Canada, limiting participation at Soviet Jewry and other national meetings due to expensive last minute plane fares and scheduling challenges. A further item of concern was the timing of National Office staff visits to Western Canada. The Alberta representatives asked that these meetings be arranged “at the behest of the host community and at times to suit the needs of the community and not the national staff person.”<sup>60</sup> In response to these concerns, Urman reported that CJC would review the relationship of the National office with the various local community councils to create a more effective process for CJC to operate through each community.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time, Urman reiterated Congress’s discontent regarding Calgary’s continuing lack of representation at national meetings.”<sup>62</sup> A few weeks later, Shatz requested clarity as to the best method to keep CJC informed of the variety of locally implemented Congress activities, including Soviet Jewry activism.<sup>63</sup> CJC’s multi-layered overlapping structure of national and regional offices, and national committees with their local branches and affiliated organizations impeded effective communication between CJC and its partners. Shatz further questioned whether CJC really accepted Calgary as its local representative for Soviet Jewry and other Congress activities, closing his 1982 letter to Urman with a request that CJC confirm this delegation of authority.<sup>64</sup> Two years later communication issues remained. In a 1984 memo to Jim Archibald, Executive Director of the CJC, Shatz highlighted CJC’s failure to include appropriate Calgary individuals in the distribution of the communiqué regarding an upcoming Calgary visit in support of Soviet Jewry. Shatz also noted that the proposed week conflicted with the annual meeting of the CJCC.<sup>65</sup>

Historian David Bercuson and Douglas Wertheimer have observed that although purportedly a national organization, the CJC’s “presence in Alberta was weak.”<sup>66</sup> In 1983, CJC president Milton Harris addressed the issue of CJC support to communities outside of central Canada, when he declared his aim to “Canadianize Congress.”<sup>67</sup> Harris also acknowledged how those from the larger Jewish centres find it difficult “to understand the feeling of isolation and neglect which pervades” the smaller Canadian Jewish communities.<sup>68</sup> The distance from the national center of Soviet Jewry activity significantly eroded the level of support encountered by Calgary activists. The absence of onsite staff dedicated to help lead and support Soviet Jewry activism and the small local population base presented obstacles not faced by fellow activists in Toronto and Montreal.<sup>69</sup>

Despite these challenges, a few Calgarians were inspired to devote much effort to serving as advocates for Soviet Jewry. Stuart Altshuler, a historian and former Soviet Jewry activist in the US, identified the perceived connection to Soviet Jewry through family members who had earlier emigrated from Russia and the desire to make up for the failure to do more to save the European Jews during the Holocaust as motivating factors for the US arm of the movement.<sup>70</sup> Though family connections could

certainly apply to Calgary as a relatively young community with a higher proportion of immigrants from the Russian Empire than Toronto or Montreal, Rena Cohen eschewed the suggestion that the Holocaust was a catalyst for action.<sup>71</sup> The impetus for Calgarians appears to be more aligned with the historian Avrich-Skapinker's suggestion that "the plight of Soviet Jews touched off something in the gut, or in the psyche."<sup>72</sup> As Troper pointed out, "even the Canadian born had a nagging sense that 'there but the grace of immigration go I.'"<sup>73</sup> For Cohen, her activism was inspired by the story of refuseniks Maria (Masha) and Vladimir Slepak, which she first heard on a 1978 mission to Israel.<sup>74</sup> Soviet Jewry advocates such as Mona Ravvin were motivated by what they witnessed first-hand as tourists in the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup> Upon her return to Calgary, Ravvin spoke about her trip to the USSR to local CHW chapters and Hebrew school students. The Calgary Hebrew School presentation, in January 1973, was part of a month of programming that included a letter-writing campaign, the mock "arrest" of students, and a lunch equivalent to that served to Soviet prisoners.<sup>76</sup>

Sociologist Shaul Kelner described the American movement as "ubiquitous in communal organizations and woven into the fabric of Jewish Americans' lives at home, on the streets, at prayer, at work and at play."<sup>77</sup> In Calgary, however, Jews experienced relatively little exposure. The small Jewish population constrained the volume and consistency of activities aimed at engaging all facets of the community in the fight to free Soviet Jewry. A meager pool of local activists nevertheless devoted much effort to enlisting the Calgary Jewish community in this campaign through local Jewish organizations, the synagogues, the schools, and the press. Their actions, following templates set by activists in other centres, encompassed three main facets: direct moral support through "adoptions" of refuseniks, phone calls, and letters; advocacy through petitions to the governments of Canada and the Soviet Union; and a public awareness campaign aimed at the Jewish and general community.<sup>78</sup>



Poster from NCJW fonds, Jay and Barbara Joffe Archives, Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta

## Personal Support and Political Advocacy for Refuseniks

The “Adopting a Refusenik” initiative, a key part of the Soviet Jewry movement from its beginnings, became the dominant focus of Soviet Jewry activism in the 1980s.<sup>79</sup> In his history of the US movement, Gal Beckerman highlighted the importance of activities that directly connected North Americans with individual refuseniks, noting these initiatives made “an abstract issue exceedingly real.”<sup>80</sup> Historian Douglas Kahn emphasized that this “approach was part of the genius that sustained the movement.”<sup>81</sup> In his study of the Cleveland Jewish community, Kelner observed that this “person to person strategy” later engendered support for Soviet Jews approved for emigration.<sup>82</sup> For example, in Calgary, news of the imminent liberation of refusenik Mikhail Lomonosov spurred Rabbi Peter Hayman of the House of Jacob to collect funds to assist the Lomonosov family upon their release.<sup>83</sup>

Starting in the early 1970s, several Calgary groups selected refuseniks to support through correspondence and petitions to political leaders. CHW and NCJW were particularly active in this area.<sup>84</sup> In 1983 the NCJW Calgary Section advertised for a Soviet Jewry chair with responsibilities that included creating “a warm personal relationship between a Canadian and Soviet Jewry family.”<sup>85</sup> Letter-writing campaigns to individual refuseniks continued until 1989.<sup>86</sup> Rena Cohen, during her term as CCSJ chair, implemented the greeting card project originated in 1968 by activists in Washington, DC.<sup>87</sup> Participating synagogues included a New Year card for a refusenik in their High Holiday package and requested that their members return the cards with a short message and a donation to cover postage. In the late 1970s Calgary’s Beth Israel Congregation mailed seventy-five New Year greeting cards to refuseniks.<sup>88</sup>

