

# EDITORIAL

## How real is Gorbachev's policy of glasnost?

A 17-year-old struggle for freedom is finally over; Soviet refusenik Yosef Begun arrived in Israel on Tuesday night, and for the first time laid eyes on a land he could only previously dream of. But with the recent emigration of such prominent refuseniks like Begun, Natan Sharansky, Ida Nudel, Udi Edelstein, and Victor Brailovsky, one would assume that the situation for Soviet Jewry is improving. And what better evidence to point to than Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's new policy of *glasnost* (openness) which seems to be granting unprecedented opportunities to Soviet citizens while opening up Russian society. On the surface this seems to be the case, but in reality *glasnost* still has a long way to go in order to fulfill the image Gorbachev has created for the West. And probably one of the greatest indicators of this is the continued oppression of Soviet Jewry.

It's ironic that the Soviet leader who has allowed the most Russian Jews to emigrate than any other was Leonid Brezhnev, the same man who the Kremlin is now openly criticizing for the country's chronic economic and social stagnation. They're absolutely right, Brezhnev was far from progressive, but he tactfully knew how to use the Soviet Jews as a bargaining chip in order to strengthen detente and maintain better trade, cultural, and political relations with the United States. In fact, the flow of emigrés between 1968-1979 totalled close to 250,000 while the period between 1983-1986, an average or less than 100 Jews left the USSR each month. Clearly, the Soviet policy on Jewish emigration has closely reflected the state of political affairs between the two superpowers, and as the Cold War intensified under the US leadership of Ronald Reagan, the number of Jewish emigrants diminished. Apparently, over the '70s the Soviets the Soviets found it important to placate American concerns on Soviet Jewry, and Carter's emphasis on human rights seemed to be effective in opening the doors when in 1979 alone over 50,000 Jews left the USSR. However it's distressing to see a country use a people's will for the sole purpose of diplomatic leverage.

And the process to apply for a visa has become exceedingly difficult. First of all, Soviet Jews must acquire a "visov" of invitation from first-degree relatives living abroad. That immediately eliminates hundreds of thousands of Jews who may want to apply for emigration, but have no such relative in order to gain that sort of sponsorship. And that is just the beginning of a long road of obstacles to freedom. The next task is to gain permission from all family members including parents, siblings, children, and even former spouses. This is part of a new emigration law passed on January 1, 1987 which essentially gives a relative the power to effectively block a person's application. Between 1968-1987, a total of about 648,000 Israeli invitations were sent to Soviet Jews, and during that time around 274,000 emigrated from the USSR, leaving approximately 374,000 Jews who still wanted to leave.

Presently the amount of Jewish culture which is allowed to exist within the Soviet Union is minimal. No textbooks of the Hebrew language, prayer books, and Jewish history books are produced in the USSR. Formal courses in Hebrew language are sometimes offered in universities, but as a rule Jews are often not allowed to enroll. Moreover, for a Soviet Jewish population of close to 2.6 million, there is estimated to be only 50-60 synagogues across the country.

Perhaps Gorbachev could ease the increasing amount of Jewish applicants wanting to emigrate by allowing Jews to practice their religion and culture. As it stands, the Soviet Union's oppressive policies will only continue to feed the desire of Jewish citizens to leave the country and gain this freedom elsewhere. But to condemn Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* outright is a bit premature. Definitely it's an attempt to reform the mentality of the country in order to help decentralize and restructure the economy. If anything the Jewish case shows that *glasnost* has a lot to prove before the West can look at Gorbachev's reforms as genuine. His release of prominent Soviet Jews it may be construed as an attempt to decapitate the emigration movement. Simply, take out those dissidents that get the most attention and the movement will eventually die. That is precisely why now more than ever, when the door is being opened a bit we must demand even louder that Gorbachev deliver on his promise for reform.



## LETTERS

We will publish, space permitting, letters under 250 words. They must be typed, triple-spaced, accompanied by writer's name and phone number. We may edit for length. Libellous material will be rejected. Deliver to 111 Central Square during business hours.

