

Soviet Jewry Activists In U.S. Express Reservations About Report From USSR On Soviet Jewry Status

NEW YORK (JTA) — Soviet Jewry activists in the United States expressed reservations that a report that the Soviet Union has agreed to an increase in Jewish emigration by way of Rumania and for easing of restrictions on Jewish religion and culture.

Lynn Singer, executive director of the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry, said that she is "deeply concerned" over the figure of 11-12,000 exit visas the Soviet Union is reportedly willing to give Soviet Jews this year. "This is only the very tip of the iceberg," she asserted, claiming that "we know of some 400,000 Soviet Jews who have already taken the first steps in applications for a visa."

"What is the future for them?" she asked. "What will happen to those who are refused exit visas on the ground that they hold state secrets? The headlines in the newspapers shout that Soviet Jews will be free, but many

cannot get exit visas. And what will happen next year, after the 11,000 Soviet Jews emigrate, how many will be permitted to leave later? This is the question."

Singer charged that the new transit procedure for Soviet Jews of direct flights to Israel through Rumania is in violation of the Helsinki Accords. She argued that future Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union will no longer be able to claim refugee status once they arrive in Rumania -- as they have been doing for years once they arrived in Vienna from the Soviet Union. "This is in clear violation of the Helsinki Accords," which give refugees the right to settle in the country of their choice, she said.

Morris Abram, president of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, who have just returned from Moscow where they met with top Soviet officials, issued a statement here late Monday night announcing that the Kremlin has agreed to a meaningful increase in Jewish emigration in the following months.

In addition, Abram and Bronfman said, they negotiated with the Soviet authorities a new transit procedure for future Jewish emigrants who will reach Israel through direct flights from Rumania, an arrangement that would eliminate the phenomenon of noshrim (dropouts) -- Jews who

leave the Soviet Union with an Israeli visa, but when they arrive in Vienna choose to go elsewhere, mainly the United States. Abram and Bronfman also said the Soviets agreed to ease restrictions on the study of Hebrew and on religious Jewish life.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJCongress, who participated in the meetings Bronfman and Abram held in Moscow, told the JTA that the Soviet officials agreed that all Jewish religious books from any source will be permitted to enter and be distributed to Jews in the Soviet Union.

"The Soviets asked the WJC to draw a list of all religious books they want to send into the Soviet Union and submit it to them. They did not place any limits on the quantity of the books. They only objected to books of a political nature,"

Steinberg said. He said the Soviets also agreed to the opening of new synagogues in Jewish communities across the country and even agreed that rabbinical training will be given in Moscow and that rabbinical students from the Soviet Union will come to study in the

United States. Rabbi Avraham Weiss, national director of the Center for Russian Jewry/Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, sharply criticized the "deal" between the Soviet authorities and the Jewish leaders.

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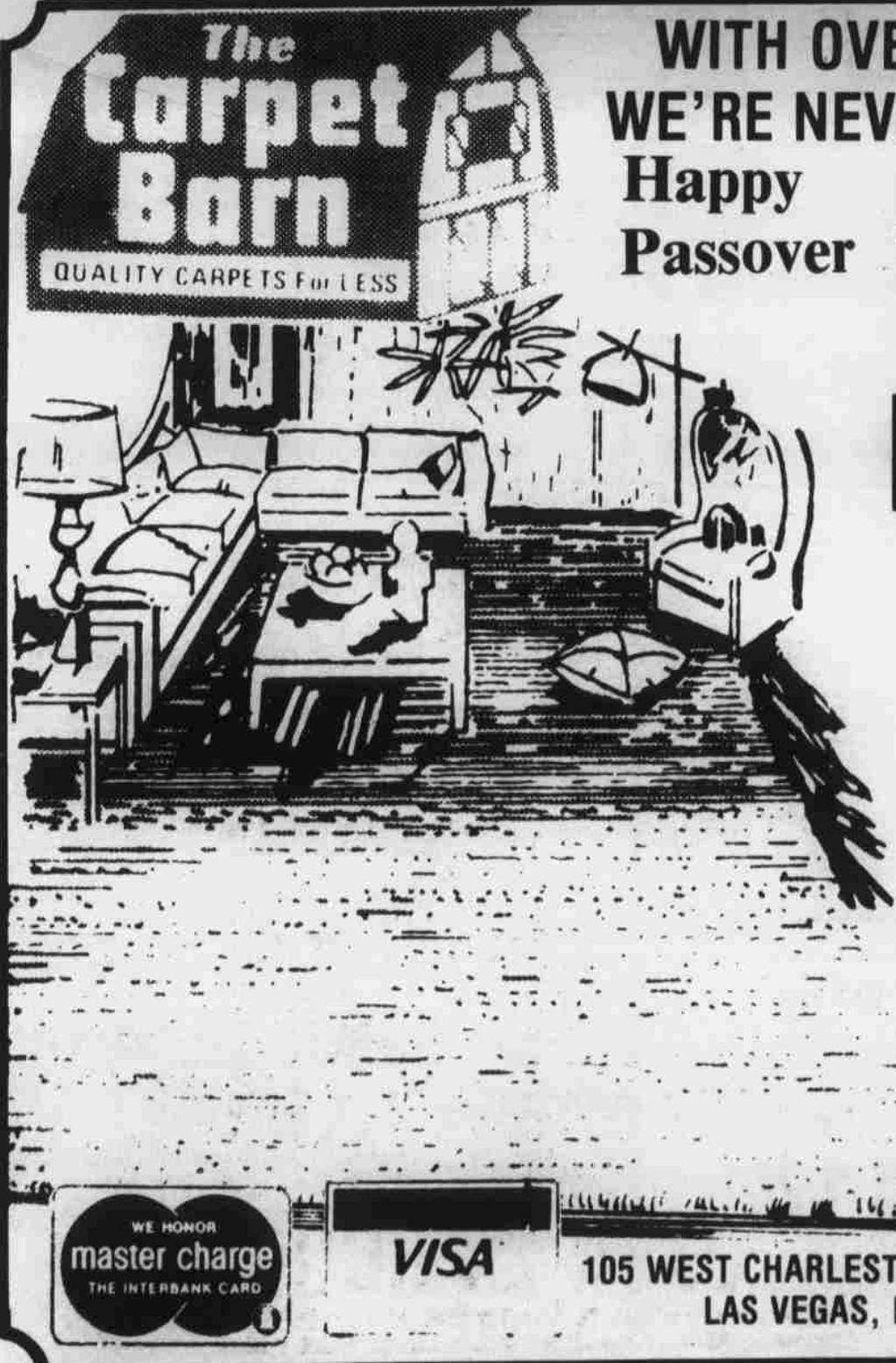
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