



INTRODUCTION

In reviewing the seven-decade-long history of the Soviet Union, many images come to mind. One of the images most often indelibly stamped on the minds of many observers is that of the GULag, the extensive system of prisons, labor camps, and other punishments meted out to opponents of the Soviet regime. Many histories of the GULag, however, including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's famed Gulag Archipelago trilogy, cover only the years of Stalinist repression. The second wave of repression, which followed the "thaw" of the Khrushchev years and extended through the perestroika and glasnost era of the 1980s, has not been as extensively studied.

The exhibit "To Choose Freedom: Soviet Dissidents and Their Supporters" provides a glimpse of those years through the holdings of the Hoover Institution Library and Archives. Inspired by former Soviet dissident and political activist Yuri Yarim-Agaev, and timed to coincide with a scholarly symposium held at the Hoover Institution in April 2008, this exhibit focuses on the lives and activities of the diverse group of people branded as "dissidents" and "nonconformists" during the latter decades of the Soviet Union. In addition, this exhibit highlights the role of the supporters of dissidents in the West—human rights activists, journalists, and both governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the United States, Western Europe, and elsewhere. Yarim-Agaev understands the roles of both the dissidents and their supporters, having become a member of the Moscow Helsinki Group in the 1970s, following the arrest of his close friend and fellow physicist Anatoly Shcharansky (Natan Sharansky). After Yarim-Agaev's expulsion from the Soviet Union before the Olympic Games in 1980, he founded an organization based in New York, the Center for Democracy in the USSR, which sought to both raise public awareness of the plight of dissidents and influence the actions of the U.S. government in its response to Soviet human rights violations.

The material in this exhibit includes documents, photographs, and other audiovisual material from the papers of Yuri Yarim-Agaev and the Center for Democracy in the USSR, as well as the papers of renowned dissidents and writers Aleksandr Ginzburg (1936–2002) and Andrei Siniavskii (1925–1996), the collection of Irwin T. Holtzman, and the records of Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharansky; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Firing Line; and the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet state.