

Student Worksheet #1: Short History + 4 Video Questions

Short History of the Refusenik Movement

From the **1960s to the 1980s**, many Jews in the **Soviet Union** wanted to emigrate (leave) to escape religious discrimination and find freedom - especially in **Israel** or the **United States**. The Soviet government often denied their requests and punished them. These people were called **refuseniks**.

Refuseniks could lose their jobs, be followed by the secret police, and even be arrested. Around the world, especially in the U.S., Jewish communities and allies formed a human rights movement to help them gain the freedom to leave. They held rallies, wrote letters, and worked with leaders. Over time, this international pressure helped many Soviet Jews finally emigrate.

Hero of the Refusenik Movement

Natan Sharansky (born 1948) was a famous refusenik, a brave Soviet Jew who stood up for the right to emigrate to Israel and speak freely. He became a powerful voice for human rights, even while spending nearly nine years in a Soviet prison, much of it in harsh conditions and solitary confinement. His courage and determination inspired people around the world. After his release in 1986, he moved to Israel, where he continues to fight for freedom and justice as a politician, author, and human rights hero.

Video Questions (After watching both videos, answer with a partner)

1. What does U.S. Representative John Lewis say about Soviet Jews in the 1987 video?



2. What were the refuseniks asking for?



3. What kind of support did the movement get from outside the Soviet Union?



4. What made this social justice movement different from some others in history?