Sophie Kettner passionately addressed CHW members about the need to support Soviet Jewry, stating in a 1973 report: “it is clear that Jews everywhere must take up this cause.”<sup>89</sup> Calgary CHW members, joining with Hadassah members across Canada, steadfastly advocated for the release of refuseniks including Sylvia Zalmanson and Ida Nudel through letters and cables to the Kremlin and petitions to the Canadian government.<sup>90</sup> Zalmanson, one of the leaders of the thwarted 1970 hijacking, was allowed to immigrate to Israel in 1974 after serving three years of her ten-year sentence in a labour camp.<sup>91</sup> Nudel, who was exiled to Siberia in 1978 for placing a banner from her apartment reading “KGB give me my visa to Israel,” was finally allowed to emigrate to Israel in 1987.<sup>92</sup> Hadassah minutes for 1978 recorded that “unlike most Canadian Jewish centres, Calgary’s activists are receiving replies to petitions sent to the Russian Embassy in Ottawa” and noted the first confirmations of the delivery of letters mailed to the refuseniks.<sup>93</sup> While available organizational minutes do not record other instances of replies from the Soviet embassy, Rena Cohen collected “pink cards” verifying refuseniks’ receipt of letters.<sup>94</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, Calgary activists persevered with appeals to government officials. In 1985, Gayl Veinotte, chair of the local NCJW Committee for Soviet Jewry, dispatched a petition and letter to Soviet ambassador A.A. Rodionov with a copy to Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney. The correspondence pleaded for the rights of Jews "to either emigrate freely or to practice their religion without threat of harassment or imprisonment."<sup>95</sup> In 1986, in coordination with their Western Canadian cohorts, the Oppressed Jewry Committee of Calgary Hillel and the Jewish Students' Network, forwarded telegrams supporting refusenik Vladimir Lifshitz to the Soviet embassy in Ottawa and the prime minister.<sup>96</sup> Lifshitz was charged with slandering the Soviet Union because of comments in letters written to friends outside the Soviet Union. Sentenced to three years in the Gulag, Lifshitz was pardoned after one year and was allowed to leave in 1987.<sup>97</sup> Calgary lawyer Sheldon Chumir, a human rights advocate and member of the Canadian Lawyers and Jurists for Soviet Jewry, addressed several letters to Canadian and Soviet officials on behalf of Anatoly Shcharansky, Alexander Paritsky, and other refuseniks. Chumir also financially supported the Telegram Bank, which raised money to send telegrams to refuseniks and government officials in Canada and the USSR.<sup>98</sup>

Events featuring telephone calls to refuseniks heightened community awareness, provided moral support and created personal connections. Telephone calls were made from Calgary several times during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>99</sup> Completing these conversations was challenging, requiring a reservation and the cooperation of a Soviet operator. Additionally, Soviet censors monitored all conversations. *The Jewish Star* placed calls from their newspaper office and invited the public to participate.<sup>100</sup>

Twinning bar/bat mitzvahs with the children of refuseniks engaged youth, increased awareness within the Jewish community and personalized the activism.<sup>101</sup> While local rabbis supported this initiative, Rena Cohen observed that parents displayed limited interest.<sup>102</sup> Her son Jeff's 1980 ceremony at Beth Israel Congregation was twinned with Mikhail, the son of refusenik Inna Kosharovsky. Purportedly, this was the first local bar mitzvah to be linked to a Jewish Soviet youth.<sup>103</sup> Inna and Mikhail's stepfather, refusenik leader Yuli Kosharovsky, were finally permitted to emigrate in 1989, eighteen years after Yuli's first application for authorization to leave the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup> At Temple B'nai Tikvah, Scott Kaufman twinned his 1984 bar mitzvah with Evgeny Kremen, the son of refuseniks Michael and Galina Kremen.<sup>105</sup> In 1985, Jeanette Goldman, chair of the Committee for Soviet Jewry Ontario Region, expressed her "delight" with NJCW's local Soviet Jewry advocacy plans and encouraged the promotion of bar/bat mitzvah twinnings.<sup>106</sup> That spring, the NCJW Committee for Soviet Jewry contacted Calgary synagogues for support for this activity.<sup>107</sup> At least two local girls expressed interest in twinning their bat mitzvahs.<sup>108</sup>

## Public Awareness Campaigns

Despite lacking a local Soviet embassy or consulate as a protest site, various Calgary-ians organized public events to educate and engage the Jewish and general Calgary community and the media in the global drive to free Soviet Jewry. These gatherings spanned the period from 1970 to 1989, and many were attended by hundreds from the community and supported by non-Jewish Calgary politicians and religious leaders. The bulk of the gatherings occurred during the 1970s. The minimal level of protest activity during the 1980s was not unique to Calgary. As Avrigh-Skapinker noted, commencing in the 1980s “virtually all efforts were concentrated on the refuseniks” and “mass demonstrations became a thing of the past, a memory.”<sup>99</sup>

Young Judean Mark Brager initiated the first known rally in Calgary. According to a report in the *Calgary Herald*, the CRC of the CJCC gave its approval and support to a November 1970 rally coordinated by the Young Judea youth group. Held in downtown Calgary, it attracted two hundred people.<sup>100</sup> One month later, Jewish youth representing various groups joined together to protest the harsh sentences meted out to the refuseniks and non-Jewish activists involved in the plan to escape the Soviet Union on a hijacked aircraft.<sup>101</sup>

During Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin’s 1971 visit to Canada, rallies were held nationwide.<sup>102</sup> In Alberta, only Edmonton was on Kosygin’s itinerary. One hundred and fifty Calgarians in forty vehicles met at five o’clock on the morning of October 24 to caravan to the Edmonton protest (a six hundred-kilometer round trip). The group gathered along the highway just outside Fort Saskatchewan to wave signs as Kosygin sped past on his way to and from a nickel refining plant. The protesters then participated in a large rally at an Edmonton synagogue.<sup>103</sup> In Ottawa, Calgary rabbis joined a vigil on Parliament Hill as well as a rabbis’ march led by Gunther Plaut. Rabbi Lewis Ginsburg of Calgary’s Shaarey Tzedec Congregation described his early morning stint at the vigil as “a thrill I won’t soon forget” and recounted that during the march “all the rabbis wore tallesim [sic], then standing eyeball to eyeball with the Ottawa City Police, the RCMP and the Ontario Provincial Police, we participated in the Mincha afternoon prayer service.”<sup>104</sup> Rabbi Plaut would later note the Canadian rabbis’ vital contributions to drawing the Soviet Jewry issue to the attention of Kosygin and the Canadian public.<sup>105</sup>

