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Rohan Pleads Innocent To El Aksa Mosque Arson Charges Before Packed Courtroom

JERUSALEM, Oct. 6 (JTA) -- Michael Denis William Rohan, the 28-year-old Australian sheep-shearer accused of setting fire to the El Aksa mosque Aug. 21, pleaded innocent today to each of two charges of arson and two charges of violation of a Holy Place. The charges were read by Judge Henry E. Baker, a Scottish-born Israeli jurist who heads the three-member district court trying Rohan. The defendant pleaded innocent through his court-appointed lawyer, Yitzhak Tunik, a prominent criminal lawyer from Tel Aviv.

The Rohan trial opened in a 400 seat hall of Binyanei Haoma, the city's convention center. It was packed to capacity with police security guards, newsmen, TV camera crews and spectators including members of the foreign diplomatic corps, Moslem dignitaries from East Jerusalem and Israeli officials.

The sight of Rohan flanked by two policemen in a bulletproof glass booth wearing earphones to hear the simultaneous English translation of the Hebrew proceedings made comparisons with the trial of the notorious Gestapo deportation chief Adolf Eichmann inevitable. Israeli authorities have been anxious to play down the resemblance.

But the Rohan trial is doubtlessly the most important from an international point of view to be held in Israel since Eichmann was tried, convicted and executed. The mosque fire set off violent repercussions throughout the Moslem world and Israelis are admittedly anxious to give the trial of the suspect maximum publicity in order to refute Arab charges of Israeli responsibility for the blaze.

Rohan was seen to swallow hard when Judge Baker stated that each of the two counts of arson against him carry a penalty of 15 years' imprisonment and the two counts of violating a Holy Place, seven years each -- a total of 44 years. The court admitted as evidence the confession he allegedly made to Jerusalem police who arrested him within 24 hours of the fire. Also admitted as evidence were color slides allegedly taken by Rohan of the exterior and interior of the mosque before he set it afire. The latter, according to police, showed incendiary material inside the shrine before it was ignited.

Police Officer Says Defendant Admitted Setting Fire For Religious Reasons

Rohan's alleged confession was read to the court by David Offer, a deputy police officer, at the request of prosecuting attorney Meir Shamgar, one of the lawyers who helped prosecute Eichmann. Deputy Offer testified that when he questioned Rohan following his arrest, the prisoner said, "I got up in the morning, went out and burned the El Aksa mosque." The alleged confession read by Offer stated: "I read in the Prophet Zachariah that one person would be called by God to build the Temple. I deeply felt that God wanted me to build the Temple and that I would have to prove whether this call was true or not by destroying the mosque."

It went on to say that Rohan paid Arab guides to take him on tours of the mosque dozens of times and tell how he made plans for setting it afire. Rohan has claimed that he is a member of the Church of God, a fundamentalist Protestant sect with headquarters in Cyprus. It is the alleged belief of the sect that the resurrection of Jesus must follow the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. The mosque, the third holiest shrine of Islam, occupies the site on which the Temple is believed to have stood.

The charges against Rohan stated that the accused made an abortive attempt to set fire to the mosque several weeks before the Aug. 21 blaze. At the time only a door was scorched. The earlier fire went unnoticed and was unreported by the Moslem guards employed by the Waqf, the Moslem religious council in Jerusalem responsible for the security and maintenance of Moslem shrines. A joint Israeli-Arab committee inquiring into the circumstances of the Aug. 21 fire charged the Waqf with gross negligence in a report to Premier Golda Meir. Moslems on the other hand, have charged Israeli police with negligence in protecting the mosque.

The fire led to calls for a holy war against Israel by several Arab leaders, among them President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and King Hussein of Jordan. Arab wrath culminated in the convening of an all-Moslem summit conference at Rabat, Morocco last month. The conference ended inconclusively but the Arab states managed to pressure the more moderate non-Arab Moslem delegates to go along with a demand that Israel rescind its annexation of East Jerusalem.

Pope Paul, Eban Discuss Mideast Crisis, Arab-Israel Reconciliation, Holy Places

VATICAN CITY, Oct. 6 (JTA) -- Pope Paul VI today received Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in a "special audience" and they discussed the Middle East crisis, peace, reconciliation of the

peoples of the region, the future of Christian and Moslem Holy Places, and the refugee issue.

A Vatican announcement, following the meeting in the Holy See library, said that another topic was the "sacred and unique character of Jerusalem." The announcement said that the Pontiff and Mr. Eban met for little less than an hour and that "high holiness had the opportunity to reaffirm and personally outline the positions of the Holy See on (Middle East) problems."

