



Anatoly Sharansky leads the rally in song.

## 1,000 Michiganians raised their voices in Washington on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

# 'Let Our People Go!'

*Freedom Sunday was the culmination of 15 years' effort on the part of American Jewry on behalf of their Soviet brethren*

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Editor

**F**or all the dignitaries and political leaders who did the speaking, it was the nameless, faceless masses — a record 200,000 strong — who were the story of the Freedom Sunday rally in Washington.

And that was only fitting. For they were demonstrating on behalf of the nameless, faceless masses of Soviet Jews, at least 400,000 of them who have sought to leave for Israel and freedom.

It is the well-known few who receive most of the attention, whether it be the prominent speakers on the podium in Washington on Sunday or the long-time refuseniks who have been released from the USSR in recent months. But this rally — the largest Jewish demonstration ever held in Washington — and indeed the 15-year struggle on behalf of Soviet

Jewry, has proved that, in the words of Elie Wiesel, "while some are more famous than others, all Jews are equally worthy of redemption."

And so, on a clear, cold afternoon in December, on the eve of the U.S.-USSR summit, the message from speaker after speaker to Soviet leader Gorbachev was loud and clear: Let all our people go. Not just the well-known refuseniks, but any and all Jews who wish to express their human rights by leaving the USSR. For we will not stop protesting until they are free.

### Sharansky Vindicated

Of the dozens of speakers, Natan Sharansky was greeted with the largest ovation. It was Sharansky, the embodiment of the struggle to free Soviet Jewry, who became its conscience as well in recent months as he traveled the breadth of the United States, goading American Jews into participation in this rally. American Jewish leaders were angered by his

initial calls for 400,000 people to attend, but in the end he was vindicated for asking, for demanding, that American Jewry make an extraordinary effort on the eve of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit. And as he stood at the speaker's platform and looked out at the vast outpouring of humanity, from virtually every state in America, he smiled widely as he proclaimed: "How many times did I hear it was impossible to get hundreds of thousands of people to march in Washington in the winter?" he asked. "And yet look, it is winter and you are here.

"And how many times," he continued, "did I hear that the Soviet gates of emigration cannot be opened?" But, he asserted, world Jewry has protested and the gates have been opened.

Sharansky said that emigration depends neither on President Reagan nor on Gorbachev, but rather on the conscience of Jews around the world.

"It is we, it is our struggle which makes governments in the free world strong," he said. "It is our struggle which can make the Soviet government willing to open the gates of the Soviet Union."

He stressed the need to continue the effort. "If Soviet Jews are not free," he said, "then all Jews are not free."

### A Variety Of Speakers

There were about 20 speakers in all, with Vice President George Bush receiving the most media attention. He was warmly applauded when he said "the human rights issue is now a permanent part of the U.S.-Soviet agenda. It will be high on the agenda for the summit. I will personally raise it with Mr. Gorbachev. I will not be satisfied until the promise of Helsinki is a reality."

The Vice President said "it would be easier, safer, more diplomatic to remain silent — to negotiate our treaties and never raise the question of human rights. But that would be untrue to ourselves, and it would break our promise to the past."

He called on the Soviet leader to prove the reality of glasnost by releasing not only a handful of refuseniks "but thousands, tens of thousands — all those who want to go." Bush ended by shouting, "Mr. Gorbachev: Let these people go. Let them go!"

Some speakers expressed anger, like New York Mayor Ed Koch, who noted that Jewish demonstrators in