In the 1978, chair of the CCSJ, Eliot Cohen, organized a petition asking the Soviet Union to abide by the human rights guarantees it committed to as a signatory of the 1975 Helsinki Accords accompanied by a daylong sit-in by the Family of Man statues in downtown Calgary. Cohen collected over one thousand signatures thanks to clergy circulating the petition to local church attendees.<sup>106</sup>

Canadian university students caravanned across Canada in 1986 holding protests on behalf of Soviet Jewry in sixteen cities.<sup>107</sup> Calgarian Ilana Krieger joined her fellow

students for the western leg of the trip.<sup>118</sup> At the Calgary City Hall rally the students dressed in striped prisoner uniforms symbolically staged a burial ceremony for Soviet anti-Jewish practices.<sup>119</sup> Following the rally, over 150 Calgarians participated in a variety of Soviet Jewry advocacy events featuring local leaders including Dr. Allan Narvey, head of the Oppressed Jewry Committee.<sup>120</sup>

Many rallies were timed with Jewish holidays. In 1971, about two hundred and fifty members of the Calgary Jewish community gathered at Beth Israel synagogue on Simchat Torah (the festival celebrating a new cycle in the reading of the scriptures), when Soviet Jews were known to gather in crowds outside of Moscow's Choral Synagogue.<sup>121</sup> Calgary's per capita response was quadruple that reported from Philadelphia's 1971 Simchat Torah rally (between five and six thousand marchers from a Jewish population one hundred times the size of Calgary).<sup>122</sup> Seventy-five people participated in a 1981 Hanukkah rally and candle-lighting ceremony at city hall featuring Jewish clergy, Calgary mayor Ralph Klein and local Soviet Jewry activists joined by a recent Soviet immigrant.<sup>123</sup> On at least three other occasions from the mid-1970s to early 1980s, recent Soviet immigrants to Calgary spoke publicly about Jewish life in the Soviet Union. One immigrant only allowed his first name to be published for fear of reprisals on his family and friends remaining in the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> Passover, with its theme of the exodus from slavery, was strongly linked with the plight of Soviet Jewry. In 1979, the CCSJ sponsored a "Freedom Seder" at the Calgary Hebrew School (now the Calgary Jewish Academy) with participation from all Jewish groups in Calgary.<sup>125</sup> Annually between 1975 and 1980, the Passover issue of the Beth Israel Congregation's newsletter contained the text of the special Passover prayer for Soviet Jewry, "The Matzah of Hope."<sup>126</sup>

Demonstrating at local events that featured Soviet performers was another effective strategy the movement employed to heighten public awareness. Kelner notes how the form of protest became a prominent tactic of the movement in Canada particularly for The Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry (the 35's).<sup>127</sup> While Calgary did not have a branch of the 35's, various Calgary groups organized demonstrations at Soviet cultural and sporting events during the 1970s. Approximately thirty members of the Calgary Jewish community (primarily high school students) distributed pamphlets detailing discriminatory Soviet policies outside a 1974 event featuring Soviet gymnasts. Harry Sherman, co-chair of the CCSJ, organized the protest.<sup>128</sup> That same year forty community members, including Rabbi Louis Schechter of the Beth Israel Congregation, demonstrated outside performances by the Bolshoi Ballet.<sup>129</sup> Ten Grade 9 Calgary Hebrew School students and their chaperones drove to Spokane Washington to protest at the Expo 74 Soviet Pavilion.<sup>130</sup> Three years later, in 1977, CHW members dressed in black joined the CCSJ and others in conducting a boycott of the Moscow Circus during its tour stop in Calgary.<sup>131</sup>

Working with national organizations, local activists arranged for former refuseniks and family members to advocate for Soviet Jewry by presenting their personal stories. The Canadian Committee for Soviet Jewry sponsored Esther Markish on a 1973 speaking tour. Locally organized by Sophie Kettner, one hundred and fifty Calgarians heard Markish, whose husband, Yiddish poet Peretz Markish, had been executed in 1952, talk about life as a refusenik.<sup>132</sup> In 1975, recently released refusenik Alexander Goldfarb spoke to the Calgary Jewish community as part of a cross-Canada trip facilitated by the Canadian Committee for Soviet Jewry, with Kettner coordinating local arrangements.<sup>133</sup> Eva Butman and her twelve-year-old daughter addressed students at Calgary's I.L. Peretz School in 1978 as part of an initiative to mobilize support for Hillel Butman, an engineer sentenced to ten years for his role in the failed 1970 hijacking plot. Several Calgary lawyers volunteered to create an appeal to the Soviet government for Hillel Butman's release from prison.<sup>134</sup> In 1986, Network, a Jewish student organization, sponsored former refusenik Leonid Feldman's talks to the Calgary Jewish community and to students at the University of Calgary.<sup>135</sup>

The success of this public awareness campaign is reflected in the many articles in the *Calgary Herald* on Soviet Jewry during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>136</sup> Readers of the *Calgary Jewish News* (published by the Calgary Jewish Community Council from 1962 to 1988) and *The Jewish Star* (published by Douglas Wertheimer from 1980 to 1990) saw news reports on Soviet Jewry as a regular feature between 1971 and 1987.

### Support from Outside of the Jewish Community

In his study of Canadian Jewish political activism, Troper points to Soviet Jewry activists' efforts to engage the broader Canadian community.<sup>137</sup> Couching the cause in universalist human rights terms was crucial in generating backing from non-Jews.<sup>138</sup> Organizers of most local events involved at least one Calgary politician and some included religious leaders and representatives from organizations such as the Alberta Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and Amnesty International.<sup>139</sup>

Calgary members of parliament advocated for refuseniks in response to letters from their constituents. John Thomson, MP for Calgary South, recommended intervention by the Canadian government on behalf of the imprisoned refusenik Anatoly Shcharansky.<sup>140</sup> Bobby Sparrow, a subsequent MP for Calgary South, was a member of the All-Party Group for Soviet Jewry. In response to a letter from Rena Cohen regarding refusenik Elena Dubianshaya, Sparrow requested permission to "adopt" Elena. Sparrow further noted that she was periodically "able to meet with the Soviet Ambassador and present names for special consideration" and that in the House of Commons there was the possibility for a "90-second presentation" on a refusenik or refusenik family.<sup>141</sup>