The Vatican said that Pope Paul "listened attentively" while Mr. Eban outlined Israeli efforts to promote peace and while he discussed the status of Jews in Arab nations. The Holy See said that the Pontiff "was inspired only by higher religious motives and by Christian and human charity" as well as a desire to see "a just and lasting peace and a brotherly and meaningful co-existence."

With Mr. Eban was Israeli Ambassador to Italy, Amiet Najar. Speaking later to Rome's Jewish community in a synagogue, Mr. Eban said, "I found an atmosphere of esteem and profound respect for our sovereignty and for our historical evolution. I hope this will be a point of departure for further contacts on international policy that will form part of our effort to achieve peace."

When he arrived Sunday in Rome, Mr. Eban said that Israel wants to bring Christian and Moslem shrines in the Holy Land under the jurisdiction of "those who hold them sacred." He said that until there is a peace settlement with the Arabs, Israel will continue to give full responsibility for the shrines to Christian and Moslem authorities in Israel.

Israeli Government circles attached great importance to the meeting. It is believed that the last time an Israeli minister had been received by a Pope in the Vatican was in 1952 when Pius XII received then Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett in a private audience.

Israeli Fighters, Anti-Aircraft Down 3 Egyptian MIGs In Fierce Fighting

TEL AVIV, Oct. 6 (JTA) -- Israeli fighters and anti-aircraft guns downed three Egyptian MIGs in what was described as a fierce Egyptian air attack on Israeli positions on the east bank of the Suez Canal at sundown today. A military spokesman said that 20 Egyptian planes including MIG-17s and MIG-21s participated in the attack which sent Israeli jet fighters into the evening skies.

According to the spokesman, the three Egyptian planes were knocked out within minutes after the attack began. Israeli fighters were credited with two MIG-21s and anti-aircraft gunners got a MIG-17. All Israeli planes returned safely to their bases and no casualties were suffered in the Israeli side. The spokesman said two Egyptian pilots were seen bailing out over Egyptian territory.

The battle brought to 54 the number of Egyptian planes Israel says it has downed since the 1967 war. The last major air battle occurred on Sept. 11 when Israel said it shot down 11 jets and lost one Mirage of its own.

Israeli security authorities girded for possible trouble in the Ramallah area today following the deportation of that town's popular mayor, Nadim Zaro, and six other Arabs from Ramallah and nearby West Bank villages for alleged cooperation with terrorists and incitement of civil disorder. Three Arabs from Hebron were also deported today on similar charges. All crossed into Jordan via the Allenby and Damiya bridges.

Mayor Zaro, 38, ran a pharmacy in Ramallah, 10 miles north of Jerusalem. He was appointed to his post by King Hussein of Jordan before the 1967 war. He remained in office after the Israeli occupation as did most West Bank mayors. But he was detained several times in the past year and warned to desist from cooperating with subversive elements. He was taken into custody again last Friday on suspicion of security violations. No specific charges were announced.

A military government spokesman said he was implicated in recent strikes by Ramallah merchants and pupils and had incited demonstrations against Israeli authorities. Sources here said his deportation may lead to demonstrations of sympathy in the town.

Four other Arabs deported today on orders of the Military Governor, Brig. Gen. Rafael Vardi, were from Dir Abu M'ashal village in the Ramallah district where an Israeli soldier was shot at last week. Three are local mukhtars (headmen). Two other deportees from Ramallah were the headmaster and a teacher in a school where pupils rioted recently. They were charged with incitement.

AFL-CIO Convention Hears Mrs. Meir, Votes Pro-Israel Resolutions

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J., Oct. 6 (JTA) -- The American Labor movement as represented by the 15 million member AFL-CIO went on record today in favor of extensive U.S. military aid to Israel. A resolution to that effect was unanimously adopted by delegates to the union's biennial convention here after they gave a prolonged ovation to Israel's Premier, Mrs. Golda Meir. Other resolutions called for direct Arab-Israeli negotiations and demanded that Syria immediately release two Israeli nationals held captive in Damascus since their TWA airliner was hijacked Aug. 29.

In her speech, Mrs. Meir, a life-long member of the Labor Zionist movement, blamed the Soviet Union for the events leading up to the Six-Day War and for keeping the Middle East in constant turmoil ever since. Mrs. Meir referred sentimentally to her long association with the trade union movement.

