

ShowBiz Forum

Forum Home **Messages** Chat Files Channel

- Click for Related Forums -

Search enhanced by Google

Hot Searches

1. Homeland Security
2. Immigration
3. Dick Cheney
4. Condoleezza Rice
5. Social Security#

MORE HOT SEARCHES

Chat Center

- Hot Movies**
- Topic: Hot Movies
- The Drive-In**
- Topic: The Drive-In

Board Folders

- Ask the Experts**
1355 msgs in 74 dscns
Latest: Feb-21
- Industry News/...**
5502 msgs in -152 dscns
Latest: Mar-26
- Weekly ShowBiz...**
4241 msgs in -133 dscns
Latest: Mar-31
- Celebrity News...**
10629 msgs in 485 dscns
Latest: 1:06 PM
- TV/Movie Celebs**
1882 msgs in 148 dscns
Latest: Mar-17
- Music/Other Ce...**
1258 msgs in 77 dscns
Latest: Mar-17
- You Decide: Ho...**
1277 msgs in 108 dscns
Latest: Mar-6
- Movie Talk**
6064 msgs in -104 dscns
Latest: Apr-4
- Harvey Karten'...**
1721 msgs in 469 dscns
Latest: Apr-5
- World of Enter...**
663 msgs in 8 dscns
Latest: 10:09 AM
- Home Video/DVD**
1330 msgs in 230 dscns
Latest: Feb-20
- Screenwriting**
220 msgs in 31 dscns
Latest: 5/10/07
- Theater & Music**
746 msgs in 147 dscns
Latest: Apr-4
- The Green Room**
9435 msgs in 564 dscns
Latest: Feb-25

To list New Prev Next

Harvey Karten's Reviews → Review: Refusenik

Subscribe Print Discussion

#1 of 1 Posted Apr-4 4:57 PM

From harveykarten Posts 228 Last Apr-5

To All [Msg # 23038.1]

REFUSENIK

Abramorama/ The Foundation for Documentary Projects
 Reviewed for CompuServe by Harvey Karten
 Grade: B
 Directed by: Laura Bialis
 Written By: Laura Bialis
 Cast: Natan Sharansky, Zev Yaroslavsky
 Screened at: Critics' DVD, NYC, 4/1/08
 Opens: May 9, 2008

To us here in the West the idea that citizens of any country are forbidden to leave, even as tourists, seems inconceivable. Could it be that people innocent of any crime are trapped because they are so valuable, talented and good, that the country in which they live simply cannot part with them? This was the argument that former Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev gives in Laura Bialis's documentary, "Refusenik," for refusing to permit any of his Jewish residents to go abroad. On the opposite track, Soviet and Russian governments from the Czars through the Stalin administration spread propaganda not unlike that spread by the Nazi government in Germany that Jews are a poison, a corrupt people intent on betraying their own country. By way of reaction, some of the signs shown by filmmaker Bialis, drawn up roughly by Soviet Jews, equated Nazism with Soviet Communism, though of course with due regard for Stalinist brutality there was never a pogrom intent on wiping out the entire Jewish population of Russia.

"Refusenik" can be compared to James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty's heartrending doc released a few months ago, "The Singing Revolution," which graphically outlined the struggle of the Estonian people to liberate themselves from the Soviet empire. In much the way Estonians were able to throw off the yoke of Soviet repression, so one and one-half million Jewish people from the Soviet Union have emigrated beginning in 1989, most to Israel and the United States.

Keeping a people imprisoned in a country is irrational. One would think that those Jews who applied for visas out of the Soviet Union would be greeted by expressions of relief by the Soviet government, given their anti-Semitic hostilities. Who wants to hold on to millions, many of whom ready to ditch their properties for free lives elsewhere? The chief rationale, a phony one to be sure, was that the Soviet government did not want an exodus of Jews to "enemy countries," namely Israel and the U.S. In a dizzying display of archival photographs and videos, many in black-and-white, Bialis uses a plethora of talking heads (too many in my opinion) to explain what is now a closed case. Jews in Russian who wanted out are out. Those remaining are presumably as free to leave their country as anyone in the democratic West.

A viewer might be shocked to see scenes of Soviet anti-Semitism during the sixties—synagogues were closed and the teaching of Hebrew was forbidden—though this can be seen through the prism of Communist-inspired atheism wherein members of other religions were not free to practice as they chose. But the refusal of the authorities even to allow talented students, some of whom graduated first in their classes, to attend the free universities as prescribed by law, is shocking. The Soviets suffered as well, depriving themselves of people whose talents in science and medicine and other fields could enrich their country. A huge Moscow library contained no volumes by Jewish writers. Those who applied for visas to leave were not only denied flat-out but were immediately fired from their jobs—as were the Panovs who were major dancers in the Kirov ballet. (A stirring demonstration of their art is offered.)

Welcome, Guest

- Post a message
- New messages to you
- Log in

Find messages

[Advanced Search](#)



Web Offers

- Find: Digital Cameras
- NBA Team Gear
- Hybrid Cars
- Tiger Woods
- Sleep Aids
- Tom Cruise

Special Offers

Show me more info on:

World Cup

Finding People

- Find Local Singles
- White Pages
- Cell Phone Numbers
- Unlisted Numbers
- E-mail Addresses
- People Finder
- Criminal Records
- Find Old Friends
- Great Travel Deals

Cool Clicks!

- Technical Support
- Private Investigators
- Leadership Training
- Binoculars
- Logo Design
- Flat Screen Monitors
- Cell Phone Accessories
- Store Photos Free



Since the United States was the only power that could conceivably persuade the Soviet authorities to release Jews, demonstrations were held annually, one featuring noted civil rights activists Bayard Rustin who alluded to the history of "our Jewish brothers" to help us (African-Americans) when we were in need. A huge demonstration, mostly by youths in Washington, was enough to convince Premier Gorbachev of the passion for liberation here in the U.S. Gorbachev, the most moderate of the Soviet leaders, would ultimately be responsible for a new wave of liberation in his own country. He was also the man who, after talks with President Reagan, pulled the necessary strings to let the Jewish people go.

Natan Sharansky is among the leading spokesmen in the film. This man, with advanced degrees in mathematics, was arrested and in July 1978 convicted on charges of treason and spying for the United States and sentenced to 13 years of forced labor. After 16 months of incarceration in Lefortovo prison he was sent to a Siberian labor camp Perm 35 where he served for nine years. The fate of Sharansky and other political prisoners in the USSR, repeatedly brought to attention by Western human rights groups and diplomats, was a cause of embarrassment and irritation for the Soviet authorities. Though not shown in this film, he ultimately became a proponent of no surrender to the Palestinians, i.e. no land conquered by Israel in the six-day war should be surrendered. Others, including at least one Holocaust survivor, chimed in with reminiscences.

As in Estonia, ordinary people crossing all ethnic and religious boundaries demonstrated persistently, their pressure finally leading the Soviet government to grant what should have been a slam-dunk decision decades earlier. The film should have been edited more vigorously, as many of the people interviewed repeated the same story. Otherwise this is a heartwarming tribute to the power of demonstrations to embarrass and ultimately lead the Soviet powers to free the Jewish people from Communist oppression.

Not Rated. 117 minutes. © 2008 by Harvey Karten Member: NY Film Critics Online

Edited Apr-4 by harveykarten

 Options  Reply

 Subscribe  Print Discussion

 [Harvey Karten's Reviews](#)  [Review: Refusenik](#)

 To list  New  Prev  Next

Adjust text size:  Interest level: 

© 2008 CompuServe Interactive Services, Inc. All rights reserved.

[Legal Notices](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)