Support was also garnered from local academics. B'nai B'rith and *The Jewish Star* sponsored a November 1983 program promoting Soviet Jewry activism entitled "Make Andropov Listen—Before It's Too Late." Included in the roster of speakers was University of Calgary mathematician Jim Jones, who had befriended refuseniks during the decade he spent in the Soviet Union.<sup>142</sup> At the 1984 Calgary meeting of the International Congress for Tropical Medicine and Malaria, papers by two refusenik scientists were presented in absentia. More than two hundred and thirty conference participants from thirty-six countries signed petitions requesting that the president of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR help grant these scientists and their families exit visas.<sup>143</sup>

The Calgary chapter of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem hosted Jay and Meridel Rawlings' 1984 fundraising presentation for a proposed documentary featuring refuseniks, which they had filmed secretly during a 1984 visit to Russia. The KGB had somehow learned of the project and seized the footage. Fortunately, the Rawlings had hidden a second copy, later smuggled out of the Soviet Union. The film *Gates of Brass* was released in Canada in 1985.<sup>144</sup>

Available records indicate the cessation of local Soviet Jewry activism after 1989, concurrent with the liberalization of Soviet society during perestroika and the concomitant introduction of freedom of religion and freedom of movement following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Calgary's final public Soviet Jewry advocacy effort was a youth-led event, echoing the movement's beginnings, initiated and coordinated by Calgarian Leonard Brody, the World Oppressed Jewry chair for the North West Canada Region of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization.<sup>145</sup> For twenty years a small cadre of dedicated Calgarians had devoted much time and effort to the movement. The challenge of sustaining this commitment was noted by Rena Cohen, when in 1981 she questioned how to get people involved "when it's been going on for so long and we don't see it getting any better."<sup>146</sup> Even two years earlier, in 1979, the CCSJ in response to questions of the value of the letters, vigils and petitions, stressed "if whatever we do contributes even in the smallest way to the release of refuseniks then we must and will continue to ask for your support."<sup>147</sup> Inspiring support for the movement became more challenging with the significant decline in emigration figures between 1980 and 1987.<sup>148</sup> Cohen reported that a planned 1980 Passover event in support of Soviet Jewry was cancelled for lack of interest.<sup>149</sup> While Avrich-Skapinker identified the extensive encouragement activists received from the international Soviet Jewry network as a key factor in motivating Toronto activists when the task seemed hopeless, this did not hold as true for the Calgary volunteers located thousands of miles from Toronto and US centres of activism.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the fluctuating volunteer leadership throughout the long years of the movement, the remoteness from the center of national activity, the very limited financial support and the challenges of maintaining an active city committee, the combined



activities of Soviet Jewry supporters working within various Calgary organizations resulted in a fairly steady stream of Soviet Jewry activism. This activism incorporated political measures of petitions and letters of advocacy with grassroots educational and awareness generating activities. Historian Henry Feingold remarked that the movement's success is "best judged not only in terms of the emigrants directly 'rescued' but in terms of its role in generating that outside pressure."<sup>151</sup> Although Calgary's activities were not individually unique, a distinctive legacy of the Calgary Soviet Jewry movement is the scope and level of public pressure generated by a few dedicated volunteers working with limited community cohesion and minimal outside support. In the words of Calgary human rights champion Sheldon Chumir, these dedicated individuals by their actions spoke "truth to power" and held "power accountable to the truth."<sup>152</sup>

**Saundra Lipton** holds a master's in library science from the University of British Columbia. She worked as a humanities and social sciences librarian at the University of Calgary for over forty years. Now retired, Saundra currently serves as president of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta.

### 1

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed massive Russian Jewish emigration spurred by violent antisemitism. Despite this significant migration, by the 1960s one quarter of world Jewry (three million) still resided in the Soviet Union. Jewish schools, organizations and all but a few synagogues were closed down, Jewish publications essentially banned, ritual items prohibited, employment and education quotas applied and emigration effectively disallowed. For a useful overview of the cultural and religious repression of Jewry in the postwar USSR, see Yaacov Ro'i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration 1948-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

### 2

Gordon Legge, "Sykes, Mahoney Join Protest of Soviet Jews' Treatment," *Calgary Herald*, January 8, 1971, 34. Maurice Paperny was also active in the Canadian Jewish Congress at the national level, as associate chairman for the CJC community services committee, see *Congress Bulletin* May/June 1972, back page, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/4335709?docsearchtext=congress%20bulletin%20jewish>.

### 3

With appreciation to the anonymous peer reviewers for their most helpful comments and suggestions, to Helen Clarke, Irena Karshenbaum, Josh Tapper and Virginia Tumaszk for their editing assistance, to Jenny Belzberg, Mark Brager, Rena Cohen<sup>2</sup>, David Cramer, Hal Joffe, Risha Joffe, Dr. Jim Jones, Larry Katz, Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapidés, Herb Rosenberg and Drew Staffenberg for providing first-hand information on the local Soviet Jewry movement and to the staff of the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, Ontario Jewish Archives and University of Calgary Archives and Special Collection for research assistance.

### 4

Yossi Klein Halevi, "Lessons of Struggle for Soviet Jewry Remain Relevant," review of *When They Come for Us We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* by Gal Beckerman, *The New Republic*, November 24, 2010, <https://newrepublic.com/article/79086/soviet-union-jews-movement>.

**5**

Overviews of the Soviet Jewry movement outside of Canada include: Stuart Altshuler, *From Exodus to Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Gal Beckerman, *When They Come For Us We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010); Tova Benjamin, "Introduction: The Soviet Jewry Movement, Revisited," *Jewish Currents*, Winter/Spring 2022, <https://jewishcurrents.org/introduction-the-soviet-jewry-movement-revisited>, see also other articles on Soviet Jewry Movement in this special issue; Henry L. Feingold, "Silent No More": *Saving the Jews of Russia, The American Jewish Effort, 1967-1989* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Murray Friedman and Albert D. Chernin, eds., *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews* (Hannover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999); Shaul Kelner, *A Cold War Exodus: How American Activists Mobilized to Free Soviet Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2024); William W. Orbach, *The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979); Yaacov Ro'i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry Emigration, 1948-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Philip Spiegel, *Triumph Over Tyranny: The Heroic Campaigns that Saved 2,000,000 Soviet Jews* (New York: Devora, 2008).