Swiss Oust Israeli Aide For Connection With Alleged Theft Of Mirage Plans

BERN, Switzerland, Oct. 6 (JTA) -- Switzerland has expelled the Israeli military attache Col. Zvi Alon in connection with the alleged theft of plans for the Mirage III-S jet engines manufactured by the Sulzer plant in Winterthur under license from the French firm of Marcel Dassault. The expulsion order linked Col. Alon and his predecessor with Alfred Frauenknecht, an employee of Sulzer, who was arrested for the theft on Sept. 23.

According to Swiss Attorney General Hans Walder, Mr. Frauenknecht confessed to receiving \$200,000 from Israel for the blueprints, models and tooling instructions. They were packed in 20 crates which Mr. Frauenknecht allegedly smuggled across the Rhine by barge to Israeli agents in West Germany. Mr. Walder made his charges public Sept. 26. Israeli officials in Jerusalem said at the time that they had no knowledge of Mr. Frauenknecht and refused further comment.

The Mirage III-S is said to be an improved version of the Mirage IV supersonic jet, backbone of Israel's combat airforce. Fifty Mirage V jets which Israel bought and paid for have not been delivered by France owing to the arms embargo imposed by former President Charles de Gaulle two years ago.

Hungarian Says He Was Recruited As Spy Against 'Zionists' In Government, Party

LONDON, Oct. 6 (JTA) -- A Hungarian actor - television personality who defected to the West claimed here that he left his homeland because he was being forced to act as a spy in a top secret project intended to implicate high-ranking Hungarian Government and Communist Party officials as "Zionists." Milo Szakats, 49, told his story to London Times writer Gabriel Ronay, who wrote that Mr. Szakats' experiences indicated that the secret police were trying to organize a purge of leading officials sympathetic to Israel along the lines of the Polish Government's "anti-Zionist" drive.

The defector said that he was arrested after the abortive Hungarian uprising of 1956 and was forced, with other artists and literary figures, to spy on Western diplomats in Budapest. He claimed that this year he was summoned by Col. E. Kiss, head of the Hungarian counter-espionage services, who wanted him to contact an Israeli diplomat in Vienna who was a friend and obtain from him names of "Zionists" in the Hungarian Government and Communist Party. The diplomat was supposed to be the "guide" to the "Zionist movement in Hungary."

According to Mr. Szakats, Col. Kiss tried to bribe him with an offer of the job of director of the radio and television theater now under construction in Budapest. Col. Kiss allegedly told the actor that the Poles and Russians had "solved" the problem of "Zionist" penetration into their countries and that "the Soviet comrades thought it intolerable that inveterate Zionists should continue to thrive in the ranks of the highest Government and party leadership in Hungary."

Mr. Szakats said the colonel was undertaking to gather evidence against the alleged "Zionists" apparently without the sanction of the party presidium and without the knowledge of President Janos Kadar. Mr. Szakats said he was repeatedly warned that the operation must be kept secret and was threatened with "dire consequences" if he betrayed it to anyone, even Mr. Kadar. "I just could not bear this life of threats and bribes and the indignity of being asked to spy on one's friends," Mr. Szakats said.

5,000 Turn Out In Montreal Rally For Soviet Jews; Demonstrations Held Elsewhere

MONTREAL, Oct. 6 (JTA) -- Over 5,000 members of Montreal's Jewish community representing all major communal organizations in the city assembled Sunday night in Dominion Square to demonstrate solidarity with Russian Jewry and to appeal for equal treatment to be accorded to them as to all other ethnic and national groups in Russia.

The assemblage was addressed by Rabbi Leonard Poller, chairman of the Canadian Jewish Congress' eastern region youth committee; Rabbi Israel Hausman; Rev. Roger Balk, director of the Christian student movement at McGill University; Nahum Wilchesky, vice chairman of the AJCongress' eastern region; Dr. Jean-Claude Lasry, who spoke in French; and Monroe Abbey, AJCongress president.

The group marched through city streets to the Soviet consulate where Cantor Mendel Fogel recited a prayer which was followed by singing and dancing with the Torah. The demonstration was organized by students and youth groups, synagogues, fraternal and community organizations under the auspices of the CJCongress' eastern region.

In Toronto, 4,000 youths and adults thronged Nathan Phillips square, named for the deceased Jewish Mayor, in a Simhat Torah rally and demonstration for Russian Jews. At a convocation at the University of Toronto, they heard Rabbi Hillel Levin of New York and a student describe the condition of Russian Jewry.

A declaration read at the rally demanded an end to anti-Jewish discrimination in Russia, restoration of Jewish schools, permission for Jews to emigrate to rejoin families abroad, respect for the Babi Yar site in Kiev and an end to the anti-Israel press campaign. The event was sponsored by the Hillel Foundation of the university, the city's Jewish Youth Council and the CJCongress.

