

THE לפני SHEKEL

The Journal of Israel and Jewish History and Numismatics
Volume 58 No. 2 Spring 2025

LODZ NUMISMATICS: BUILDING ON THE FELLERS'



CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SHEKEL



FEATURING:

THREE EIGHTHS OF A SHEKEL by Steve and Ray Feller

U.S. CUSTOMS IMPORT RESTRICTIONS AFFECT TYRIAN COINS by Peter Tompa

ISRAEL'S FOOTBALL COINS by Simcha Kuritzky

CELEBRATING THE 300TH ISSUE OF THE SHEKEL

Published by the American Israel Numismatic Association

LET MY PEOPLE GO:
BADGES OF JEWISH HUMAN RIGHTS
ORGANIZATIONS ISSUED AT SUMMITS WITH SOVIET
LEADERS

By Dr. Vladimir Bernshtam

In the 1960s to 1980s, Soviet Jews fought for the opportunity of free repatriation to Israel, the right to lead a Jewish way of life in the USSR, and the release of Soviet “prisoners of conscience” [1]. Jews worldwide, especially those in the United States and Israel, supported them in this struggle. Many collectible items, including badges and medals, were produced during this time, serving as symbols of resistance and solidarity. The author’s goal is to describe and systematize these badges and medals, a topic he has already explored in several articles [2 – 6]. This current note, continuing the series of these publications, focuses on badges issued by various human rights organizations during summits between political leaders from the United States and Canada with Soviet leadership. The author provides descriptions of the badges they are aware of, following a chronological order of their issue.

In October 1971, Soviet Premier Kosygin visited Canada as a guest of the Canadian government. Rabbi Gunther Plaut led a picket of sixty rabbis wearing prayer shawls and carrying prayer books at the gates of the Soviet Embassy. The participants of the picket accused the Soviet government of persecuting Jews, attempting to eradicate their national identity, and fanning anti-Semitism. They demanded the opportunity for Jews to develop their culture, practice religious rituals, and have the freedom to emigrate to Israel. On October 19, approximately 7,500 Canadian Jews marched through the center of Ottawa, demanding freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews [7, 8]. A metal badge with a diameter of 4.5 cm (Fig. 1) is dedicated to these events.



Fig. 1.

In the early 1970s, there were three meetings between U.S. President Richard Nixon and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev. The author is aware that the badge related to the summit held in Washington in June 1973 was issued by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ). This organization was established in 1971 to advocate for the rights of Soviet Jews and played a significant role in the struggle for these goals during the last two decades of the Cold War.



Fig. 2 Diameter – 5.7 cm.

From December 8th to 10th, 1987, a meeting took place in Washington between President Ronald Reagan and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. Before the summit, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) formed a coalition of nine public organizations to mobilize public support for the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate. Rallies and other events were held in the United States and Canada. David Harris, a representative of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in Washington, was selected as the national coordinator for a massive demonstration. (The AJC is a Jewish organization in the USA dedicated to protecting the rights and interests of Jews in the US and other countries. It was founded by German immigrants in 1906, following another wave of pogroms in Russia.)

The demonstration occurred on December 6th, with approximately 250,000 people in attendance. Representatives from Jewish organizations, public figures, and politicians participated, including Vice President George Bush, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Bishop William Keller from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Dr. Ari Brauer from the National Council of Churches, and Elie Wiesel, the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. The author knows five badges related to this event (Figures 3–7). In a photograph (Figure 8), Natan Sharansky and Vladimir Slepak are depicted at the demonstration on December 6th. On Slepak's coat, the badge shown in Figure 6 is visible.



Left to Right: Fig. 3 Diameter – 5.6 cm. and Fig. 4 Diameter – 5.6 cm.



Left to Right: Fig. 5 Diameter – 5.6 cm. and Fig. 6 Diameter – 5.7 cm.
NCSJ released.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8 Former refuseniks Natan Sharansky, left, and Vladimir Slepak, along with Elie Wiesel and American Jewish leader Shoshana Cardin, right, at a march on Washington, D.C., in support of Soviet Jewry, Dec. 6, 1987. (Peter Turnley/Corbis/VCG via Getty Images) Photo from [9].

In late spring of 1988, the final meeting between President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev took place in Moscow. Before the American delegation departed for the summit, Jewish organization leaders presented a memorandum to Secretary of State George Shultz, demanding free emigration for all Jews who wished to leave and full cultural, religious, and educational rights for those who remained. In Moscow, President Reagan met with a group of refuseniks. The 1988 Moscow Summit in May-June resulted in an increase in exit visas and the liberalization of cultural and religious life for Soviet Jews. Badges related to the 1988 summit, depicted in Figures 9 - 12, were issued by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry (LICSJ), and The Student Coalition for Soviet Jewry (SCSJ) which was founded in 1977 in response to the arrest of Anatoly B. Sharansky.



Left to Right: Fig. 9 Diameter – 5.7 cm. and Fig. 10 Diameter – 5.7 cm.



Left to Right: Fig. 11 Diameter – 5.7 cm. LICSJ released and Fig. 12 Diameter – 5.7 cm. SCSJ released.

The author does not believe that he has managed to describe all the badges issued by Jewish human rights organizations related to the summits. He appeals to readers who have information about such badges or additional information about the badges described here to share it with the author (fnbern@gmail.com). The author is grateful in advance to such readers.

In conclusion, the author extends sincere gratitude to Michael Beiser for his insightful comments, which helped to prevent errors in this article. ▢