**6**

Mindy Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement with Soviet Jewry 1970-1990: The Toronto Case Study" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993); Wendy Eisen, *Count Us In: The Struggle to Free Soviet Jews: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: Burgher Books, 1995).

**7**

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 298. Eisen incorrectly notes the date of creation of the Calgary Committee for Soviet Jewry, erroneously states that activity before 1979 was generated only by Hadassah and Young Judea, lacks mention of other groups involved, and only mentions activists (all women) who worked with Rena Cohen from 1979 to 1981.

**8**

Harold Troper, "The Canadian Jewish Polity and the Limits of Political Action: The Campaigns on Behalf of Soviet and Syrian Jews," in *Ethnicity, Politics and Public Policy in Canada: Case Studies in Canadian Diversity*, ed. Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld (Toronto: Univer-

sity of Toronto Press, 1998), 224-52; Harold Troper, *The Defining Decade: Identity Politics and the Canadian Jewish Community in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 204-43 and 244-83.

**9**

In June 1970, a group of refuseniks along with two non-Jewish dissidents devised a plan to seize a small aircraft and fly to freedom with the hope that even if unsuccessful, their actions would demonstrate to the world the desperate situation of Jews in the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities arrested members of the group on the morning of the planned hijacking. At the first trial in Leningrad in December 1970, two were sentenced to death and the others were sent to labour camps for four to fifteen years. The death sentences were later commuted to prison terms. A photo of the Calgary protest is available in the digital collections of the University of Calgary library, [https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R3BF1SPQD\\_2](https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R3BF1SPQD_2).

**10**

"Citywide Rally Scheduled in New York; Rallies in Philadelphia, Canadian Cities," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 30, 1970, 2, <https://www.jta.org/archive/citywide-rally-scheduled-in-new-york-rallies-in-philadelphia-canadian-cities>.

**11**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee for Soviet Jewry, January 8, 1974, Box 4, File 26, Canadian Jewish Congress Collection, ZA 1974, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal, Quebec (hereafter cited as CJC Collection).

**12**

For information on Canadian Soviet Jewry advocacy in the 1960s see Eisen, *Count Us In*, 16-23.

**13**

"Canadian Conference on Soviet Jewry Set," *The Jewish Post*, May 12, 1966, 14; "CJC Acts on Behalf of Soviet Jews," *Congress Bulletin*, January 1973, 1, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/4335712>; Eisen, *Count Us In*, 53. In 1971 the Central Region of the CJC formed the Action Committee for Soviet Jewry covering Toronto and rest of Ontario (Committee for Soviet Jewry fonds description, Ontario Region Fonds, CJC, Ontario Jewish Archives,

iojewisharchives.andornot.net/Permalink/descriptions21396). For a list of the committee's actions up to spring 1972, see *Congress Bulletin*, May/June, 1972, 11.

#### 14

Troper, *The Defining Decade*, 264-71.

#### 15

Leigh Sarty, "A Handshake Across the Pole: Canadian-Soviet Relations During the Era of Détente," in *Canada and the Soviet Experiment: Essays on Canadian Encounters with Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-1991*, ed. David Davies (Toronto: Centre for Russian and East European Studies [University of Toronto] and Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism [University of Waterloo], 1994), 126.

#### 16

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 88-9, 168-69, 173-74.

#### 17

Asa McKercher, "Reason Over Passion: Pierre Trudeau, Human Rights and Canadian Foreign Policy," *International Journal* 73, no. 1 (2018): 135; For specific actions by Trudeau in support of Soviet Jewry see Troper, *The Defining Decade*, 240-43.

#### 18

"Canada Urges USSR to Free Shcharansky," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), December 3-16, 1982, 1; See also David P. Smith, "The Canadian Who Helped Free Soviet Jews," *National Post*, August 5, 2015, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/david-p-smith-the-canadian-who-helped-free-soviet-jews>.

#### 19

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 215-22.

#### 20

The major Jewish Canadian focus is reflected in reports in the annual publication, *American Jewish Yearbook*. From 1968 to 1992 the annual report for Canada included a section on Soviet Jewry. See <https://ajcarchives.org/Portal/Yearbooks/en-US/RecordView/Index/6> for issues of the *Yearbook*.

#### 21

Anna Shternshis, "The Ambivalent Émigrés," *Jewish Currents*, May 23, 2022, <https://jewishcurrents.org/the-ambivalent-%C3%A9migr%C3%A9s>.

#### 22

Jack Switzer, "A Brief History of Jewish Life in Southern Alberta," <https://cdn.fedweb.org/90/151/history.pdf>.

#### 23

*1911 Census of Canada* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912), 1:2, table 1, [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2016/statcan/CS98-1911-1.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/CS98-1911-1.pdf); Charles Shahar, *2001 Census Analysis: The Jewish Community of Calgary Part I: Basic Demographics* (Calgary: Calgary Jewish Community Council, November 2003), 2; "Highlights of Southern Alberta History," n.d., Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta (JHSSA) notes that the 75 percent increase in Calgary's Jewish population between 1971 and 1981 was mostly due to the large number of immigrants from the Soviet Union, Quebec and South Africa.

#### 24

CJCC Board and Executive Meeting Minutes, Calgary Jewish Community Council fonds, M7892, Glenbow Library and Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta (hereafter cited as CJCC fonds). For more on Keegstra, see David Bercuson and Douglas Wertheimer, *A Trust Betrayed: The Keegstra Affair* (Toronto: McClelland-Bantam, 1987).

#### 25

"Protesting for their Faith," *Calgary Herald*, November 9, 1970, 28.

#### 26

Legge, "Sykes, Mahoney Join Protest of Soviet Jews' Treatment."

#### 27

CHW Newsletter, June 1972, 6-7, Calgary Hadassah-WIZO fonds, Jay and Barbara Joffe Archives, JHSSA, Calgary, Alberta (hereafter cited as CHW fonds).

#### 28

"Soviet Gymnasts Protested," *Calgary Herald*, June 10, 1974, 31. CCSJ chairs included: Harry Sherman (co-chair 1974), Sophie Kettner (1975-1977), Eliot Cohen (1978-1979), Rena Cohen (1979-1981).

#### 29

"Scream Today or Feel Guilty Tomorrow," *Calgary Jewish News*, June 1978, 2.

**30**

Anna Gelt, interview by Reva Faber, May 11, 2019, Calgary, Alberta, transcript, JHSSA; See chapter 6 of Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and The Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) for discussion of the situation of those Soviet Jews attempting to emigrate.