In Winnipeg over 1,000 people attended a solidarity rally on the grounds of the Rosh Pina synagogue.

Telegrams appealing for equal treatment for Soviet Jews were sent to the Soviet Ambassador in Ottawa as well as Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs.

In Ottawa, over 600 people participated in a Simhat Torah rally at the Jewish Community Center and were addressed by Jacie Horwitz, international chairman of B'nai B'rith of Canada. They marched with torches to the Soviet Embassy where a "resolution of concern" was read to Russian Jewry.

Oregon Supreme Court Decision Banning Cross On Public Property Hailed By AJCongress

SALEM, Ore. Oct. 6 (JTA) -- The Oregon Supreme Court, in a precedent-making decision, reversed a position it had taken last February and ruled that a giant, electrically lighted cross erected in a city park in Eugene must be removed. The court thus confirmed the decision of the Circuit Court, made in 1967, ordering the removal of the cross on the grounds that its erection violated the city charter. The lower court decision did not rule on the constitutional issues.

The Supreme Court, by a four to three vote last February, reversed the Circuit Court decision on appeal by the Eugene City Council, a majority holding that the religious symbol was not unconstitutional. The court, however, granted a rehearing at the request of the 10 plaintiffs, only one of whom was a Jew. The rehearing was argued by Leo Pfeffer, special counsel of the American Jewish Congress. He predicted today that the decision is likely to touch off a series of lawsuits challenging religious symbols on public property -- including nativity scenes during the Christmas season.

Mr. Pfeffer, who served as chief attorney for the plaintiffs in the Oregon suit, hailed the ruling and said it was the first case in which the highest court of a state had ever considered whether it was constitutional to erect a cross or religious symbol on public land.

Mr. Pfeffer said that the Federal District Court in Washington, D.C. dismissed a suit last week seeking to prohibit the annual erection of a nativity scene on the ellipse, a Government-owned park adjoining the White House. An appeal will be taken in the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in which the Oregon decision will be relied on by the plaintiffs. Both sides in the suit have agreed to ask the court for a ruling before the Christmas season.

In ruling by a five to two decision that the cross must be removed, the Supreme Court upheld the dissenting opinion of Justice Alfred T. Goodwin when the case was heard last February and affirmed the decree of the trial court "for the reasons substantially set forth" in his dissent. Justice Goodwin took the position that the display of the cross was "a religious activity" and thus violated both the United States and Oregon constitutional provisions barring aid to religion.

Justice Goodwin had declared that "whether so intended by the City Council or not, the city's participation in the display has placed the city officially and visibly on record in support of those who sought Government sponsorship for their religious display." He said there was "no doubt that the mayor and council were responding to popular demand," but he stressed that "it was to prevent this kind of response to majority pressure that the establishment clause of the First Amendment was written into our Federal Constitution."

The dissenting justice cited the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Bible-reading and prayers in the public schools and said that "government has no more right to place a public park at the disposal of the majority for a popular religious display than it would have, in response to a referendum vote, to put a lighted cross on the city hall steeple."

The cross, which was cast in concrete with built-in neon lighting, stand 51 feet high on a hill overlooking the city. It has been a source of contention since its construction five years ago.

Connecticut Jews Join Other Groups In Suit Against Aid To Parochial Schools

HARTFORD, CONN. Oct. 6 (JTA) -- The Connecticut Jewish Community Relations Council joined with the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, other state organizations and a number of individuals in an action in United States District Court here to challenge the constitutionality of a law enacted last year by the State Legislature to provide state financial aid to parochial and other private schools in the state for the teaching of secular subjects.

The AJCongress, American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith support the participation of the Jewish community relations body. Other plaintiffs include the Connecticut Council of Churches, Americans United For Separation of Church and State, and the Connecticut branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. One of the individual plaintiffs is William Manchester, author of the book, "Death of a President."

The suit seeks an injunction to prevent disbursement of tax funds for church-related and other private schools and charges that the state law to provide for this is in conflict with the First Amendment and will contribute to contravention of the 14th Amendment. The state law appropriated \$6 million for two years to go to aid the non-public schools of the state.

The Connecticut Jewish Ledger said that the plaintiffs will argue that the bulk of the funds to be expended under Public Act 791 will go to church-related schools and while it will be applied to the teaching of "secular subjects," it will provide significant assistance to these schools for teaching of "sectarian" subjects by releasing funds now applied to other purposes.