

200 West 70 Street
New York, N.Y. 10023
October 13, 1974

Rabbi Norman Lamm
New York Coordinating Committee
for Russian Refugees
131 West 86 Street
New York, N.Y. 10023

Dear Rabbi Lamm:

For the past nine months I have been trying to aid the Soviet Jewish immigrants in the Embassy hotel on 70 Street on the West Side. Unfortunately the west side Jewish community is not the first contact the Soviet Jews have with the Jewish community. The "ambassadors", so to speak, of our community is N.Y.A.N.A., of which I'm sure you've heard.

From my very many hours of conversation with all of the Soviet Jews in the Embassy hotel I can verify than N.Y.A.N.A.'s treatment of our Soviet brethren is far from commendable.

The immigrant on arrival finds himself in a flophouse-type of welfare hotel with all its inherent evils; prostitution, drug addiction and alcoholic related crimes. His room is infested with cockroaches and usually is poorly cleaned and dreadfully aerated. We in the Lincoln Square Synagogue community tried desperately to obtain cooling devices to ward of the stifling, intolerable heat of the summer months.

Within a few days of their arrival the Soviet Jew is interviewed at N.Y.A.N.A. and is assigned two social workers. One takes care of his living needs. (Sees that he gets money for room and board) The other supposedly helps the immigrant obtain employment. A school where they may learn English is then assigned.

The assignment to these schools has been a point of great difficulty. From what I have gathered from my extensive contact at the Embassy, N.Y.A.N.A. indiscriminately assigns the Soviet refugee to schools of greatly varying quality and to perplexingly different lengths of time. Few have been sent to the American Language Institute,

a school of good quality. Most have been sent to the Cambridge School or the Latin American Institute which have received poor marks by my Soviet acquaintances.

I know personally of a intelligent construction engineer who pleaded with N.Y.A.N.A. to switch him to the American Language Institute to enable him to get a proper hold of the English language. Only after much worry and heartbreak did N.Y.A.N.A. relent.

In combination with the substandard English instruction is the problem of length of time at these schools. Most Soviet refugees are sent for six weeks of instruction, hardly enough time to grasp the complexities of a completely foreign language. As a result, many of the Jews in the hotel don't have the speaking and reading ability necessary to get meaningful employment. I can't begin to tell you of the many times the Soviet Jews, supposedly N.Y.A.N.A. English educated, have told me that they've been rejected ~~for employment~~ for employment specifically because of insufficient English-speaking ability.

Seeking employment is a major problem confronting the Soviet Jew and is in this sphere that N.Y.A.N.A. has particularly failed. Again and again I've heard from my Soviet friends of the ludicrous attempts of the social workers supposedly acting in the refugee's behalf to find jobs. Here are but a few examples:

Example 1 : Many have been told to bring in the New York Times so that the social worker can look through the male-female want ads.

Example 2 : Electrical engineers who haven't done draftsman work ⁱⁿ since ten years are sent to prospective employers as draftsman.

Example 3 : Violist sent on a job as a carton packer. Employer sends the disgruntled man away realizing that this type of work could cause permanent injury to the hands of a musician.

Example 4: Artist needs materials but N.Y.A.N.A. refuses to give him the money that he needs. Result: N.Y.A.N.A. will use far more of it's U.J.A. funds supporting the artist than if the artist had the materials to make a living of his own, ~~thereby freeing N.Y.A.N.A. of it's responsibilities of supporting him~~.

Worse yet are the disturbing instances ^{of} when Soviet Jews, after waiting hours, to be seen, by the employment social worker ^{being} and turned away,

One immigrant told me recently that he had been far better treated at the New York State Employment Service.

This is evidence of a very poor relationship between the Soviet Jew and N.Y.A.N.A.. It's not surprising. From my conversations with the refugees there apparently isn't a person at this organization that speaks Russian. This poor relationship has bred bitterness, frustration, and most unfortunately a general distrust of New York City's Jewish community thus hindering the efforts of those of us who are trying very hard to ~~adapt~~ ^{discriminating} the help the Soviet Jew adapt to life of the American Jewish community.

I know personally of two instances where Soviet Jews have written to relatives in the Soviet Union ~~that discredit~~ ^{discriminating} this city's Jewish community. It is unfortunate that in some cases Soviet Russia's anti-semitism has been replaced by N.Y.A.N.A.'s seemingly indifference to the sensitive and great problems that the Soviet Jew has.

It is obvious that affirmative action in the form of a thorough overhaul of N.Y.A.N.A. is needed to avert the disastrous implications that could be drawn if the Jewish community of New York was discredited unjustly because of the insensitivity and down-right apathetic incompetence of N.Y.A.N.A.

It would help greatly if you could use your wide and respected influence to bring about these most necessary changes. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,
Michael Platzter
 Michael Platzter

RECEIVED
 FEB 28 1964
 NEW YORK STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE