

REFUSENIKS 1987

A Personal Journey: Activism and Freedom

A look at the Refusenik struggle
and its relevance today.



MY BACKGROUND & MOTIVATION

My Context: ROBIN LANSMAN Osteopathy Student

Why I Went



- Primary Goal: **Moral Support.**



- Inspiration: Courage of '35s' women.



- **Motivation:** Grandfather's NAZI escape & exclusion



- **Training:** Meetings above a hair salon - Childs Hill



THE 35S CAMPAIGN: LEADERSHIP & LEGACY

The Grassroots Movement

- Founded 1971 (London): By housewives with no prior political experience.
- Name: “The 35s,” inspired by prisoner Raisa Palatnik (age 35).
- Tactics: Street sweeping, black balloons, and relentless pressure.

Enduring Leadership: **Rita Eker**

- Co-Chair: A driving force behind the campaign's global impact.
- Still Active Today: Continues humanitarian work (One to One Children's Fund) and historical remembrance in 2025.



CAREFUL PREPARATION FOR TRIP MARCH 1987



- ****Tourist Façade:**** Strict adherence to official itineraries and passive behavior to avoid suspicion.
- ****Hidden Cargo:**** Essential goods (Hebrew prayer books, medicines, vitamins) concealed within luggage compartments.
- ****KGB Surveillance:**** Assume all rooms were bugged; conversations were held outside or via written notes that were destroyed.
- ****Rendezvous Protocol:**** Meetings arranged using coded language, specific times, and crowded, low-risk public locations.

THE EMIGRATION PROCEDURE (THE 12 STEPS)

WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN FOR SOVIET JEWRY | MR/JA 755A Finchley Road, London NW11 8DL 1986. | Co-Chairman: RITA EKSM., MARGARET SIGEL

THE 12-STEP BUREAUCRATIC GAUNTLET

A long, laborious process designed to trap.
Goal: Humiliation, financial ruin, and deterrence.

1. **Visov (Invitation):** Legally attested, from a near relative in Israel.
2. **OVIR Registration:** Applicant registers 'Visov'. Interrogations (Party member? Army service?).
3. **Work/Housing Reference:** Certificate from place of work or House Management.
4. **Residential Permit:** Certificate proving legitimate residence.
5. **Autobiography & Photos:** Detailed autobiography and six photos per member.
6. **Residents' Attitude:** Certified letter on the attitude of those left behind.
7. **Forty Roubles:** Fee for each family member.
8. **OVIR Submission & Fees (If Favourable):**
 - a. Resign from work.
 - b. Pay for flat repairs.
 - d. Pay 500 roubles (renounce citizenship).
 - e. Pay 170 roubles (exit visa).
9. **Document Surrender:** Hand in passport, Army card, work-book to OVIR.
10. **Transit Visas:** Obtain entry visas from Austrian/Dutch Embassies.
11. **Send Luggage:** Ship belongings.
12. **The 'Refusenik' Trap:** If OVIR disapproves, wait six months, apply again... become a 'Refusenik'.



KEY TERMINOLOGY

Visov (Визов)



The 'Invitation' from a relative in Israel. Essential for application, but risked labeling the holder a traitor.

OVIR



Department of Visas and Registration. The bureaucratic gatekeeper. Controlled queues, interrogations, and approvals.

Refusenik



A citizen denied an exit visa. Faced job loss, social ostracism, and became a 'non-person.'