**31**

"Soviet Jewry: Only on Simchat Torah—Calgary Jewry: All Year Round," *Calgary Jewish News*, September 1977, 2; "Scream Today or Feel Guilty Tomorrow."

**32**

Rena Cohen, "Report for the Calgary Committee for Soviet Jewry," May 1981, personal collection of Rena Cohen.

**33**

NCJW Calgary Section Newsletter, May 1983, 3, National Council of Jewish Women fonds, Jay and Barbara Joffe Archives, Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, Calgary, Alberta (hereafter cited as NCJW fonds).

**34**

CHW Council Minutes, December 3, 1981, CHW fonds.

**35**

Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 75.

**36**

"Soviet Jewry: Only on Simchat Torah."

**37**

Drew Staffenberg to Carole Moscovitch, September 27, 1989, Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 12.

**38**

Schwartz served as chair of CRC from 1978 to 1983 and in the mid-1970s served as Chair of the CHW public affairs committee. In 1984 Schwartz was on the 1984 National Hadasah-WIZO executive with responsibility for public affairs for Soviet Jewry, see "Hadasah-WIZO Happenings," *Calgary Jewish News*, December 1984, 2. In late 1981, Cohen was removed from her position as chair of CCSJ "in keeping with a policy adopted by the Board of the CJCC," see Fay Schwartz to Gena Intrator, November 3, 1981, Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 12. Cohen attributed this dismissal

to her decision, upon hearing that Calgary was significantly in arrears on its pledges to Israel, to forward the majority of her annual United Jewish Appeal (UJA) donation directly to United Israel Appeal of Canada, rather than through the community campaign (Rena Cohen, email message to author, October 31, 2022). In June 1981 CJCC did approve a policy that "all people elected and/or appointed to positions of leadership are expected to be satisfactory contributors" and "that any person who chooses to with-hold any portion of his/her United Jewish Appeal contribution from the local community beneficiaries should not be permitted to serve in a leadership capacity," see Morris Dancyger and Norman Dvorkin to Dear President, September 29, 1981, Box 20, File 198, CJCC fonds.

**39**

Fay Schwartz, Chairperson, Community Relations Committee to Dear Friend, February 1, 1983, Box 27, File 262, CJCC fonds.

**40**

Gayl Veinotte, "Soviet Jewry Today," *Calgary Jewish News*, December 1984, 4; Barbara Stern to Gert Cohos, July 6, 1984, Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 12.

**41**

Drew Staffenberg to Allan Rose, February 27, 1986, Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 12. Oppressed Jewry Committee chairs included: Allan Narvey (1986), David Craimer (1987-1988, 1988-1989), and Rabbi Jordan Goldson (co-chair 1988-1989).

**42**

Rena Cohen, email message to author, October 31, 2022.

**43**

Rena Cohen, in discussion with the author, September 19, 2021; Rena Cohen, email message to author, October 30, 2022; CHW Council Minutes, October 5, 1978, CHW fonds note a request for representative to the CCSJ; a 1981 letter from Fay Schwartz to Genya Intrator notes possible volunteers to form a committee to bring together representatives from the local Jewish organizations, see Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 12.

**44**

"In the Community," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), December 18, 1981-January 7, 1982, 10C.

**45**

"City Group Forms to Help Paritskys, Soviet Outcasts," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), November 6-19, 1981, 7C.

**46**

"Paritsky Gets Three Year Prison Term," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), November 20-Dec 3, 1981, 1C, 3C.

**47**

Ibid.

**48**

Local Calgary Soviet Jewry activist leaders Sophie Kettner, Fay Schwartz and Rena Cohen were all active volunteers in both CJCC and CHW.

**49**

Nine visits in support of local Soviet Jewry activity over the twenty years of the campaign have been identified from archival documents and news reports: Assistant Director CJC March 1971 and April 1972, Leah Feinman, Coordinator, National Committee for Soviet Jewry 1973, Genya Intrator, National Committee Chair 1981, Maxine Blendis, BB National Director for Soviet Jewry 1983, Canadian Committee for Soviet Jewry national directors Martin Penn in 1984 and Carole Moscovitch in May and August 1988 and Wendy Eisen, Co-Chair National Committee, November 1989.

**50**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee for Soviet Jewry, January 8, 1974, CJC Collection.

**51**

"Soviet Jewry Head in Alberta," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), May 29-June 11, 1981, 3C.

**52**

CJCC Executive Minutes October 5, 1981, Box 18, File 192, CJCC fonds. That same year, CJCC also allocated funds for Hadassah leader and CJCC Board member Judy Sanderson to attend a Soviet Jewry conference in Ottawa, see CJCC Board of Directors Meeting, December 14, 1981, Box 18, File 186, CJCC fonds.

**53**

Rena Cohen, email message to author, November 31, 2022. The Calgary Community Relations Committee's total annual allocation between the years 1976 and 1982 ranged from \$1,200 to \$3,000 of which the vast majority of

funding covered administrative support. The Calgary Community Council budget reports do not indicate what if any of this was allocated to the Soviet Jewry sub-committee, see UJA Beneficiaries Administered by CJCC Financial Statements 1977-79, 1981-82, Box 22, File 219, CJCC fonds.

**54**

Rena Cohen, "Report"; CHW Council Minutes, October 1, 1981, CHW fonds note the collection of funds to cover cost of telegrams.

**55**

Rena Cohen, email message to author, November 2, 2022; correspondence found in Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection DA 12; Drew Staffenberg in conversation with the author, September 7, 2023.

**56**

Congress was funded by each of the Canadian Jewish communities through a negotiated allocation from local fundraising drives. See Troper, "The Canadian Jewish Polity," 230.

**57**

Stan Urman to Harry Shatz, February 11, 1982, Box 20, File 198, CJCC fonds.

**58**

Harry Shatz to Mr. S Filer, January 13, 1982, Box 20, File 198, CJCC fonds.

**59**

Calgary was originally part of the Western Region of CJC, created in 1938 to cover all of Canada west of Port Arthur, Ontario. Later the Western Region was reduced to the three prairie provinces and in 1979, an Alberta Region was formed, see Ann Steindel, "Manitoba/Saskatchewan Region," in *Pathways to the Present: Canadian Jewry and Canadian Jewish Congress* (Toronto: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1986), 68.

**60**

Summary of Meeting of Representatives of the Alberta Region and the National Canadian Jewish Congress, October 25, 1981, Box 20, File 198, CJCC fonds.

