

Detroit Action Committee on Jewry aids immigrants

By HY SHENKMAN

The Detroit Action Committee for Soviet Jewry was formed in Southfield by local men and women. They are working for a cause which is more than a cause. With these people it is a strong feeling of dedication, a commitment.

"My heart pounds when I make the long distance calls to Russia," said

Ray Sharfman, from Southfield, one of the activists.

"When I dial, I'm nervous because I never know whether the person I'm calling is at home or in jail. Applicants for visas have their phones disconnected so one evening I phone and reserve a date for the next day at a certain time.

"In the beginning, Soviet Jews are suspicious. Taken by surprise they listen. They don't open up at first. It takes time to develop a relationship," she said.

"I HAVE to be careful what I say, so not to harm the applicant. The conversation is being taped by the Soviet authorities.

"I know it. I can hear the click of the recorder. We too tape the conversation so we can go over it and make the right move.

"At this time I'm handling Dr. Polotnikov from the city of Novosibirsk. He is not allowed to leave the country because as the Soviet authorities claim he knows secrets. The doctor is in his sixties and insists he doesn't know any secrets and the authorities know it.

"His doctor's license has been revoked, and he was fired. Now he is called a parasite and warned that if he doesn't find work within a short time he'll be locked up for two years."

SO THE Detroit Action Committee for Soviet Jewry gave Dr. Polotnikov a job as consultant for ophthalmology. The group will send him cases by mail and he in turn will send his opinions as to the treatment.

Checks for his work will be mailed. A copy of this employment contract will be mailed to Russian Malik of the

UN and to the Russian Ambassador in Washington, Dobrinin.

This routine of employing fired Soviet Jews has been practiced before by the State of Israel. Jewish specialists in Russia, fired because of the desire to immigrate, had been hired by Israeli Universities.

Chemists, physicists and other professions have been giving lectures long distance on the phone and paid for it. This move has given them the opportunity to support themselves and stay out of prison for "parasitism."

"IMAGINE two doctors, husband and wife, working all their lives without being able to save up some money for a rainy day. The Soviet Government revoked their practicing licenses, fired them and disconnected their telephone.

"Their only crime was that they wanted to be reunited with their family," said Saul Rabins from Southfield. Rabins knows the taste of this agony.

Two years ago he helped his sister from Russian Jewry to reunite with their father in Israel. Now Rabins devotes his time and effort for others.

"We send to Russian Jews weekly close to a dozen packages of the kind of clothing which is especially valuable in the Soviet Union.

"There they sell it and buy food. We also write and call them. All this is our way of showing them that we care."

"I JUST can't get over it" -- he said. "Russia is probably the only country in the world where a man can work for the government all his life and have nothing to show for it.

"As soon as a citizen applies for a visa he is out of a job, out of food and goes hungry."

get mail from the doctor couple. What really hurts them most is their pride, and it isn't easy to swallow. For almost four decades they were employed by the Soviet government, helping thousands of people and here is their "reward."

"I'm one of the older members," said Sady Gollieb from Southfield, recording secretary. "My enthusiasm to work for this cause came after I was invited to a meeting.

"I LISTENED to the fate of a people and felt very strongly about helping them. I felt guilty for not helping during the second world war, but I was busy raising a family then."

Mrs. Gollieb is not bashful. "I asked for the job of writing letters, and I got it. We are all interwoven, no one refuses to do anything.

"I belong to other organizations, but this one is the most important to me now, because it can't wait.

"Many nights I don't sleep through because of what these people are going through. My heart goes out for them and I'll do all I can," Mrs. Gollieb said assuringly.

A DELEGATE to the World Congress for Soviet Jewry in Brussels, Hellen Shavell is the youngest activist in age but not in experience. A past president and present trustee she makes people aware, tries to motivate them and encourage them to become active.

Many people contribute to a cause and think that they have done their share. But no job is accomplished until the job is done. It isn't easy to get people involved.

"It's human nature to look for an easy way out. I found that adults are more responsive to this cause.

"As the years are marching on,

they feel maybe they haven't done enough."

THERE ARE four categories among immigrants: "displaced persons" those who look for a better way to earn a living; "exiles" (like Solzhenitsyn and Nemands—those who have no country of their own (like Gypsies).

Almost 90 per cent of the emigres in Brussels are of the displaced person category. Misha Feigin, the former major of the Red army, is a D.P. The Soviets claimed he was mentally unbalanced for wanting to leave Russia.

"My work for this noble cause," said Hellen Shavell, "has enriched me." Her parents survived the holocaust and left Russia soon after the second world war.

"I'm glad they did. I could have been on the other side," Mrs. Shavell said.

"It all began at a meeting. Along with others I signed a petition for Russian Jewry and left with the feeling that I had done my bit," said the group's president, Arnold Michlin of Farmington.

"But my daughter, Joanie, then 13, was not satisfied with just signing. She felt that more had to be done.

"So she retyped the petition in a language more appealing to people her age and collected 500 signatures from her schoolmates, her Arab teacher and all.

"My wife and I drove her to the activist meetings, and we too got interested in the project.

"But what really turned me on," said Michlin, "was a skit I saw performed at the Jewish Center."

It was about young Russian Jews in search for identity at passover time. They managed to get a little piece of matzo, through the underground. They pulled the shades down, locked the doors and performed the traditional Seder.

Shavell ate a piece of matzo they handled it like sort of a delicacy, a treasure. It was the first time they even saw matzo.

The same young actors appear in the next act dressed like Americans, listening to their stereo in a middle-class home. While they were snapping their fingers to the tune of the music, their parents pleaded with them, "Please come to the Seder, the passover table." But the youngsters paid no attention.

"It's a holiday," the parents begged. "Please turn it off. Come and eat...turkey with matzo."

"They boys, Wouldn't you please spend your parents at least a few minutes of the passover table?" the parents asked again.

"It was then when the boys of Russia captured my heart. I realized how we take things for granted around here," said Mr. Michlin.

"When a Jew cries in Kiev it is heard by a Jew in the United States and it's heard by a Jew all the way to Jerusalem," said Mrs. Shirley Leopold from Huntington Woods. She is the co-chairman and liaison between the group and the Jewish Council.

"We are trying," she said, "to implement the Jackson Amendment which deals with human rights of all nationalities. The Soviet Jewry is just a part of it. The amendment deals with freedom of immigration.

A busy activist, Mrs. Leopold is also on the executive board of the Jewish Community Council; on the executive board of the Zionist Federation of Detroit and social action for Detroit Metropolitan Hadassah.

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Optometrists eye state shortage

Dr. William Pope is worried. As president of the Oakland County Optometric Society he's fearful for the future of Michigan Optometry if there isn't an optometry school established in this state soon.

"Michigan doesn't have a single optometry school, yet most of the people get their eye care from optometrists," he said.

There are 38 counties in Michigan whose only eye care is rendered by optometrists.

Pope, along with many other of the state's optometrists, is hopeful, that a school of optometry will be established this year at Michigan State University.

It is under consideration.

"So far, \$130,000 has been spent to research whether or not we need a school in this state. To me, it's pretty obvious," Pope said.

He explained that the average age of optometrists in Michigan is 52 and rising because there aren't enough places to train young men and women.

Pope is hopeful that people throughout the state will tell their state representatives and state senators "We need optometric care in this state."

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