MOSCOW: MARCH 1987 CONTEXT

Political Climate

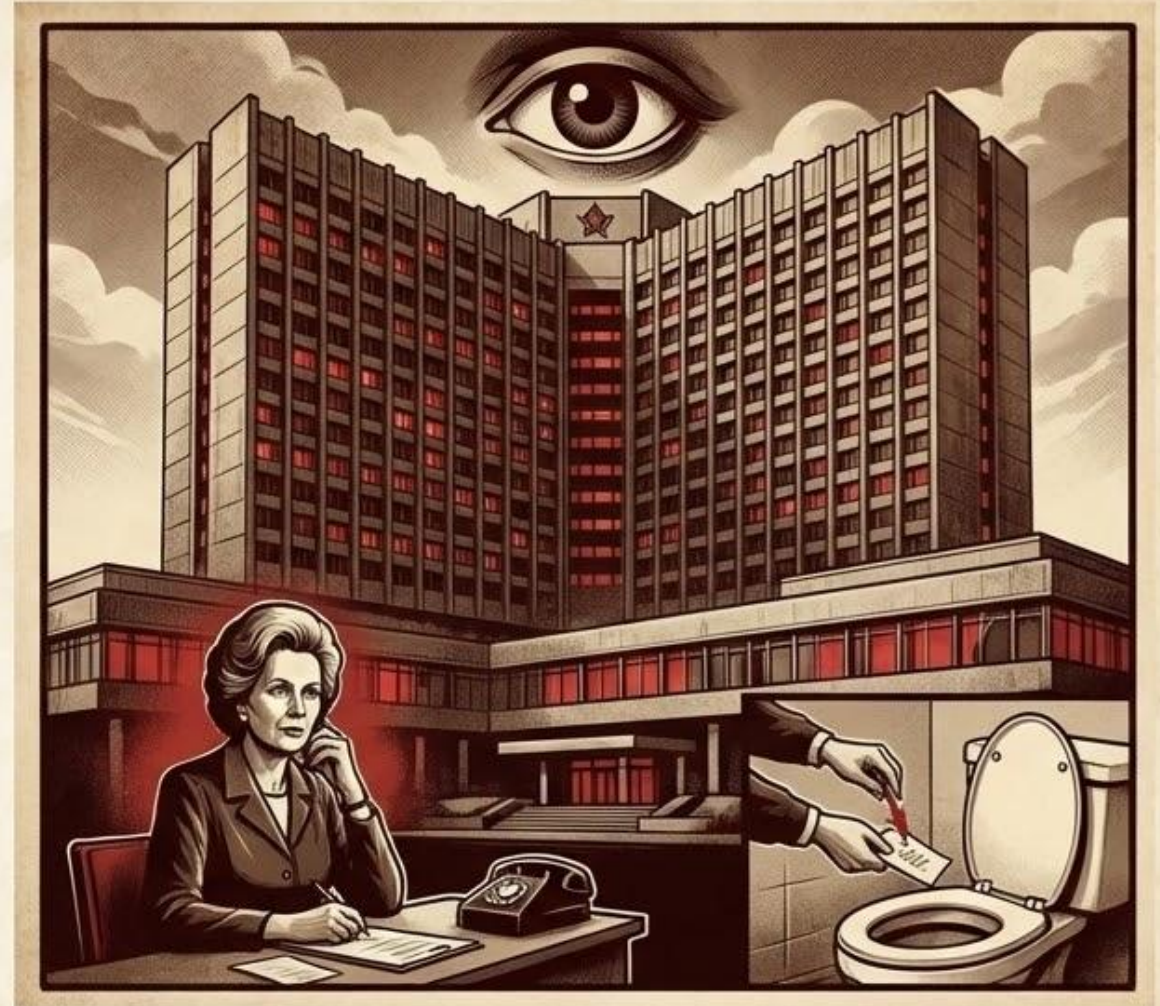
- Coincided with the Thatcher/Gorbachev meetings.
- Era of *Glasnost* (Openness) and **Perestroika* (Restructuring).
- Atmosphere: A mix of official hope countered by deep Refusenik fear of surveillance.



THE ROSSIYA: SURVEILLANCE HUB

The Environment

- 6,000-room brutalist monolith; felt less like a hotel, more like a center for monitoring.
- **Paranoia was Necessary:** Floor ladies monitored our movements constantly.
- **Safety Protocol:** Communicated by writing notes and flushing them down the toilet.



MEETING REFUSENIK FAMILIES

The Protocols

- Required complex tradecraft and coded signals (e.g., newspaper under arm).
- Meetings were often brief, tense, and held in specific public locations.



The Exchange

- Our gifts: Prayer books, kosher food, medicine, and Western currency.
- Their gift: Incredible hospitality, resilience, and dignity despite hardship.



THE SOVIET PARADOX



Contradictions in Communism

- **Beryozka Shops:** Sold Western goods to foreigners/elite while locals queued for basics.
- **Over-Employment:** Manual labor (like breaking ice) created solely to inflate employment figures.
- **The Metro:** A secretive, subterranean palace—a metaphor for the secrecy of the state.

CASE STUDY: IDA NUDEL

The Guardian Angel



- Refused visa in 1971; became an activist helping “Prisoners of Zion” in the Gulags.



- Exiled to Siberia for four years for hanging a protest banner.



- Her struggle, and that of Natan Sharansky, proved the power of international advocacy.



Symbol of Resilience & Advocacy

1987 VS. 2025: LESSONS ON IDENTITY

1987: State-Mandated Exclusion

- Persecution was institutional: job loss, "diploma taxes."
- Jewish identity was officially denied or suppressed.

2025: Anti-Zionism & The New Challenge

- Classic antisemitism merges with aggressive **anti-Zionism**.
- This targets the political/national element of Jewish identity.
- The fear of being *persona non grata* persists, shifting from the government to social pressure.



THE LEGACY OF RESILIENCE

“The story of the Refuseniks highlights how quickly expressing a different view can lead to being declared persona non grata.”



— A Reflection on Freedom



— A Reflection on Freedom



****Call to Action:**** Share this history to recognize the subtle warning signs in our present environment.