### Soviet Jewry week "callous"

Editor,  
The Jewish Student Federation's use of the slogan "Struggling For Freedom" to promote its "Soviet Jewry Week" is both callous and hypocritical.

The JSF seems to believe that it is only Jews who are trapped inside the communist hell known as the Soviet Union. I seriously doubt that the JSF has any concern for the hundreds of millions of non-Jews who are also denied their rights and freedoms. One cannot "struggle for freedom" without realizing the nature of the slavery which restricts that freedom. In this case, the enemy is not anti-Semitism but socialism (a policy of which the Soviet Union is the ultimate manifestation). Hence, it is not Jews, but all Soviet citizens, who are the innocent victims of Soviet policy. Therefore, by lobbying only for the rights of Soviet Jews, the JSF implicitly sanctions the enslavement of any non-Jewish Soviet citizens.

The only system under which Soviet style imprisonment is made impossible is one which guarantees individual rights. Ironically, this is what the nation of Israel is fighting to deny its non-Jewish residents.

Sincerely,  
Greg Hopper

### "Insults" were "fair comment"

Editor,  
Imagine my surprise to pick up several of the last issues of Excalibur and find that I was indeed mistaken in at least one of my contentions in my letter taking one of the poltroon-

ish "liberty" coalitioners to task for stupidity. From the volume of letters it seems like I've got the whole nest of maggots stirred up and doing a cucaracha all over your pages.

Two points:

a) one of the most inane things that apprentice rightwing ideologies tend to do out of some primitive ability to mimic the powers of argument is to make a thoroughly baseless, outrageous claim and then carry on endlessly requesting "facts" to contradict their spurious claim. I guess they feel they are contributing to their cause if they trammel up people with better things to do in a double bind of the "are you still beating your spouse" type. Ditto this endless palaver about "libel."

Dear fellows (using the term loosely)—I spend a great deal of my time discussing Nicaragua and the rest of Latin America with almost all and sundry who will listen—in my home, on the phone, in bars, in meetings, at readings. I spend a lot of that time supplying facts—from personal observation, scholarship and investigations of my own and others. I lend books and magazines from my large library of Nicaraguan material on an almost daily basis. But my interlocutors are genuinely interested. They want to know. As for Hooper and the other toadish clubbers who have written, answer me this—why, in the names of both Sandino and Socrates, should I expend the time and energy supplying "facts" to someone who has just turned around, dropped their trousers bent over and showed me the colour of their politics (hint: 1939-1945 & the wrong side?)

And, by the way, speaking of facts, where does this drivel about Linder's AK-47 rifle come from? I can't bring myself to credit Hopper's imagination.

b) I appreciate Blechman's fastidious repetition of 90% of the text of my earlier letter. It was rather a thrill to be able to re-read what I had written without having to go back to the source. With regard to libel, two points seem to apply—the notion of "fair comment" and the necessity of proving substantial damage to the reputation of the person spoken of. As each and every carefully-chosen word of my previous letter applies without doubt to someone of Hopper and other's political "stripe" (see my point a, above), "fair comment" is certainly taken care of. As for damage to reputation, well, a lump or two on their added pates for the damage they did to Ben Linder's reputation is only fair. As I am sure these squeamish dotards are glad of, Ben is dead and therefore can't threaten libel actions.

As for choice of vocabulary, I do mean to apologize to Hopper, Blechman et al—but please remember, boys, there is a word limit in letters to the editor. If I'd had more space to do you justice, I would have spoke better of you—like *slithering* maggot, *useless* jackass, *repellent* slimeball, etc etc. If you show this letter to any "objective and intelligent reader," get her/him to look the adjectives up.

Thanks,  
Jim Smith

### Art reviewer responds

Dear Editor,  
re: Marnie Endrin's letter of Jan. 14. All emotions aside, Ms. Endrin has misunderstood the art review of the Winter's art shows. I speak not only as a reviewer but as a participant in the shows as well. Ms. Endrin's confusion stems from the

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 (. . . and Liz Flagal as Peggy Lipton)

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MAILING ADDRESS:  
 Room 111, Central Square  
 York University  
 4700 Keele Street  
 Downsview M3J 1P3