**61**

Stan Urman to Harry Shatz, February 11, 1982, Box 20, File 198, CJCC fonds.

**62**

Ibid.

**63**

Harry Shatz to Stan Urman, February 26, 1982, Box 21, File 205, CJC fonds.

**64**

Ibid.

**65**

Harry Shatz to Jim Archibald, October 4, 1984, Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA12.

**66**

Bercuson and Wertheimer, *A Trust Betrayed*, 125.

**67**

"Congress Head Has No Fear of Raising Controversial Issues," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), October 21-November 3, 1983, 1.

**68**

Milton Harris to Herb Leon, November 30, 1982, Box 20, File 199, CJC fonds.

**69**

For example, in 1976, the CCSJ hired staff to support Soviet Jewry activities in the major centres see Eisen, *Count Us In*, 88.

**70**

Altschuler, *From Exodus to Freedom*, 12-18.

**71**

Jim L. Torczyer and Shari L. Brotman, "The Jews of Canada: A Profile from the Census," *American Jewish Year Book* 95 (1995): 251 (Table 3); in 1931, 35 percent of Jewish Canadians were born in Russia versus 28 percent for Montreal and 19 percent for Toronto, see Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada in the 1930s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 78; Rena Cohen, interview by Glenn Richter, October 27, 2010, Soviet Jewry Movement Oral History Project, Yeshiva University, <https://digital.library.yu.edu/object/digital34785>.

**72**

Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 59.

**73**

Troper, "The Canadian Jewish Polity," 239.

**74**

Rena Cohen, conversation with the author, September 19, 2021.

**75**

Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 72.

**76**

"Hebrew School Students Council Hold Soviet Jewry Month," *Calgary Jewish News*, January 1973, 2; *CHW Council Bulletin*, February 1973, CHW fonds. Family members have confirmed that Mona and her husband travelled to the Soviet Union for the 1972 Canada-USSR hockey series and while there Mona visited family.

**77**

Kelner, *A Cold War Exodus*, 12.

**78**

Avrich-Skapinker notes these three categories in her discussion of the Toronto movement. See Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 79.

**79**

Ibid., 81.

**80**

Beckerman, *When They Come for Us*, 221; Avrich-Skapinker highlights that this also helped incentivize volunteers when activities appeared to initiate few or no results, see "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 82.

**81**

Douglas Kahn, "Advocacy on the Community Level," in *A Second Exodus*, 192.

**82**

Shaul Kelner, "People-to-People: Cleveland's Jewish Community and the Exodus of Soviet Jews," in *Cleveland Jews and the Making of A Midwestern Community*, ed. by Sean Martin and John J. Grabowski (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 210.

**83**

"Mostly About People," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), March 27-April 9, 1987, 5C. The Calgary Community made a number of phone calls to Lomonosov organized by Aviezri Fraenkel in the early 1980s, see "Moscow Refusenik Phoned," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), January 13-February 2, 1984, 3.

**84**

NCJW fonds. In 1984, the Aliyah chapter of CHW "adopted" Anatoly Shcharansky, sending letters to him, see "Mostly About People," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), January 13-February 2, 1984, 5C.

**85**

NCJW Calgary Section Newsletter, May 1983, 3, NCJW fonds.

**86**

"Hadassah - Adopt-a-Refusenik," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), January 20-February 16, 1989, 6C; "Update COJ," Board Meeting, CJCC, December 19, 1988 (Document obtained from David Cramer).

**87**

Kelner, "People-to-People," 207.

**88**

Rena Cohen, "Report."

**89**

Sophie Kettner, "Public Affairs Committee Activities," CHW Council *Bulletin*, February 1973, 4-5, CHW fonds. In the early 1970s, CHW under Kettner's leadership sent petitions and letters in support of refuseniks Galena and Valery Panov, see "Panov, Renowned Choreographer, Devotes Efforts to Israel, Refuseniks," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), February 27-March 12, 1987, 2C.

**90**

CHW Council Minutes, January 3, 1985, CHW fonds.

**91**

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 54,76.

**92**

*Ibid.*, 106, 243.

**93**

CHW Council Minutes, September 5, 1978, CHW fonds.

**94**

Rena Cohen, email message to author, October 30, 2022. Images of two examples were received from Cohen.

**95**

NCJW fonds.

**96**

Mark Krygier and Shane Chetner, "Letters for Refuseniks," Letters, *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), February 21-March 6, 1986, 9C.

**97**

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 206, 240.

**98**

Box 75, File 960, Sheldon Chumir fonds, M8846, Glenbow Library and Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary. At least four other Calgary lawyers belonged to Canadian Lawyers and Jurists for Soviet Jewry.

**99**

See for example: "Telephone for Freedom," *Calgary Jewish News*, May 1972, 2; Update on Soviet Jewry Activities," *Calgary Jewish News*, October 1978, 2; "Telephone Bridge to Moscow," *Dor l'Dor*, June 1988, 12.

**100**

See for example "Moscow Refusenik Phoned."

**101**

Troper, "The Canadian Jewish Polity," 240-41; Shaul Kelner, "Bar and Bat Mitzvah Twinning in the American Soviet Jewry Movement," *Frankel Institute Annual* (2016): 39-41, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11879367.2016.012>; Kelner, *A Cold War Exodus*, 257-95.

**102**

Cohen, "Report."

**103**

"Mostly About People," *The Jewish Star*, November 14-27, 1980, 7.

**104**

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 248-49; Martin Gilbert, *The Jews of Hope* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 92-109.

**105**

Mostly About People," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), January 13-February 2, 1984, 5C.

**106**

Jeanette Goldman to Gayl Veinotte, January 15, 1985, NCJW fonds.

**107**

Handwritten note and copies of letters from Gayl Veinotte to Rabbi Lewis Ginsburg, Beth Israel Congregation and Rabbi Abraham Witty, Shaarey Tzedec Synagogue, NCJW fonds.

**108**

Samuel Resnick, Director, Committee for Soviet Jewry, Ontario Region to Gayl Veinotte, June 14, 1986, NCJW fonds.

**109**

Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 81.

**110**

"Protesting for their Faith."

**111**

Image of December 1970 protest published with "A Catch 22 Conundrum Faces Hapless Soviet Jews," *Calgary Herald*, February 6, 1973, 5.

**112**

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 42-46.

**113**

Troper, "Let Them Have It," 274-83; "Calgary Soviet Jewry Caravan," *Calgary Jewish News*, October 1971, 1.

