

ANATOLY SHCHARANSKY

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Copyright: Johanna Granville, "Anatoly Shcharansky." In *The Encyclopedia of Russian History*, edited by James R. Millar. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004 (p. 1380).

Anatoly Shcharansky (1948-) is a prominent Jewish dissident who was arrested on March 15, 1977 after being refused permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union. A 29-year-old computer expert at the time, Shcharansky had been a leading figure in the "Helsinki Group," the oldest human rights organization in the Soviet Union, founded by Dr. Yuri F. Orlov on May 12, 1976 for the purpose of upholding the USSR's responsibility to implement the Helsinki commitments. The Helsinki Agreement had been promulgated a year earlier (August 1975), its text published in full in both *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. The formation of the Moscow Helsinki Group sparked the creation of several human rights organizations throughout the Soviet Union. Shcharansky was a founding member of the group, along with Yelena Bonner (Andrei Sakharov's wife), Anatoly Marchenko, Ludmilla M. Alexeyeva and others. In the first three years of the group's work, nearly all of its members were arrested or sentenced to psychiatric hospitalization as a way to repress their activities.

As the era of détente in US-Soviet relations progressed, Soviet authorities came under increasing pressure to improve their country's human rights record. In 1970, about forty-four Jewish prisoners had been sent to labor camps for their dissident activities. News about the trials and activities of dissidents appeared daily in the

Western media. Solidarity committees formed in several countries. In the United States, the Jackson-Vanek Amendment of 1973 linked trade relations directly to the question of Jewish emigration. The process of emigration for Soviet Jews was long and anxiety-provoking. Applications for exit visas usually resulted in harassment, immediate dismissal from one's job, and months of financial hardship that carried the extra risk of arrest on charges of "parasitism." Nevertheless, from 1971 onward, a growing number of Jews were allowed to leave: 113,800 between 1971 and 1975.

Shcharansky's arrest was part of a Soviet campaign against dissidents begun in February 1977. Others were arrested before him: Alexander Ginsburg (February 4), Ukrainian dissidents Mikola Rudenko and Olexy Tikhy (February 7), and Yuri Orlov (February 10). In June 1977, Shcharansky was charged with treason, specifically with accepting CIA funds to create dissension in the Soviet Union. After a perfunctory trial, he was sentenced to 14 years in prison. He was finally released in February 1986, when he and four other prisoners were exchanged for four Soviet spies who had been held in the West.

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