

# SOVIET WRITER'S VISIT TO MOSCOW SYNAGOGUE MAY MEAN EASING OF RESTRICTIONS

By David Horowitz

UNITED NATIONS (WUP) -- A member of the Soviet Mission here at the UN, came to visit this writer in the WUP Bureau quite excited in the belief that I would be interested in a Novosti News Agency press release dealing with the report of a Russian writer, Igor Troyanowski, who had given his personal impressions of a visit he had made to the Moscow Choral Synagogue on the Succoth Sabbath service September 27.

In view of the fact that the Soviets of late have made some move towards a rapprochement with Israel on the possibility of the renewal of diplomatic relations, the Troyanowski report takes on added meaning. For it shows, hopefully, that the Russians are beginning to take a new look on easing the religious freedom of the Soviet Jews.

The Novosti release was written in Russian and the Soviet UN official took great pains in translating it to me. In essence, it read as follows:

"On Saturday evening, September 27, the Succoth holiday, I visited the Moscow Choral Synagogue where in the large halls were assembled no less than 1,500 worshippers. While many of them were elderly -- who appeared to come out of the pages of the classic Jewish literature of Sholom Aleichem -- I noticed quite a number of young faces also.

"When the services were completed, I went up to Rabbi Jacob Fishmen and congratulated him on the inspiring proceedings. Sporting a beard, he seemed to be a middle-aged man. He introduced me to the chairman of the Board of the Moscow Jewish religious institution, a Mr. Michael Tandetnik, a tall handsome man of great energy who by profession an engineer-economist. I gathered his age was 56.

"Mr. Tandetnik told me that services are conducted every day. 'We have especially many worshippers on Sabbaths -- somewhere around 1,000.' He further informed me that this year they had manufactured 110 tons of Matzoth which is provided free to the ill and elderly. Moreover, he said that kosher meats are provided for all those who wish to keep kashruth.

"On the ground floor of the synagogue is a Mikvah for ritual purposes, Tandetnik told me, and he said that there are active Yeshivoh for students.

"During our discussion we took up reports of some of the Western media, especially the Voice of America and the BBC which point out time and again to what great an extent the Soviet authorities are interfering with the normal religious services in the Synagogue and how militia men have obstructed services and arrested worshippers. 'There's been nothing of the sort,' Mr. Tandetnik told me. This is all pure distortion and falsehood. There never was a time when any of our worshippers suffered for their religious views.

"Mr. Tandetnik went on to say that 'some religious activists in the West, in whose sincerity I never had any doubts, believed in this distorted information and thus expressed their fears. I want to point out that there are no grounds whatsoever for any kind of worry. We ourselves requested the militia men, especially during the holidays, to keep order near the synagogue. It is entirely a traffic problem.'

"While in the Synagogue, Mr. Tandetnik introduced me to a New York rabbi, Haskel Lookstein, whom I interviewed at his hotel after the Succoth festival. I asked him to give his impressions of the services and whether he had noticed any interference to the normal activities of the synagogue services. 'My impressions are good,' Rabbi Lookstein stated. 'It was a beautiful event. All our traditions and

rituals are adhered to, and I was particularly pleased with the Cantor and the masterful chorus. Together with the worshippers in the Synagogue, I prayed for the peace of the world.

"Rabbi Lookstein concluded by expressing the hope that wider contacts be established between the religious figures outside the Soviet Union with the Jews in Russia and thus helping bring about a better understanding between them and thereby dissipate erroneous impressions."

The fact that the Soviets found it expedient to publish this report throughout the Soviet Union, via the Novosti News Agency at this time may have some meaning. It now remains to be seen what the follow-up will be. The main question remains: will the Kremlin relax its restrictions on emigration?

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