**114**

Rabbi Ginsburg to Arlene and kids, October 19, 1971. Unprocessed Rabbi Lewis Ginsburg collection, JHSSA. Rabbi Ginsburg in his letter notes that Rabbi Louis Schechter of the Conservative Synagogue, Beth Israel, was also at the rabbis' march.

**115**

Gunther Plaut, "When Kosygin Came to Canada," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas*, February 25, 1972, 52-53, <https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/11782>.

**116**

Kathryn Warden, "'Prisoners of Conscience' Rally Draws Prayers and Signatures," *Calgary Herald*, July 18, 1978, B14. The news report refers to the CCSJ as the Committee for Human Rights in Soviet Russia.

**117**

Eisen, *Count Us In*, 210-11

**118**

Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapides, in conversation with the author, September 30, 2021.

**119**

Brenda-Ann Marks, "Caravan Brings Freedom Message," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), June 6-19, 1986, 1, 8c;

**120**

Ibid.

**121**

"Calgary Jews Protest Oppression in Russia," *Calgary Herald*, October 12, 1971, 25.

**122**

Andrew Harrison, *Passover Revisited: Philadelphia's Efforts to Aid Soviet Jews, 1963-1998*, (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2001), 49; In 1970 the Jewish population of the Philadelphia metropolitan area was 330,000, see *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1970, 351.

**123**

"Ceremony for Refuseniks Held on City Hall Steps," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), January 22-February 4, 1982, 1.

**124**

CHW Council Minutes, December 3, 1981, CHW fonds; "New Russian Immigrant Says Canadians Too Soft - Calls for Boycotts," *Calgary Herald*, July 18, 1978, B14; Gary Cohn to Alan Rose, May 7, 1975, Box 26, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 5.

**125**

"Freedom Seder," *Calgary Jewish News*, March 1979, 2; CCSJ to Presidents/Leaders of All Jewish Organizations, February 23, 1979, Box 19, File 194, CJCC fonds.

**126**

Newsletters, Beth Israel Congregation fonds, JHSSA.

**127**

Kelner, *A Cold War Exodus*, 211; Calgary activist Karen Behar had been a member of the 35's in Winnipeg, see "In the Community—Beth Jacob," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), June 28-July 1981, 10C.

**128**

"Soviet Gymnasts Protested," *Calgary Herald*, June 10, 1974, 31.

**129**

"Soviet Emigration Policy Protested at Bolshoi Opening," *Calgary Herald*, Tuesday, July 9, 1974, 35.

**130**

Risha Joffe and Jodi Schechter, "Spokane" in *Calgary Hebrew School Yearbook 1973/74*. Copy of page received from Risha Joffe.

**131**

Hadassah-WIZO Council minutes, October 6, 1977, CHW fonds; The Committee on Soviet



Jewry, "Free Soviet Jewry," Letters, *The Gauntlet*, October 19, 1977, 6, digitalcollection.ucalgary.ca.

### 132

"Woman describes struggle to leave U.S.S.R.," *Calgary Herald*, February 20, 1973, 42; *CHW Newsletter*, March 1973, 5, CHW fonds.

### 133

"Soviet Jewish Scientist to Speak at a J.C.A. Program," *Calgary Jewish News*, October 1975, 1.

### 134

"Butman Plight," *Calgary Jewish News*, December 1978, 5. Hillel Butman was set free in April 1979 and immigrated to Israel.

### 135

Brenda-Ann Marks, "'You Have the Power to Help,' Refusenik Insists," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), April 4-17, 1986, 1,3; Mark J. Krygier, "Soviet Refusenik to Speak," Letters, *The Gauntlet*, March 6, 1986, 9.

### 136

A keyword search of the online *Calgary Herald* archive for the terms "Jews" within seven words of "Soviet," restricted to the period 1970 to 1989, retrieved 759 articles.

### 137

Troper, "The Canadian Jewish Polity," 237.

### 138

Mandy Joy van der Hoeven, "Universalizing the Soviet Jewry Movement: The National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, Christian Activists, Human Rights and Interreligious Relations in the 1970s and early 1980s" (MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2019), 10.

### 139

Marks, "Caravan Brings Freedom Message"; Rena Cohen and Dr. Eliot Cohen, "Soviet Dissident Petition Supported," Letters, *Calgary Herald*, August 3, 1978, A8.

### 140

"Mostly About People," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), February 19-March 4, 1982, 5C.

### 141

Rena Cohen to Bobby Sparrow, March 26, 1985, and Bobby Sparrow to Rena Cohen, April 19, 1985, NCJW fonds. Cohen left Calgary in 1983 but continued her human rights work in Toronto.

### 142

"Forum on Refuseniks Aims to 'Make Andropov Listen,'" *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), November 4-17, 1983, 3C; Jim Jones, email message to author, October 13, 2021.

### 143

Herb Rosenberg, "Canned but not Quiet, Refuseniks Speak at Congress," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), October 17-November 1, 1984, 1; Hyman Tannenbaum, "Plight of Soviet Refusenik Scientists," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 132 (February 1, 1985): 239.

### 144

"Mostly About People," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary Edition), September 7-20, 1984, 5C; Film is available on YouTube <http://israelvisiontv.blogspot.com/2018/04/gates-of-brassa-timeless-film-for-all.html>; Eisen, "Count Us In," 180.

### 145

Box 37, File 6, CJC Collection, DA 12, includes a write-up on the 1988 event and correspondence between Brody and Carole Moscovitch, Director, CJC Committee for Soviet Jewry regarding the event and expenditure of the proceeds.

### 146

Cohen, "Report."

### 147

"Update on Soviet Jewry," *Calgary Jewish News*, May 1979, 2.

### 148

Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 81; Committee for Soviet Jewry, Ontario Region, "Jewish Emigration from the U.S.S.R.," NCJW fonds.

### 149

Cohen, "Report."

### 150

Avrich-Skapinker, "Canadian Jewish Involvement," 82-83.

### 151

Feingold, *Silent No More*, 261-62.

### 152

Chumir quoted in Irwin Cotler, "The New Human Rights Agenda: The First Sheldon Chumir Lecture," *Constitutional Forum* 6, no.1-4 (1994): 42, [https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/constitutional\\_forum/index.php/constitutional\\_forum/article/view/12017](https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/constitutional_forum/index.php/constitutional_forum/article/view/12017).